

Kol THE VOICE OF Barrack

Adar: Standing Together

Hodesh Tov!

During Rosh Hodesh Adar, I recalled some of the most exciting discussions I love having in my Jewish Studies classes: Did the stories in the Tanakh really happen, or are they folktales of the Jewish People? Ultimately, does it really matter if the events occurred or not? For me, no. Why? Because they help to make up the rich, vibrant history of the Jewish people, they teach us valuable lessons, and they have become stories that are passed down from generation to generation.

In the month of Adar, we will celebrate the holiday of Purim. Was there really a Mordechai and Esther? Who was King Ahashverosh (Xerxes I)? Was there really an evil Haman out to destroy the Jewish people? Whether you believe the events to be real or simply a folktale to inspire the Jews to unite and to stay strong in the face of adversity, I ask: does it matter if those events really happened?

If the story is true, biblical scholars estimate the events took place around 500 BCE. The Jewish People had been exiled from Israel under the Babylonians in 586 BCE with the destruction of the First Temple, and Mordechai himself is identified as one of those exiled. Most of us are familiar with the story: King Ahashverosh is displeased with his wife Queen Vashti; he searches for a new queen and selects Esther; Mordechai raised and took care of Esther; Mordechai saves Ahashverosh's life; Haman has a rabid hatred of the Jews, becomes vizier to the king and attempts to eradicate the kingdom of all Jews; Esther and Mordechai reveal this to Ahashverosh; Haman and his sons are put to death and the Jewish people, against almost insurmountable evil forces, survive again.

One of the mitzvot that is observed in connection with Purim is Ta'anit Esther, the Fast of Esther. It is a "minor" fast and begins before sunrise the day before Purim and ends after the reading of the Megillah (the Scroll of Esther) on Purim night. From my point of view, it is unfortunate that so few Jews observe this fast. Why, you may ask? Because this fast is intended to remind us of how strong we are when we stand united. In the Megillah, Esther asks the Jewish People to fast for three days in order to have the edict of death revoked by the king. It is amazing to me that the story implies that everyone participated in the fast. We have read time and time again, throughout our history, that when we stand together as one nation, as the Jewish People, we can achieve great outcomes. In my own time, I have witnessed the Jewish People coming together for successes such as The Six-Day War and Operation Solomon, the airlift of thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel. We also have come together at difficult moments from The Yom Kippur War, the struggle to free Soviet Jewry and the recent tragic massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

Perhaps a fast is not simply a fast but a time to reunite with the Jewish People, to stand together, despite our differences. In this time of great division and isolation in our nation, we can be reminded of the strength and comfort we have as a pluralistic community, with our shared history and values.

Wishing everyone a Hag Purim Samay'ah | חג פורים שמח!

Kol Barrack (The Voice of Barrack) is a periodic publication that recognizes the new month in the Jewish calendar. In this edition, Rabbi Steven Razin shares his thoughts about Adar with our school community.



Rabbi Steven Razin

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Rabbi Steven Razin has been a Jewish Studies teacher at Barrack for 16 years, and has taught Jewish Studies and Tanakh to hundreds of our students. Rabbi Razin and his wife of 36 years, Beth, are also the proud parents of Yosef '07, Victoria, Yakira and Yonatan '10.

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