

## **“Purim levity is also an aspect of the divine”**

**By Rabbi Tiferet Berenbaum (2/25/15)**

<http://www.jewishchronicle.org/2015/02/25/dvar-torah-purim-levity-is-also-an-aspect-of-the-divine/>

Interestingly, the goals of both holidays are the same: to attain holiness (*kedusha* — a spiritual leveling up). It is easy to do that on Yom Kippur, but on Purim?

On Purim the rabbis declare that we drink “*ad d’lo yada*,” until we don’t know the difference between blessed be Mordechai and cursed be Haman. That’s a *lot* of drinking. And in this state, we are supposed to spiritually level up?

Yes, actually. In fact, our rabbis say that Purim is even holier than Yom Kippur. Why?

On Yom Kippur, the *Kohein Gadol*, High Priest, would go into the Holy of Holies to be face to face “*panim el panim*” with the Holy Blessed One. The God Face of Tishrei is one of judgment, forgiveness and reconciliation.

It is also a time when God energy is most accessible and the synagogues are filled as a result. The idea of a clean slate is an attractive one, forgiveness for the year past.

On Purim, however, God is “*hester panim*” a hidden face, the least directly accessible. In the book of Esther the name of God is not even mentioned.

Thus, the challenge for us is to find God energy in the hiddenness, in places we would not think God would (or should) be found. On Purim, we look beyond God’s mask of invisibility and try to bring ourselves *panim el panim* with God’s Adar Face.

When we seek that face, we find a divine smile, perhaps the echo of a laugh, the Divine force that created the platypus (a reference to the movie “Dogma”).

Levity is not usually an attribute we associate with God, yet if we believe *ain od milvado*, that there is nothing other than the Holy One, then levity cannot be outside of God, for it too is an aspect of the Divine.

Connecting with God on this level is the spiritual challenge of Adar. It is for this reason that I think our rabbis say that Purim is holier than Yom Kippur.

Taking on this challenge leads to greater simcha and greater kedusha, enough to lead us out of the winter and into the springtime renewal of Pesach.

## [“Confronting the Darker Side of Hanukkah”](#)

by **Ginna Green (2020)**

<https://www.jofa.org/shema-bekolah-hear-her-voice>

Whether or not I agree with the premise or veracity of the Maccabees’ war, I do vigorously agree with what we can acknowledge is its clearest overarching result: a successful uprising that preserved Jewish tradition from the threat of eradication against the effects of non-Jewish influence. To that end, I appreciate the rich offering of the Sefat Emet, which has broadened my appreciation of the holiday beyond the rabbinic instruction to commemorate the miracle of light by oil (and the historical reality of its connection to a problematic war), to one that invites us to commemorate the miracle of eight nights of light, delivered to us by God:

R’ Elazar of Worms says in his work *The Rokeach* that the thirty-six candles we light on Hannukah parallel the thirty-six hours for which the original light of the six days of creation shone, before it was hidden away. If this is so, then it appears that each Hannukah candle draws from the *or haganuz*, the hidden light of creation, and gives light in great darkness, as our Sages hinted with their description of the *or haganuz* as a light that shone from one end of the world to the other (Haggigah 12a). There is no hiddenness or obscurity (*he’elem*) before this light. We call the world (*olam*) that obscures (*ma’alim*) and hides this light “the natural,” but the original light of creation shone through all these layers of concealment and it was hidden away for the righteous; on this it is written “A light shines for the upright in the darkness...” (Psalms 112:4). It is also written “The people that walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light...” (Isaiah 9:1). The generation that lived in the days of the wicked Greeks walked in darkness, as the Sages taught, “Darkness refers to Greece, which darkened the eyes of Israel...” (Bereshit Rabba 2:4). Nevertheless they served God with a spirit of self-sacrifice even in the midst of this darkness. That is why they merited that the hidden light shine for them, and some of its illumination remains, radiating from year to year even in these lowly times. Every servant of God must rejoice during these days when a touch of the hidden light illuminates Divine service. The primary intent of the wicked ones was to make us forget God’s laws and Torah, and the Hanukkah lights bring us to remembrance.

That *or haganuz* that illuminated the path of the Maccabees, and continues to be present each year, can also illuminate the path forward for Jewish continuity yet again. The forces of

wickedness today take a different shape and pose a different threat than in days of old, but their threats to Jewish continuity are as clear and present of a danger as any other in our history. Those of us who value both Torah and its values, must seek that *or haganuz* to continue to illuminate what's possible and what's important... We, too, can merit the light of creation to illuminate our paths to both a Judaism that evolves, that is inclusive, that is observant, while still remaining committed to "God's laws and Torah," and a society and democracy where every single one of us—each of us created in the image of God— can thrive.