

March Bridge

Beth El Congregation

A Message from our Rabbi

Righteous Indignation

As we are about to enjoy the holiday of Purim I would like to reflect on a couple of passages that appear in the Book of Esther. At the conclusion of the story, when the King issued the edict that the Jews could protect themselves from Haman's evil plot to destroy us, the book of Esther reports the following:

Esther 8:10ff

Letters were dispatched by mounted couriers, riding steeds used in the king's service, bred of the royal stud to this effect: The king has permitted the Jews of every city to assemble and fight for their lives; if any people or province attacks them, they may destroy, massacre, and exterminate its armed force together with women and children, and plunder their possessions—on a single day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar. And in every province and in every city, when the king's command and decree arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

And from chapter 9:

Throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the Jews mustered in their cities

to attack those who sought their hurt; and no one could withstand them, for the fear of them had fallen upon all the peoples. Indeed, all the officials of the provinces—the satraps, the governors, and the king's stewards—showed deference to the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. For Mordecai was now powerful in the royal palace, and his fame was spreading through all the provinces; the man Mordecai was growing ever more powerful. So the Jews struck at their enemies with the sword, slaying and destroying; they wreaked their will upon their enemies. In the fortress Shushan the Jews killed a total of five hundred men. They also killed Arshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the foe of the Jews. But they did not lay hands on the spoil. When the number of those slain in the fortress Shushan was reported on that same day to the king, the king said to Queen Esther, "In the fortress Shushan alone the Jews have killed a total of five hundred men, as well as the ten sons of Haman. What then must they have done in the provinces of the realm! What is your wish now? It shall be granted you. And what else is your request? It shall be fulfilled." "If it please Your Majesty," Esther replied, "let the Jews in Shushan be permitted to act tomorrow also as they did today; and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on the stake." The king ordered that this should be done, and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan. Haman's ten sons were impaled; and the Jews in Shushan mustered again on the fourteenth day of Adar and slew three hundred men in Shushan. But they did not lay hands on the spoil. The rest of the Jews, those in the king's provinces, likewise mustered and fought for their lives. They disposed of their enemies, killing seventy-five thousand of their foes; but they

did not lay hands on the spoil. That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.

These passages are somewhat jarring to us. Our tradition teaches us to protect ourselves but admonishes us against vengeance. The vengeance described here is not only vindictive but bloody. It does not sound like justice. It sounds like vigilantism. It does not correspond to our vision of religious righteousness.

In the group chat forum of Reform Rabbis, recently one of my colleagues posted a conversation about this, and specifically about one of her own Christian colleagues rejected this text and condemned its presence in our holy book (also THEIR holy book).

I can see why this passage is troubling.

However, in our tradition we don't excise passages from our holy books. We learn from them. The story of Esther was likely retold during the time of the Maccabees, at the time when the Jewish community was experiencing religious oppression by the Greek forces occupying the country and occupying the Temple.

Some years back Quentin Tarantino wrote and directed a movie about militant Jews during World War II who took gleeful vengeance on the murderous Nazis. I, for one, did not like the movie because it had no basis in reality. The actual Jewish soldiers who had enlisted in elite military units to combat Nazis knew the job was critical but took no joyous pleasure in their assignments in the way that Tarantino's combatants relished their jobs.

There can be a time for fantasy. I believe the passage here, while disjointed from the actual experience of Jewish values, nevertheless can have a place in our observance. Purim is a holiday in which we often acted in ways antithetical to Jewish practice to show that Jews are not holier than others. It is not that Jews CANNOT be irreverent. It's that we CHOOSE not to be and we prove it by being irreverent one day a year. On Purim we might pretend to act out the fantasies that we would never

actually enjoy in reality. We are allowed to imagine vigilante justice against those who would harm us as a cathartic response to trauma. Fantasizing about this does not mean that we would actually perform these violent acts if given a chance.

That is the beauty of Purim. It embraces all of our humanity and gives us a chance to realize that vengeful feelings are a normal part of being human, while the values of our faith remind us to keep them as fantasies and not as actual practice.

This is one more way Purim allows us to engage in the Jewish observance of one day a year of "reverent irreverence."

A Message from our President

I hope everyone had a great month.

The new month begins the same way the previous month ended. That is, our communal family serving those much less fortunate than us. I'm specifically talking about the homeless community who are being housed at the Islamic Center. There is no greater feeling than to give back especially to those who do not have a roof over their head. Members of our communal family have taken time out of their lives to serve their fellow men (and women). In Harrisonburg it works where Muslims can house the less fortunate at their Mosque and Jews can go and are welcomed there to help feed the homeless who are probably Christian or nonreligious. I believe this is the way that religion should work. Jewish children do not come out of the womb hating Muslims and Muslim children do not come out of the womb hating Jews. Hate is learned as is love and respect. We must take it upon ourselves to teach love and respect. By the actions of our communal family, we have made the world just a little better place to live in and that is something we can all be very proud of. I'm certainly very proud to be part of the representation from Temple Beth El in celebrating this true mitzvah by serving our fellow men (and women).

I hope everyone has a wonderful and healthy month. One in which we teach our children to love and respect all people of good will. There is no greater feeling than to give of ourselves without getting anything in return except knowing that you've done something that really counts. Something that makes the world just a little better to live in.

March Yahrzeits

Ivan Lantz - *Mar 1*
Anne Mintzer - *Mar 1, 2010*
Evan Poster - *Mar 2, 2009*
Arthur Dorne - *Mar 2, 1999*
Julias Wise - *Mar 3, 1954*
Mary Frank Loewner - *Mar 3, 1945*
Joshua Rabinowitz - *Mar 4*
Bertha Ney - *Mar 5, 1943*
Lilly Schwartz - *Mar 5*
Shirley Dobin - *Mar 5, 1982*
Rosalie Hirsch - *Mar 5, 1988*
Joseph Berney - *Mar 6*
Hetty Marrick - *Mar 6, 1972*
Maurice Scheuer - *Mar 7, 1935*
Sadie Derechensky - *Mar 8*
Rae Slater - *Mar 9, 1950*
Baruch Ney - *Mar 10, 1915*
Merwin Kalman - *Mar 10*
Phyllis Rodbell - *Mar 10*
Joe Kimmel - *Mar 12, 1974*
Nathan Minskoff - *Mar 14*
Anna Rodbell - *Mar 14, 1959*
Lenore White - *Mar 14*
Jonathan Freudenthal - *Mar 15*
Mary Blatt - *Mar 15, 1994*
Louis Amber - *Mar 16, 1903*
Rose Solomon - *Mar 18, 1903*
Joseph Huffman - *Mar 19*
Louise Perlman - *Mar 19, 1997*

Augusta Loewner - *Mar 20, 1893*
Rabbi Bernard Bloom - *Mar 20, 1952*
Morton Nusbaum - *Mar 21*
Flossie Hollander - *Mar 21, 1888*
Sigmond Wise - *Mar 22, 1909*
Esther Clayman - *Mar 22, 1981*
Abraham Bersson - *Mar 22*
William Friddle - *Mar 23, 1958*
Michael Mintzer - *Mar 23, 1976*
Aaron Sissman - *Mar 23*
Cornelia Oestreicher - *Mar 23, 1925*
Esther Miller - *Mar 24, 1951*
Bettye Rubin Neuwelt - *Mar 24, 2020*
Charles Schwalb - *Mar 25, 1995*
Lilly Schwartz - *Mar 25, 1983*
Phillip Feig - *Mar 26*
Beatrice Schwalb - *Mar 27, 1992*
Fanny Spivak - *Mar 29*
Max Sissman - *Mar 29*
Herb Rodbell - *Mar 30, 2018*
Rabbi David Fazon - *Mar 31*
Margot Stein - *Mar 31*
George Goldberg - *Mar 31, 2005*

Recent Donations

Dale Brothers - Yahrzeits for Karen Vanderhoof and Gloria Richter Simon
Amanda and Evan Friss - Donation to the Religious School

News

After Friday night services, 11 year old member Miles Friss declared “I was surprised at how unborring it was.”

We couldn’t agree more, Miles!



Miles Friss (age 11)

BETH EL CONGREGATION

MARCH 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			01	02	03	04
			Men's Club Breakfast/Dinner Islamic Center Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom	Men's Club Dinner Traditions 6:00 pm	Rabbi-led Shabbat Services Guest Cantor Marty Steinhouse 7:30 pm Sponsored Oneg Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
05	06	07	08	09	10	11
Religious School, Purim 9:30 am Torah Tots 10:30 am Adult Ed History of Arab Israeli Relations 7:00 pm Zoom	Sisterhood Meeting 6:00 pm		Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom		Rabbi-led Shabbat Services 7:30 pm Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
No Religious School Adult Ed History of Arab Israeli Relations 7:00 pm Zoom			Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom Board Meeting 6:30 pm Zoom also		Lay Services 7:30 pm	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
No Religious School		Valley Interfaith Action Refounding Action Bridgewater Church of the Brethren 6:00-7:30 pm	Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom		Men's Club Shabbat Services 7:30 pm Sponsored Oneg Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
26	27	28	29	30	31	
Religious School 9:30 am Possible Adult Ed			Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom		Rabbi-led Shabbat Services 7:30 pm Oneg Livestream also	