

THIS EPIC STORY WE CALL "LIFE" by Rabbi Moshe Tom Heyn March/April 2017

Over the years, I've been in many shpiels, the satirical re-enactments of the biblical book of Esther done each year during Purim. One year I was cast as King Achashverosh and found myself to be very uncomfortable in that role. Achashverosh was a buffoon who was all too easily influenced by his cronies and his evil adviser, Haman. It shouldn't have bothered me. After all, Purim is a time to be risqué and poke fun at ourselves and others, more than we would during the rest of the year.

Playing the part of Haman can be fun because he is such an over-the-top sinister character. And while it's fun when everyone shouts "boo" when I make my appearance, I am troubled playing that role, as well. It's hard for me to overlook the fact



that these characters, along with the indifference or malice they personify, are not make-believe. Maybe that's why tradition encourages us to get drunk on Purim. Without being intoxicated, it's hard to laugh about it.

I think my favorite role in any shpiel is that of Mordechai. He was a really decent guy, a *mensch* who refused to bow down to anyone but God. He had the courage to stand up to Haman, and he had the moral clarity to tell Esther that she had no choice but to act boldly in order to save the Jewish people, even if it meant risking her life.

Early 20th century Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, was a student of Sigmund Freud before they parted ways. Although he was not Jewish, he probably loved Purim because it involves archetypal characters. Jung popularized the idea of archetypes as aspects of human nature that find expression in such figures as king, hero, princess, or villain. The Purim story is a perfect example of how these timeless characters can reappear in any place or

time and engage in an epic drama which plays itself out again and again in every generation.

Jung went a step further to suggest that these characters and their corresponding traits exist, not only "out there" but also "in here." That is to say, we all possess archetypal traits within ourselves in different measures. This is why role-models are so important. What traits we see in others often become the traits we bring forth from within ourselves. When we have positive role-models and courageous leaders, we and our children are more likely to follow in their footsteps.

Seen in this light, the Purim story plays itself out in the world around us and in our own lives. It's both funny and sad to notice that human nature hasn't changed very much in the past few millennia. And we might notice that, even within ourselves, we can find the very same tendencies personified by Haman, Achashverosh, Esther and Mordechai.



It is a *mitzvah* to witness the Purim story being read and re-enacted each year because it is intended to help us recognize the danger of indifference and malice, wherever it

exists, and remind us that it must be overcome by courage and moral clarity. It's a recurring theme in our tradition, reflected not only in the Purim story but in the Passover story as well. It is the most important motif during this period in which we welcome Spring. It's interesting that Judaism equates such a powerful moral message with the rebirth of life and hope.

As things heat up in the coming weeks and months, I hope you will join me in reflecting on the meaning of Purim and Passover. Whether or not you come to our Purim shpiel or our Passover seder, we will all get to choose the parts we play in this epic, unfolding story we call "life."