

Purim 5771

257 Garden Street
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The Roslyn Synagogue

Newsletter

Schedule of Services

Monday to Friday morning:

Shacharit: 6:30am
(except Rosh Chodesh 6:20am)

Sunday morning:

Shacharit: 8:30am

Sunday evening:

Mincha/Ma'ariv at the previous Friday's candle lighting time.

Erev Shabbat:

Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat at 6:45pm

Shabbat morning:

Shacharit: 9:00am

Saturday evening:

Shiur 40 minutes before the previous Friday's candle lighting time.

Mincha: Ten minutes before previous Friday's candle lighting time, followed by Seudat Shlishit, Ma'ariv and Havdalah.

Message from the Rabbi

WE NOW FIND OURSELVES IN CHODESH ADAR, THE MONTH OUR Sages tell us is to be ushered in with a sense of joy and gladness (Tractate Ta'anit, 29a). At the epicenter of this gleeful time is the holiday of Purim. I have always thought Purim represents somewhat of a puzzling dichotomy. Chronologically, it is the last holiday to find its way into Rabbinic literature (with the exception of the fast days commemorating the Temple's destruction). Any reading of Megillat Esther provides little to pinpoint as "miraculous" — certainly not when compared to the wondrous miracles of Pesach. Moreover, as we have spoken about many times, G-d is strangely absent from the entire story. So underwhelming does Megillat Esther seem, that the Talmud records a debate as to whether it should be included in the Biblical Canon and whether Purim should be established as a holiday altogether (see Tractate Megilla, 7a and Rashi there).

In this light, I call your attention to the closing words of Maimonides in his discussion of the laws of Purim: "In the days of Mashiach, all books of Nevi'im and K'tuvim (the latter 2/3 of the Bible) will eventually become null and void except for Megillat Esther which will endure along with the five books of the Torah and the Oral Law (Torah Sheba'al Peh) which will not be voided for all eternity" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Megilla and Chanukah, 2:18).

Without addressing the perplexing notion of the majority of Tanakh becoming null and void, what can this statement of Maimonides possibly mean? How can he claim that Megillat Esther is on a level above all else? The miraculous conquering of the Land of Israel found in Joshua, the piercing wisdom found in Proverbs, the countless prophetic lessons found in book after book — are these not at least equal to Megillat Esther — where no miracles are found and where we lack even one reference to G-d or prophecy?!

I would like to suggest a possible reading of Megillat Esther which may serve as a solution to this difficult question. While G-d's name and direct involvement in the Purim story is nowhere to be found, our tradition understands the divine hand to be pulling the proverbial strings at every juncture. Any one part of the story taken in a vacuum may be seen merely as happenstance. It is only when we take the whole story, placing every piece of the puzzle in succession and seeing how they were all necessary for the eventual salvation of the Jewish People, then and only then is the divine hand apparent. Is it any coincidence that the Halacha requires, unlike with ordinary Torah reading, that one must hear every word of Megillat Esther to fulfill his or her mitzvah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 690:3)?



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Message from our Rabbinic Intern



I am going to do it. I am going to contradict myself.

If you recall, we discussed last Hanukkah the need for consistency and continuity in the practice of our values and religious duties. Now, it's time for change. It's time to experiment outside the confines of normality. It's time to challenge the monotony of routine, and seek a different kind of experience.

That is what Purim seemingly asks us to do. We eat much more than normal. We drink more heavily than we ordinarily would. We give charity more freely than at any other time during the year. To their chagrin, we also give our friends more food and drink than they would ever accept in their right mind, just a month before Passover. With all those indulgences, we're testing our boundaries, and tasting a more carefree existence.

Simply choosing to read the Megillah breaks the rules. As the Talmud tells us, when a Jew chooses what to do first — read the Megillah or perform a regularly scheduled mitzvah like a Torah class or a Temple sacrifice — he or she necessarily must first read the Megillah. Of course, that is in contradiction to the general rule that frequent mitzvot must trump commandments in the brief, seasonal spotlight. Here too we find ourselves breaking our normal codes of conduct, embracing life in the moment over a life of consistency.

Yet, why Purim? Why should Purim be our occasion for an expedition into a more experimental lifestyle? The Talmud answers: the miracle of Purim. Miracles are shocking and momentous interruptions of the natural laws that inspire us to rethink our existence. When G-d breaks the rules of physics during the Exodus from Egypt and parts the Red Sea, He is trying to condition the Jewish People to abandon their self-identification as slaves. When Eliyahu prompts G-d to send a fire from Heaven to consume an offering on Mount Carmel, that too is a shock and awe campaign, meant to impress the Jews into abandoning idolatry. If any experience would challenge our conceptions of the world and of our assumptions about its function, it would be a miracle.

However, Purim in particular commemorates a miracle best suited for rethinking normal life. As a point of contrast, Hanukkah commemorates a miracle in the Temple, a location that Chapter five of Pirkei Avot depicts as abounding in miracles. Passover recalls a string of miracles initiating our extraordinary and explicitly supernatural journey through the desert. It is the story of the Megillah which never once mentions G-d; which occurs in the depths of the Persian exile and amidst stagnation in the Persian sanction to rebuild the Temple; which is typified by the seeming irony of Jews not only escaping the dates, decrees, and gallows meant for their destruction, but even seizing on those same elements to destroy their enemies. Purim tells us to rethink the normality of our lives because the Purim miracle occurred surprisingly in the most un-miraculous of contexts, not so different from how most of us view our own lives.

To be sure, Hanukkah is a message that extends throughout the entire year. Day-to-day, we must strengthen the consistency of lives and values. Yet, Purim is a necessary moment for the occasion to take precedence, for the contradictions and leniencies of the moment to shine. The Jewish calendar annually offers us the themes of Purim to refresh and rethink even constructive habits that become ensconced in our routines. So, let's enjoy our food and wine, relish the moment, and then reflect on how we can bring that sense of miraculousness and happiness back with us to normal life.

Michael Goon

Shul News

Mazel tov to Ellen & Alan Kaplan on the engagement of their daughter, Ariella, to Sam Nutis.

Mazel tov to Edith and Paul Tolins on the marriage of their daughter, Ilana, to Jeffrey Lax.

Mazel tov to the Neman family on the engagement of Albert to Hagit Sedaghat-pour.

Happy goth birthday to Jack Wertenteil!



Our condolences to Nate Schulman and family on the loss of his father, Henry (Zvi ben Noson) Schulman.

Our condolences to the family of Aziz (Ezra ben Ovadya HaKohen) Mirharoon on his passing.

May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Scholar in Residence

On February 25-26, The Roslyn Synagogue held its annual Scholar in Residence Shabbat. We were honored this year to host Professor Jeffrey S. Gurock as our scholar in residence. Professor Gurock, the Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University and Chair of the Academic Council of the American Jewish Historical Society, gave three lectures over the course of the weekend. His topics included the history of Orthodox Judaism in America, a surprising mystery relating to the origins of institutions of higher Jewish learning in New York City, and insights about the status and role of Jews in sports in America.

As is customary at a Roslyn Synagogue event, our community also enjoyed a wonderful Shabbat dinner in shul, and we had the opportunity to spend Motzei Shabbat together at a Melevah Malkah graciously hosted by Kimya and Steve Kreinik. We thank our sponsors: the Wertenteils, Rosenblums and an anonymous donor for helping to make this event possible. Thank you to Marc Yunis and Alan Sonnenklar for all of their hard work. Our Scholar in Residence Shabbat has become a much anticipated event, and we look forward to many more opportunities in the coming year for learning and celebrating together.



Top photo: Professor Jeffrey Gurock
Middle photo: Alan Sonnenklar, Stephen Baumgarten, and Marc Yunis
Bottom left photo: Rozita Youssefzadeh, Shira Shamtoab, and Kimya Kreinik

Lox 'n Learn

The Roslyn Synagogue has been privileged to host a series of Lox n Learn lectures. Topics and speakers have included:

- “Steak or Fries? The Propriety of Vegetarianism in Judaism” led by Jonathan Chambre, a member of the HAFTR High School faculty. He currently is finishing his masters at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration.
- “Don’t Touch That Bible: Is Study of the Talmud better than study of the Books of Moses?” led by Shlomo Zuckier.
- “The Longest Journey or The Scenic Route: Was Wandering Through the Desert Punishment or Preparation for Greatness?” led by Adina Borg, teacher of English Literature at Stella K. Abraham (SKA) High School for Girls. Adina is currently completing her second Masters in Bible at Yeshiva University’s Bernard Revel Graduate School of Judaic Studies.



Thank you to Michael Goon for organizing these interesting and informative speakers!

Junior Congregation



Two of our young members.

The Junior Congregation is a new and wonderful addition to the Roslyn Synagogue. Children between the ages of 5-13 are invited to attend Junior Congregation which occurs every other Shabbat from 10:45-11:45 AM. Children pray together while learning the significance and the meaning of the prayers. They also explore the Torah portion of the week in a fun and interactive way. Every Junior Congregation ends with games and of course, the beloved grab bag! Junior Congregation also hosts several fun and festive activities for the children around the holidays. We are so fortunate to have several wonderful group leaders who are entertaining, warm, and engaging and always keep the kids coming back! They include Leora Perlow and Sofia Peimani who are both studying at Stern College for Women.

We would love to see you and your children at any of our Shabbat programs or events. For additional information, please contact Tamar Azaraf (tamarazaraf@gmail.com)

Purim Schedule 5771, March 19-20, 2011

Thursday March 18th, 2011

Taanit Esther
Fast Begins 5:51am
Schacharit 6:30am
Mincha-Ma'ariv 6:35pm
Fast Ends 7:44pm

Friday, March 18th

Mincha-Kabbalat Shabbat 6:45pm

Saturday, March 19th, 2011

Shacharit 9:00am
Mincha 6:45pm
Shabbat Ends 7:46pm
Megillat Esther 8:00pm
Magician and Refreshments 9:15pm

Sunday March 20th, 2011

Shacharit 8:30am
Megillat Esther 9:15am
Mincha-Ma'ariv 6:45pm



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If this is true of Megillat Esther, then perhaps we can understand Purim's significance and the perplexing statement by Maimonides. We live today in a world bereft of prophecy where we do not merit witnessing seas being split and heavenly plagues smiting our enemies. Purim is eternal because its model of the divine is eternal. For us to see G-d's hand in our lives, we must do so in the mode of Megillat Esther.

May we all merit to recognize the divine in our every day lives just as did the Jewish people of Shushan, and may we all see that as a cause for true joy and gladness. I look forward to booing Haman's name with you all. Beile joins me in wishing everyone Purim Sameach,

Rabbi Robert D. Block