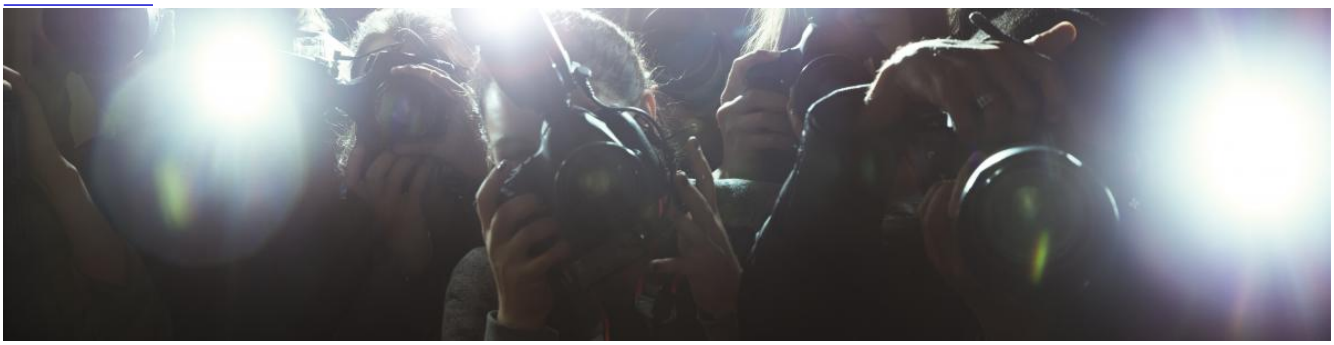
A Purim Miracle: Thoughts for Purim

View PDF



Rabbi Marc D. Angel is Founder and Director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, jewishideas.org This column was originally published on our website in 2012.

Esther the Jewess marries King Ahashverosh. Her Uncle Mordecai tells her not to reveal that she is Jewish. The Jews throughout the 127 provinces of the Empire know Esther is Jewish. But not one of them gives away the secret. Ahashverosh, Haman and the entire royal court are kept in the dark about the Queen's true identity.

This, commented Rabbi Haim David Halevy (late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv), was an amazing phenomenon, a veritable miracle. Not one Jew in the entire empire betrayed the secret. The Jewish people were united, discreet, and disciplined to an extraordinary degree.

Let us imagine how this story would play out if it occurred today.

Jewish reporters would fiercely try to outscoop each other to report about a Jewish Queen.

Wikileaks would put an image of Esther's birth certificate on the internet, with the indication that she was born Jewish.

The Hareidim would demonstrate worldwide at the travesty of a Jewish woman marrying a non-Jewish king, a wicked one at that.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel would issue a statement that Esther's Jewishness was in question, and that she would need a "giyyur le-humra" (a conversion to be on the safe side) if she wanted to be considered Jewish for purposes of aliyah.

The Zionists would point to Esther and say: you see, the Jews of the diaspora are assimilating; they all should make aliyah before they totally disappear.

The zealous Litvaks would say: Esther is merely a Persian Jewess and doesn't have our fine Ashkenazic pedigree. We wouldn't want our sons to marry such a woman.

Chabad would send another shaliah to Shushan, to re-enforce the staff already there at the Chabad House. Cholent (Persian style) would be dished out each Shabbat morning along with prayers for the Queen's prompt release from bondage in the palace.

The Sephardi Federations around the globe would glow with quiet satisfaction that one of their own made the big time.

The peaceniks would say: this whole crisis could have been avoided if Mordecai simply bowed to Haman and would not have been so stubborn. If Jews simply gave everything away, we wouldn't have to worry about anti-Semitism.

The kabbalists would manufacture a new batch of red strings for bracelets, and sell them at a suitable price to those who wanted to provide mystical salvation to Esther and the Jewish people.

The secularists would blame the fanaticism of the religious community; the religious would blame the secularists for their innumerable sins which surely brought on God's wrath.

Jewish newspapers would be filled with spicy attacks and accusations, op ed pieces and letters to the editor. Everyone would have an opinion, invariably wrong. All the commotion within the Jewish community would catch the attention of the non-Jewish media.

It would not take too long for Queen Esther's hidden identity to be revealed. Esther would have then been ejected from the throne; Haman would have had full sway; the Jews would have had no powerful person to intercede on their behalf. The Purim story would have ended in disaster. The joyous holiday of Purim would never have come to be.

The Jews of the ancient Persian Empire demonstrated remarkable intelligence and restraint. They understood what was at stake and they rose to the occasion with admirable self-control. They surely had differing opinions and ideologies among themselves; but when faced with national crisis, they knew enough to set their

differences aside, to refrain from destructive gossip and back biting.

While we modern Jews cannot hope to achieve the unity and self-control of the ancient Persian Jewish community, we can strive to act and speak with discretion, courtesy, and respect for the views of others. We can avoid vitriolic attacks on those with whom we disagree. We can focus on the really big issues which confront the Jewish people, and think how each of us can be constructive members of our community. We can know when to speak and when to remain silent. We can know when action is necessary and helpful, and when action is counter-productive and misguided.

Rabbi Halevy thought it was miraculous that the Jews of ancient Persia acted so wisely and so discreetly. Perhaps it is too much to expect such miraculous behavior from us. But perhaps—with intelligence, compassion, discretion and respectfulness—we can be part of a new Purim miracle for our generation.