

Welcome to “Purim for Adults”. Purim is not just a kids’ holiday with a carnival (Mardi Gras)-like tenor; there are some very “adult” themes.

Consider:

- sexual politics
- buffoonish leadership
- identity, and the masking of identity
- random fate (as in “casting lots,” pur-im) and intoxication!

The focus of this year’s learning — and our taking Purim seriously— is **Anti-Semitism**.

In recent decades, the past couple/few generations here in America, we have been wont to read the Book of Esther as a story that redeems the notion of life in the Diaspora. After all, Esther and Mordecai rise to levels of power and influence, and Jews retain their ways and laws within the Persian Empire. We feel good about ourselves.

BUT THAT’S NOT HOW THE RABBIS UNDERSTOOD THE STORY! They canonized the tale precisely because it told of the topsy turviness of life outside the Land of Israel, vulnerable in minority status, at the mercy of others, reliant on “Court Jews.” And it confronts the oldest hatred in the world...

Now I know very well that many of us have not directly experienced discrimination and persecution. And we’ve been taught (I’ve been taught) that America is different because anti-Semitism is not and never has been a part of mainstream political party platforms, discussed openly as part of the public discourse. We’ve been told that “it can’t happen here.”

I, myself, represent part of the effort to build community with our non-Jewish neighbors, to seek security in alliances and friendships and collaborations. I, myself, want to create religious life in 21st-century America that will serve as a bulwark against anti-Semitism. And maybe even heal some of our trauma.

Tonight, let’s take stock of where we are, take the pulse of the current moment...take the story seriously and ask how it might apply to our lives, our day and age. These are serious times right now. There is a lot of talk about Jewish power and influence, about the mixture of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, and a rising tide of hate crimes and incidents. Pittsburgh and its antecedents are still quite fresh, as are comments by Members of Congress.

I want to read together just a few short articles — both journalistic reportage and informed opinion — and then let’s see if we can conduct a “listening session” as people share their own thoughts and feelings. Let’s avoid debate by speaking only for ourselves. That way, we get to air out and hear all views and viewpoints. We may not end up with consensus — that’s not my goal here — but we’ll end up with a more

informed and nuanced picture of our place in Time and Space, Jews who happen to be in America in the early 21st century.

ARTICLES:

Bernard-Henri Levy, in the "Forward" (March 2019)

R' Toba Spitzer, in "Evolve" (excerpts)

R' Jill Jacobs, of Tru'ah, in the Washington Post

Bret Stephens, op-ed in The New York Times

J Street press release Feb. 2019

JDL stats

WE'LL TAKE A FEW QUIET MOMENTS TO DIGEST, COLLECT THOUGHTS, AND DECIDE WHAT, IF ANYTHING, IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO SAY IN REACTION, IN RESPONSE, IN ASSESSMENT. THOUGHTS? FEELINGS? CONCERNS? AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH ANYTHING HEARD?