

BRUSSELS, BOMBINGS AND PURIM

YESTERDAY I awoke to a vision of pure evil: Innocent passengers running through the Brussels airport as destruction rained glass and debris, sirens screaming, ceilings and walls collapsing, and the death toll mounting. Over two hundred people injured, thirty-four dead, and no end in sight. It was a glimpse into the inferno of pure evil.

The week before Purim is the week of Shabbat Zachor, when we are commanded “Remember Amalek, how he met you on the way, and struck the hindmost of you, all who were feeble, faint and weary”. I can only imagine the panic of an elderly traveler using a walker, or a mom trying to herd two small children through a collapsing airport structure. For Jews, Amalek, who targets the “feeble, faint and weary”, provides the very definition of evil. “You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sky, you shall not forget”. Amalek is considered to be the direct ancestor of Purim’s evil Haman.

TODAY is Taanit Esther, The Fast of Esther.

When Esther is told that her cousin Mordecai is sitting outside the palace gates wearing the sackcloth of mourning, her first instinct is to simply send him better clothing. Mordecai’s reply is swift. “Do not think that in the King’s palace you shall escape, any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house shall be destroyed. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Esther asks that all the Jews fast with her for three days, before she goes in to speak to the King. “And then”, she says if I perish, I perish.”

TOMMOROW is Purim, and our election cycle seems to be providing us with a stellar Purim Play cast. It is easy to see who gets to play the foolish and narcissistic King Ahasuerus. Mar-a-Lago, with its opulent rooms, seems reminiscent of the Foolish King's palace, where Queen Vashti" was commanded to appear wearing only her royal crown. (pictures, anyone?) Everything is so "yuuge" that it is comical, but we see the consequences of a King whose ego is out of control.

And evil Haman? "There is a certain people dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom: and their laws are different from those of every other people" Haman tells the King, "Therefore it is not for the King's profit to tolerate them." Jews? Hispanics? Muslims? As we designate communities for expulsion and special surveillance, our Purim play has resonance for this generation.

Queen Hillary, accustomed to life in the palace, would love to play the role of Esther. But is she capable of seeing what lies beyond the palace gates? Bernie seems to fit Uncle Mordecai, goading her conscience and pushing her to action, but our play has yet to reach its conclusion.

Meanwhile, as we hiss and boo in this week of joyous celebration, we are reminded once again that pure evil, this time dressed as ISIS, exists in our world. That evil is beyond all foibles, beyond all personalities, and stark in its adherence to its goals of destruction. As we drink, dress up, celebrate, and enjoy the Purimspiel with all of its silly fun, we must be careful to remember to blot out the name of Amalek. In the memory of those helpless innocent beings whose lives this week were cut short by unadulterated evil, we will not forget.