

Shabbos Zachor Poem 5784
Rabbi Ariel Rackovsky

I have to say that I haven't been feeling,
So much like preparing my annual verses,
As Jews worldwide are searching for healing,
From the ongoing war and its manifold curses

In a year when our Purim seems markedly tragic,
How are we meant to experience joy?
To free all the hostages would seem to need magic,
And the news out of Israel just makes us say "Oy."

People displaced from their permanent dwellings,
Parents and spouses and kids up all night,
Living in fear of rockets and shellings,
As their relatives go into Gaza to fight

And the spectre of battle still hovers up north,
As Hezbollah constantly causes such trouble,
Ghost towns abound, do we send our troops forth,
And reduce all those beautiful cedars to rubble?

Children with fathers they won't meet in this life,
Valiant soldiers, cut off in their prime,
Leaving behind parents, siblings, a wife,
Killed for being Jewish, the ultimate crime,

Modern day Hamans, hell-bent on destruction,
As-a-Jews joining in Hollywood speeches,
On campus, instead of academic instruction,
Jews are subjected to taunts, blows and screeches

Candidates telling the Jews how to vote,
Senators adding to Israel's details,
If they want to meddle, they should really devote,
Their talents to finding the Princess of Wales

So this year, could the call of the hour be brevity,
No shtick when our brothers and sisters still suffer?
Better days will be times for rejoicing and levity,
But these days are serious, and we must be tougher

This year should we be aware of emotions,
With which many of us, these days, are conflicted
On Purim, should we just go through the motions,
And celebrate less because we're so afflicted?

Or would being morose not solve any issues,
Maybe to do so would be a grave error,
To cry without pause while dampening tissues
Feels right in the short term, but gives in to terror?

It seems that no answer is totally right,
A conundrum for which there is no real solution,
Do we go for the darkness or privilege light,
And if we choose the wrong path, hope for absolution?

Amidst all the confusion and strident invective,
Before we let anger and fear grow and fester,
We'd benefit from a small shift in perspective,
From some practical lessons from Megillat Esther

The first is a lesson from the actual text,
The very last part of the book's second chapter,
Bigtan and Teresh, the eunuchs, were vexed,
Because they considered the king as their captor,

And so they fomented a murderous plot,
Involving much intrigue and, of course, regicide,
To kill off the king would require much thought,
And a secret code, behind which they would hide

They must have been drunk on a spirit or beverage,
If they thought it was secret, they must have been dreaming,
In a move that later secured him much leverage,
Mordechai deciphered their devious scheming,

When Mordechai learned of a threat to security,
He acted upon it with utter dispatch,
He didn't consign it to unmentioned obscurity,
He cut it off right away, before it could hatch

The key to our safety in times that are tenuous,
Before dangerous things go horribly south,
Is not to let self delusion be strenuous,
And to listen to the words from our enemies' mouth,

Whether those words come from left or from right,
Hating the Jews is what they have in common,
Black, Arab, Latino, Asian or White,
Trailer park residents or Harvard Yard Brahmin

But of course, that advice, so pragmatic and wise
Is not even remotely relaxing or calm
In times that confuse and bring tears to our eyes
Doesn't our soul need a life giving balm?

When we read Esther in public, there's a law for the reader¹
Who cannot read the scroll when it's rolled up and curled

¹ This idea about the folded Megillah is based on an essay by Rabbi Johnny Solomon, the Virtual Rabbi

Whoever chants Esther as the community's leader
Must read it when folded and largely unfurled

Because that more resembles a king's proclamation,
That which is known in the book as *Iggeres*,
A scroll is more like a Hogwarts invitation,
Or something you'd get from an Highland Park heiress

So when the *baal keri'ah* folds over the scroll,
And wrestles the parchment into awkward submission,
Just know the halacha, it's part of the role,
When reading Megillah, our holiday's mission.

But why do we go through ridiculous motions,
When it makes so much more sense for us to be rolling?
On TikTok and Insta, in a world of commotion,
We're no strangers at all to perpetual scrolling!

I think that there is quite a logical reason,
For folding the scroll when we read it tomorrow,
In telling the story of the theme of this season,
Moving to joy from our fear and our sorrow,

Because folding the scroll collapses the tale,
The beginning on top of the middle and end,
Esther's ascent meets Haman's great fail,
Together with Mordechai's refusal to bend

But when we read the story, the way it transpires,
We read the Megillah from start until finish,
Each year anew the Megillah inspires,
The miraculous nature is never diminished

When thinking about this year's celebration,

Our story of rescue is still being written,
We're still in the middle of God's narration,
And have yet to see all our enemies smitten

When the present seems bleak, remember the Jews,
Living in Shushan and Persia of Yore,
Whose faces were glued to their phones, and the news,
And were pretty sure they could not take anymore,

It was their prayer and faith that made a big difference,
turning to God when they could no longer bear it,
That's what caused them to see His deliverance,
As we will, please God, from the events of Shemini Atzeret

In a world that feels ever more insecure,
Let's spend our Purim in divine supplication,
May seeing the folded megillah ensure
That God will, in time, produce our salvation

And let us thank God that we no longer cower,
Before an enemy that wishes to kill us like sheep
Just like in Shushan, we now have the power
To fight our enemies and make sure they weep

But the book of Esther yields many morals
Another to which I commend your attention,
When the Jews are resting on their newly saved laurels,
In a miracle defying our weak comprehension

They all celebrated with eating and drinking,
A party to rival Achashveroh's repast,
But then Esther and Mordechai had to start thinking,
How can we get this great party to last?

The original Purim was just for the locals,
If not for something that made it catch fire,
It would have been celebrated by a couple of yokels,
Inside a few cities in the Persian empire

So what, indeed, was the special component,
That gave this fine day so much popularity?
Everyone now is a Purim proponent;
Is it because of the costumes, and food, and hilarity?

Well...yes. But there's also something additional,
Because after the first year, it wasn't just food,
It's the gifts to the poor, completely volitional,
To make sure that they'd also have a good mood

What makes Purim so special, and so fun every year,
And a chance to connect with the Almighty above,
Is that we observe it, not out of great fear
But that we draw together with caring and love

So when things seem quite scary, and we're not feeling cheerful,
Let us reach out and take care of each other,
Our mandate is not to break down and be fearful,
But to turn in support to our sister and brother

So maybe let's be even MORE lively and happy,
To stick it to those who would want us depressed,
Yes, the last six months have been....awful
But on Purim, we give our sadness a rest

Maybe we need to *increase* the activity,
That brings joy to the heart and smiles to our faces,
And on behalf of those who are still in captivity,
Pray that *our* joy leads them out of dark spaces

And one day we'll look back at this moment of unity,
And the days that we spent in prayer and learning,
We'll reflect on the power of faith and community,
To pull us together when the world was burning

May we see the miraculous in a manner so swift,
May our prayers be answered this year up in heaven
May we thank God for His benevolent gift,
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