

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I'm concerned with the upcoming Purim holiday so close to the release of the Passion movie. How is it possible to be joyous on Purim when such a powerful expression of anti-Semitism has just been spilled right in our backyards?

Robert W.

Dear Robert,

The Purim story, which occurred some 2500 years ago, was the first recorded attempt to annihilate the Jewish people. Haman was the author of the first "final solution", and was granted the royal permission to murder every last Jewish man, woman and child living in the Diaspora.

The Jews, upon repenting and beseeching the Al-mighty, were spared this evil decree, through a miraculous sequence of events, which spanned over a ten-year period. What is unique about the miracles of Purim, unlike other Jewish holidays, is that the miracles were seemingly natural events. No seas split or plagues fell upon the Persians. No clouds of glory, manna falling from the heavens, or oil burning long past its natural capacity. The miracles of Purim are what our Rabbis call "hidden miracles". They show us how G-d is involved in our lives behind the scene, and His hand is present in the minute details of our existence, both nationally and individually.

The "star of the show", Queen Esther, carries this theme in her very name. "Esther", says the Talmud, comes from the word "hester", or hidden. The message is that even in the darkest times of our exile, G-d protects us and watches over us, in a hidden way. It is for us, as to the Jews of Persia, to realize that and seek out the hidden hand of G-d in our existence.

The celebration of Purim, says the Talmud, is like the celebration of the sheep surrounded by a pack of 70 hungry wolves, and gets out alive. Despite all the attempts to destroy us by many powerful nations, here we are, alive and well, albeit not without the scars of the struggle. Most of the powerful nations bent upon our destruction, have long passed from the stage of history. (When's the last time you bumped into a Persian, a Babylonian, a Greek or Roman Legioneer?) Purim is the joy and celebration of Jewish continuity, of G-d's promise of *Netzach Yisroel Lo Yishaker*, that ours is an eternal nation.

The release of a movie like that of Mel Gibson in our days, despite all the world has learned (or refused to learn), from a calamity as recent as the holocaust, is truly cause for great concern. This is especially so given recent events throughout Europe, Durban, and in universities in Canada and even in this great country.

This concern, however, is certainly not a reason to dampen our joy on Purim. Purim is precisely the holiday which gives us the strength to carry on despite all the Passions, the blood libels, Protocols and the like which we haven't ceased to witness for millennia. On Purim we joyously raise our glasses of wine, despite the Mel Gibsons of the world, and celebrate the eternity of our nation. L'Chayim!