

Thoughts From THE HEART

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## THE AGELESS THANKSGIVING DAY TURNING TRAGEDY IN-TO TRIUMPH

A fledgling nation of pilgrims found themselves in a strange, hostile country. They were far away from home. They felt abandoned. They especially feared the very real threat of extinction. Religious freedom was their champion cause, for despite the dire circumstances in which they found themselves, nothing was more important to them than their ongoing relationship with God. (Haseem)

When everything looked the bleakest, and their days on earth seemed to be numbered down to single digits, a miracle came from an unexpected source, and instead of slipping from the pages of history, forever forgotten, their unforeseen survival propelled them to become a nation unparalleled in mankind's continuing saga. To this very day, a nation of people celebrates this ageless story with a Thanksgiving feast. Traditional foods make their annual appearance and countless pageants re-enact the story so often that even little children know the characters and countless blessings. On this day the needs of the poor among us are more prominently noted - much more so than at other times of the year.

THESE THANKSGIVING PARTICIPANTS GO OUT THEIR WAY TO MAKE SURE THAT LESSER PRIVILEGED CITIZENS ARE LOVINGLY CARED FOR, FED AND MADE A PART OF THE FESTIVITIES. ON THIS DAY A NATION PAUSES TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR ACHIEVING WHAT THEY COULD NOT DO FOR THEMSELVES. THE PILGRIMS OF PLYMOUTH ROCK IN 1621?? NO. THE EXILED ISRAELITES IN PERSIA, ABOUT 2,500 YEARS AGO. THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CELEBRATING THEIR OWN THANKSGIVING DAY FOR CENTURIES, LONG BEFORE THE PILGRIMS EXPERIENCED THEIR NARROW BRUSH WITH EXTINCTION IN MASSACHUSETTS. THE JEWISH VERSION IS NOT CALLED THANKSGIVING, OF COURSE. INSTEAD WE CALL IT THE FEAST OF PURIM. AND FOR GOOD REASON. TO DISCOVER WHY THIS ANNUAL HOLIDAY EXISTS, WE HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. NOT ONLY IS IT THE ONLY BOOK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TO EXPLAIN OR EVEN MENTION, THE FEAST OF PURIM, IT IS THE ONLY BOOK IN WHICH THE NAME OF GOD (YHWH) IS NOT MENTIONED ALTHOUGH THE LORD'S MIGHTY HAND IS VISIBLE THROUGHOUT. IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, WHEN WE TAKE A WORD AND MAKE IT PLURAL, WE ADD S OR ES - TO DO THE SAME IN THE HEBREW LANGUAGE WE ADD IM. SO THE PLURAL OF SERAPH IS SERAPHIM. THE PLURAL OF CHERUB IS CHERUBIM. EVEN BAAL (A FALSE GOD) BECAME BAAZIM - (MANY FALSE GODS). IN THE THRILLING STORY OF ESTHER, A SCOUNDREL NAME HAMAN WAS PLOTTING TO EXTERMINATE ALL OF THE JEWS IN THE PERSIAN KINGDOM. HAMAN

WAS THE ROYAL VIZIER TO KING AHASUERUS-[WE KNOW HIM TO BE XERXES I OF PERSIA], AND WITH DECEIT AND TRICKERY THAT WOULD MAKE SURVIVOR CONTESTANTS BLUSH, HAMAN MANAGED TO MANIPULATE KING AHASUERUS INTO AUTHORIZING A MASS EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWS. HAMAN INFORMS AHASUERUS THAT THE JEWS DO NOT OBEY THE KING'S LAWS AND THAT IT WOULD BE IN THE KINGDOM'S BEST INTEREST TO GET RID OF THEM. HE ASKS FOR PERMISSION TO DESTROY THEM, WHICH THE KING GRANTS. HAMAN THEN ORDERS THE KING'S OFFICIALS TO KILL ALL THE JEWS. TO WIN THE FAVOR OF THE GODS, HAMAN CASTS LOTS TO DETERMINE ON WHICH DATE THE MASSACRE IS TO TAKE PLACE. THE HEBREW WORD FOR LOTS WAS PUR. SINCE HE HAD TO CAST SEVERAL LOTS TO DETERMINE FIRST THE MONTH, THEN THE DATE, THEY HAD TO CAST PURIM (PLURAL OF PUR). SO LITERALLY, WITH A FEW ROLL OF THE DICE, THE DATE WAS SET FOR THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWS: THE THIRTEENTH DAY OF THE TWELFTH MONTH. ALL YEAR LONG EVERY JEW IN THE KINGDOM MARKED OFF ONE MORE DAY FROM THEIR CALENDAR UNTIL THEY WOULD BE BUTCHERED—WHAT A GASHLY THOUGHT!! JUST IMAGINE KNOWING THAT ON A PRE-DETERMINED DATE THOUSANDS OF YOUR PEOPLE WOULD BE KILLED ON, DECEMBER 13. THE JEWS WERE A CONQUERED AND DOOM PEOPLE. BUT THE STORY DOES NOT ENDS. GOD (HASHEM) INTERVENED BY

QUEEN ESTHER - (who was Jewish) to INTERCEDE ON BEHALF OF her people with the King. SINCE the King BY LAW CANNOT CANCEL his own SIGNED AND SEALED DECREE, he SHREWDLY SIGNS AND ISSUES ANOTHER ONE: ["THE JEWS, ON THAT SAME DATE, ARE PERMITTED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES BY EXTERMINATING THOSE ENEMIES WHO ORIGINALLY SOUGHT TO KILL THEM"] - THE TABLES ARE REMARKABLY AND MIRACULOUSLY TURNED. INSTEAD OF MARKING A DATE THAT EVIL INTENDED TO BRING CALAMITY UPON GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, THEY NOW CELEBRATE VICTORY AND JOY OVER THEIR ENEMIES. THE FEAST OF PURIM IS A TIME OF FEASTING AND SENDING PORTIONS OF FOOD TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS. EVERYONE, CHILDREN AS WELL AS ADULTS DRESS UP IN COSTUME AND REENACT THE MELODRAMA. EVERYONE CHEERS THE HEROINE AND HERO, QUEEN ESTHER AND HER UNCLE, MORDECAI; AND THEY BOO, HISS AND STOMP THEIR FEET WHENEVER THE NAME HAMAN IS MENTIONED.

With Torah Gratings and Blessings.