

THE EAST 55TH STREET  
CONSERVATIVE SYNAGOGUE  
PRESENTS

CABARET 

PURIM פורים

2009 / תשס"ט

(c) Jan R. Uhrbach 2009

# MEIN HERR

*As a monarch you have always been a flake, Mein Herr  
A foolish, sexist despot, and a fake, Mein Herr  
I've had about as much as I can take, Mein Herr  
What to do... What then, nu?... When I'm through... Then I'm through...  
And I'm through... Toodle-oo!*

*Bye-Bye, Mein Lieber Herr. Farewell, Mein Lieber Herr.  
It was a fine affair, but now it's over.  
You never thought I'd dare  
But now I do declare  
I'm better off without you, Mein Herr.*

*Don't dab your eye, Mein Herr, Or wonder why, Mein Herr.  
At least a week's gone by since you've been sober<sup>1</sup>  
You tell me what to wear  
And you're no Fred Astaire  
I've every cause to flout you, Mein Herr.*

*You've never been a person one could trust, Mein Herr.  
Your brains are overshadowed by your lust, Mein Herr.  
And no one in Shushan would call you just, Mein Herr.  
So I do... What I must... Take a chance... Make a fuss... Kick some dust...  
Dance my dance.*

*Bye-Bye, Mein Lieber Herr. L'hitra'ot<sup>2</sup> Mein Herr.  
It was a fine affair, but now it's over.  
A woman's not a pet  
I'll just collect my get<sup>3</sup>  
You've gone too far, you've lost me Mein Herr.*

*Don't dab your eye, Mein Herr, Or wonder why, Mein Herr.  
You always were too much the controller.  
You want to make me dance  
You'll see who wears the pants  
You never should have crossed me, Mein Herr.*

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1. Est. 1:10

2. L'hitra'ot: Goodbye

3. Get: Document of divorce

# KAVOD<sup>4</sup>

(to the tune of "Money Makes the World Go Around")

*Kavod makes the world go around,  
The world go around, the world go around  
Kavod makes the world go around  
It makes the world go 'round.*

*Haman seeks to wear the crown  
Have world reknown, his name resound  
One lone Jew will not bow down,  
His ego can't rebound -- the world turns upside down.*

*If you happen to be rich,  
And you have lots of  
Power and fame you should be  
Satisfied with your lot*

*But when ego and ambition  
Create competition with all  
Then your kishkes  
Get tied in a knot.*

*Soon you start to get defensive  
You're on the offensive  
And even your friends give  
You agita and hives*

*And where once there was some joy  
Now there's just paranoi-a  
And soon oi-va-voi<sup>5</sup> you  
Will plot genocide*

*Kavod makes the world go around,  
The world go around, the world go around,  
Threats from Haman do abound,  
A woman takes him down, a man receives the crown.*

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4. Kavod: honor, respect, dignity, public recognition

5. Oi-va-voi: Heb. for oy vey.

You have always kept Shabbat,  
Kosher glatt, been to Sfat,  
And you're not a Feminista  
The last time you checked

But exclusion is so wrong  
And it's gone on so long  
And you want  
At least a small modicum of respect

So you go there where they'll train you  
Ordain you  
Maintain you are fully qualified  
To be called a rabbi

But then when it comes to minyan  
It seems that as women  
You still are second class<sup>6</sup>  
What a pain in the \_\_\_\_\_

They attack you from the right  
And the left  
And you feel so bereft  
And you no longer know what to do

You're the monkey in the middle  
And feeling a little  
Ambivalent to be  
A Conservative Jew

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6. Although the Jewish Theological Seminary has been ordaining women as rabbis for more than 25 years, they continue to offer a non-egalitarian minyan, where women do not count.

So say a *berakha*<sup>7</sup>  
And stick to *halakha*<sup>8</sup>  
And keep learning that *Wissenschaft*<sup>9</sup>  
*Wissenschaft?! What we need is a little Heilsgeschichte*<sup>10</sup>

After all that we the Jews  
Have been through  
You would think we would learn  
How destructive can be human pride

And yet still we find  
That lacking attack from without  
We allow ourselves to chide  
And divide from inside.

Specially now when there is  
So much transition  
We feel insufficient  
And worry if we'll still belong

So we jockey for position  
Respond with division,  
Derision  
And somehow we can't get along.

*Kavod makes the world go around, the world go around, the world go around  
Kavod makes the world go around, it makes the world go round!*

*Kavod, kavod, kavod, kavod . . .  
Orthodox, Conservative, Traditional, Alternative  
Kavod, kavod, kavod, kavod . . .  
Pluralism, Liberalism, Narcissism, Cynicism  
Kavod, kavod, kavod, kavod . . .  
Kavod kavod makes the world go round!*

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7. *Berakha*: Blessing

8. *Halakha*: Jewish law

9. *Wissenschaft* (short for *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, "science of Judaism"): the German term for the critical study of Judaism and Jewish text, using modern historical methods and scholarship, which is one of the foundations of Conservative Judaism.

10. *Heilsgeschichte*: German for "God's intervention in history."

## TWO YIDEN (to the tune of “Two Ladies”)

Chiri biri bim -- Two Yiden  
Chiri biri bom -- Two Yiden  
Chiri biri bim -- And we must save Shushan – Ja!  
Chiri biri bom -- He’s Mordy  
Chiri biri bim -- She’s Essie  
Chiri biri bom -- Against Haman

Chiri biri bim -- Two cousins  
Chiri biri bom -- Just us’n  
Chiri biri bim -- We can’t afford to lose – Ja!  
Chiri biri bom -- I’m nervous.  
Chiri biri bim -- Impervious  
Chiri biri bom -- We’ll save the Jews.

*I put on sackcloth, and I say the prayers.  
I’m in the palace, and put on Persian airs.  
But we’re working together, we both want one thing.  
The king. His ring. Chiri biri biri bing!*

Chiri biri bim -- Two Yiden  
Chiri biri bom -- No kiddin’  
Chiri biri bim -- And we must make a plan – Ja!  
Chiri biri bom – The king knows me  
Chiri biri bim -- The king owes me  
Chiri biri bom – We’ll hang Haman!

*Don’t tell them, Esther, that you are a Jew  
But when they pass the bacon – Oy! What would Sadie do?  
So you pick the menu, a feast you’ll put on  
We’ve no ham tonight, sir, but we’re serving Haman*

Chiri biri bim – Two Yiden  
Chiri biri bom -- One hidden  
Chiri biri bim – We must reverse the edict  
Chiri biri bom – I’ll juice him  
Chiri biri bim -- Seduce him  
Chiri biri bom – I’ll turn the trick!

## DON'T TELL MAMA

*Mama thinks I’ll be with Cousin Mordy  
And a virgin till I’m forty  
Keeping kosher in Shushan*

*Shushan thinks that I’m a goyish beauty  
And I’m doing wifely duty  
As the new queen of the land*

*So please sir, don’t engage in lashon hara<sup>11</sup>  
Don’t do damage to my aura  
Give a working girl a chance*

Hush up don’t tell Shushan  
Of this “substitution”  
Don’t tell Shushan that I am a Jew

Well-placed prostitution  
Prevents persecution  
So let’s keep it entre nous

I’ve never been to church or a madrasa  
And no one needs to know that I support Hadassah<sup>12</sup>

So here’s to assimilation  
Masking infiltration  
A nice Jewish girl in a seraglio

You can tell God of my trickery  
Cause God is hidden just like me<sup>13</sup>  
Just don’t tell Shushan what you know

11. *Lashon Hara*. Gossip or negative speech.

12. Esther’s given name is actually Hadassah (Est. 2:7).

13. Megillat Esther never mentions the name of God directly, prompting, suggesting to the Rabbis of the Talmud that God is “hidden” (see note 28 below).

*Mama thinks I'm living in the District  
Just a heartbeat from the White House  
In designer elegance*

*Mama doesn't even have an inkling  
That I'm back there in Wasila  
In a pair of Walmart pants*

*So please sir if you run into my mummy  
Don't reveal that I'm not chummy  
With the president of France*

Hush up don't tell Mama  
That I lost to Obama  
Don't tell Mama I'm back with the moose

If you had a secret  
You betcha! I would keep it  
I would never tell the truth

There's still some folks who love me, dontcha know, there  
And they don't know that my career's a bridge to nowhere

So let's stop all this "verbage"  
Don't cause a "disturbage"  
Cause I might yet give it one more go

Call Joe the Plumber, he's my man  
It's dumb and dumber, yes we can

Don't trust Obama --  
He rhymes with Osama -- please God  
Don't tell Mama what you know

## DON'T TELL MAMA (REPRISE)

*Mama thinks he's working as a ḥazzan  
In a sleepy little stiebl  
In the heart of east midtown*

*Mama doesn't even have an inkling  
That he's singing in a nightclub  
In a slinky evening gown*

*So please sir, if you run into my mother  
Just pretend you saw my brother  
Give a working guy a chance*

Nothing is what it seems  
A nightmare or God unseen?  
*Arur Haman or Barukh Mordechai?*<sup>14</sup>

Can we find God and a Godly plan  
When Ahmadinjad controls Iran  
Just don't ask us cause we don't know

So we'll joke and be inebrious  
Cause there's a chance the joke's on us  
Just don't ask us cause we don't know

Don't call the ḥazzan, he's in drag  
And if you want the rabbi, she's in Sag  
Here's our suggestion  
Just don't ask those questions, please God  
Don't ask us cause we don't know

14. אמר רבא: מיחייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי.  
Rava said: A person is obligated to get drunk on Purim until he does not know the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai." (Babylonian Talmud Megillah 7b)

# MEIN HERR (REPRISE)

*The invite to my feast has made you crow, Mein Herr  
But you're about to reap the way you sow, Mein Herr  
You've gone about as far as you can go, Mein Herr  
What to do... Here's a clue...  
When you're through... Then you're through...  
And you're through...  
Toodle-oo!*

Bye-Bye, Mein Lieber Herr.  
Farewell, Mein Lieber Herr.  
You thought you'd be the heir but now it's over.  
Despite your pretty plot  
Kingship is not your lot  
And we'll soon be without you, Mein Herr.

Don't dab your eye, Mein Herr,  
Or wonder why, Mein Herr.  
You thought for sure you'd landed in clover  
But now I've got some news  
You shouldn't mess with Jews  
And I'm about to out you, Mein Herr.

*"This people stands apart," is what you said, Mein Herr.  
"I'll kill them all and start to get ahead," Mein Herr.  
But one who has no heart's already dead, Mein Herr.  
Since your soul... You have sold...  
Now the bell... It doth toll...  
Ding-a-ling...  
The lady sings.*

Bye-Bye, Mein Lieber Herr.  
*L'hitra'ot*<sup>15</sup> Mein Herr.  
It was a fine affair, but now it's finished.  
We've had our tete-a-tete  
*Barukh dayan emet*<sup>16</sup>  
There'll be no more nightmare from Mein Herr.

*Arur shimkha*,<sup>17</sup> Mein Herr,  
For us *simḥah*,<sup>18</sup> Mein Herr.  
And now you've learned a lesson in Yiddish.  
As you would hear from my  
Dear uncle Mordechai  
*Geharget zolstu veren*,<sup>19</sup> Mein Herr

Bye-Bye, Mein Lieber Herr  
Auf weidersehen, Mein Herr  
So long, farewell, adieu and ta-ta  
Feel free to hang around  
Before you're in the ground  
We'll drink to gallows humor, Mein Herr

Bye-Bye, Mein Lieber Herr.  
Farewell, Mein Lieber Herr.  
You thought you'd be the heir but now it's over.  
And now we'll shout the news  
You shouldn't mess with Jews  
The world will do without you, Mein Herr.

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15. *L'hitra'ot*: Goodbye.

16. *Barukh dayan emet*: The blessing said upon hearing of a death; lit. "Blessed is the Judge of truth."

17. *Arur Shimkha*: Cursed be your name.

18. *Simḥah*: Joy

19. *Geharget zolstu veren*: Yiddish, "drop dead."

# SITTING PRETTY

The Jews of HaAretz are  
Finding life hard, it's a  
Struggle to get what they need.  
But we, we're sitting pretty  
In a land of prosperity.<sup>20</sup>

So why choose autonomy  
Or Deuteronomy<sup>21</sup>  
Persia's economy is strong!  
Yes here, we're sitting pretty  
In a land where we don't belong.

We know that hatred that was latent then  
Can easily turn blatant when  
Hard times create a sense of shame  
And people need someone to blame  
And still we say that fear's inapt  
'Cause it could never happen, here.

There Iran's a powderflask  
Gaza's ruled by Hamas  
Hezbollah's poised in Lebanon.  
But here, we're sitting pretty  
We're secure and safe in Shushan.

---

20. The Purim story takes place in Persia, after the destruction of the First Temple. During this time, Ezra and Nehemiah were leading the exiled Israelites to return and resettle the Holy Land. As Rabbi Yitz Greenberg writes:

The people who returned were poor and not very well organized. When the temple was rebuilt by the year 515 B.C.E., those who dedicated it wept at the contrast of this poor building and the grandeur of the First Temple. The Jews in the Exile were better off than the needy, struggling community that had returned to a ruined, run-down Holy Land. . . . Persian Jews send money and, occasionally, high-quality people such as Ezra and Nehemiah, but they stayed put. Meanwhile, back in Susa and throughout Persia, the Jews were doing famously. This is the context of the Purim episode.

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*, p. 226.

21. The Book of Deuteronomy consists primarily of Moshe's speeches to the People Israel as they are about to enter and take possession of the Land that God has promised them. The injunction to settle in and dwell in the Land is repeated several times.

With no moral gumption  
Just endless consumption  
And banquets to show off his wealth<sup>22</sup>  
The king was sitting pretty --  
So the wealth was gotten through stealth!<sup>23</sup>

They gave out tax rebates  
To tycoons and magnates  
And reveled in their heathendom.  
Shushan was sitting pretty  
Now the tax collector has come.<sup>24</sup>

It seems a devastating confluence  
Of avarice, incompetence  
Extravagance & opulence  
And financial incontinence  
Plus overseers' somnolence  
Erodes consumer confidence -- nu?

They wouldn't self-regulate --  
Who could anticipate  
Where dissipation could lead?  
Shushan was sitting pretty  
Till they lost it all to their greed.

---

22. Est. 1:4

23. According to the Talmud, Ahashverosh possessed (and used) gold vessels stolen from the destroyed Temple (Meg. 11b)

24. The early portions of the Megillah focus on the king's extravagance and wealth, and very specifically on tax abatements (Est. 2:18). By the end of the Megillah, the situation seems to have changed, and the last chapter opens with a statement that "King Ahashverosh levied a tax..." (Est. 10:1).

The stock market's in the tank  
Watch out for falling banks  
Wall Street is cashing in its chips  
But we'll recover quickly  
Unless China calls in its chits.

Poor people get laid off  
While rich ones get paid off  
And someone Mad-off with all the green.  
But we, we're sitting pretty  
We're a Jewish community.

Though Ahashverosh refused  
To sell Haman the Jews<sup>25</sup> --  
In a reversal surreal:  
Right here, in New York City,  
One of us completed the deal.

The daily headlines cause our heads to spin  
We can't believe the mess we're in  
So like the King who cannot sleep  
We lie awake and dare to speak  
To God "Are you still kind and just?"  
While God in turn is asking.... us!

Yes God's face is hidden,  
But who are we kiddin,'  
We've got some accounting to do  
The picture isn't pretty  
Jewish tradition  
Gives us a mission  
To use our volition  
It all depends upon, all depends upon, all depends upon you!

---

25. In the third chapter of the Megillah, Haman offers to pay 10,000 silver kikars into the royal coffers in order to exterminate the Jews. The king responds, "Keep the silver" (Est. 3:9-11). See also Est. 4:7.

# CABARET

What good is sitting, alone in your room.  
Come hear the music play.  
Life is a Purim spiel, old chum.  
Come to the Purim play.

Leave off from fasting, don't say *tahanun*.<sup>26</sup>  
Time for a holiday.  
Life is a Purim spiel, old chum.  
Come to the Purim play.

Come taste the wine, come hear the band.  
Come blow your horn, let's blot out Haman –  
Make some noise, we're celebratin'.

No use permitting, some prophet of doom  
To wipe every smile away.  
Life is a Purim spiel, old chum.  
Come to the Purim play.

*There used to be a woman known as Esther.  
And in the beauty contest none could best her.  
To kill the Jewish people Haman plotted.  
The task of saving them, she was allotted.*

*Her cousin Mordy said, "It may be fated,  
That for this very thing you were created."  
No way to know, and God cannot be seen....  
"If I die, I die." So said the queen.*

*We think of Esther to this very day,  
When we read aloud her Megillah, and say:*

---

26. *Tahanun*: Penitential, petitionary prayers omitted on festivals and days of joy. The day before Purim is a fast day.

# ON THE MEANING OF PURIM

By Rabbi Jan Uhrbach

What good's just hoping, redemption comes soon.  
Get out there, and pave the way.  
Life is a Purim spiel, old chum.  
Come to the Purim play.

No use just sitting, awaiting *tikkun*.<sup>27</sup>  
Step up, and save the day.  
Life is a Purim spiel, old chum.  
Come to the Purim play.

And as for me, and as for me,  
Though the Divine Face may be *hester*,<sup>28</sup>  
When I go, I'm going like Esther.

Start by admitting, from cradle to tomb,  
Isn't that long a stay.  
Life is a Purim spiel, old chum.  
Only a Purim spiel, old chum.  
And I love a Purim play.

27. *Tikkun*: Repair of the world.

28. *Hester*: Hidden. The Talmud (Hullin 139b) notes the similarity between the word *hester* and the name *Esther*:

אסתר מן התורה מנין? ואנכי הסתר אסתיר

Where is [the Book of] Esther hinted at in the Torah? "And I will surely hide My face" (*haster astir panai*) (Deut. 31:18).

The hiddenness of God's face is reflected in the absence of any direct mention of God in the entire Megillat Esther.

חור כרפס ותכלת אחוז בתבלי-בוץ וארגמן...

Upon first hearing, we might think this verse comes from one of the parashiyot we read from the Torah during these weeks -- Terumah, Tetzaveh, Vayakhel or Pekudei. It sounds like the description of the building of the Mishkan: beautiful fabrics and colored threads, white wool, rich purples and reds. And *tekhelet* -- that special blue-green which is used in the Torah only in connection with the Mishkan itself, the garments of the kohanim who serve there, and the *tzitzit* that we put on our garments to remind ourselves of the Divine.

But in fact, this verse is not from the Torah reading, it is a verse from Megillat Esther (1:6). It describes not the home we are to build for God, but the courtyard and gardens of the all-too-human king, Ahashverosh.

Nor is this the only passage in Megillat Esther which invites comparison between the king in the story, *hamelekh* Ahashverosh, and the King of Kings, *HaMelekh*, God. We read that Ahashverosh displayed *מלכותו* and *תפארת גדולתו* (Est. 1:4), terms we associate with God. The text emphasizes the theologically significant number seven: the king has a feast of seven days, reminiscent of Sukkot and Pesah (Est. 1:5), there are seven servants (Est. 1:10) and seven ministers (Est. 1:14), and Esther is selected in the seventh year of the king's reign (Est. 2:16). Perhaps most strikingly, the summoning and banishment of Queen Vashti occurs *ביום השביעי* (Est. 1:10), when the king was "happy with wine" -- an odd reversal of the mystical teaching that on Shabbat, the seventh day, the Divine King (that is, the masculine aspect of God: *Tiferet, HaKadosh Barukh Hu, Adonai*) reunites with the Divine Queen (that is, the feminine aspect of God: *Malkhut, Shekhinah*). Indeed the association between Ahashverosh's palace and his feast with God and the Mishkan was strong enough to suggest to the rabbis of the Talmud that the vessels in which Ahashverosh served were actually the very vessels stolen from the destroyed Temple (Meg. 11b).

Why would Megillat Esther evoke such powerful associations between the buffoonish human king and God?

One possibility is that the similarities are intended to highlight the differences. In keeping with classic midrashic style, it is possible to read King Ahashverosh as the antithesis of God: a human king behaves in such and such a manner, not so the King of Kings.

But here's another possibility: this is parody. What if Ahashverosh is intended to be not a contrast to God, but a parody of God, a parody which reaches its climax at the beginning of chapter 6: בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא נִדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמְּלָךְ (on that night, the king's sleep was disturbed) (Est. 6:1). Traditionally, when the Megillah is chanted aloud, this reference to *hamelekh* is chanted in High Holy Day nusah, suggesting the workings of the Divine beneath this seemingly random turning point of the story. But perhaps the use of the High Holy Day melody here suggests also the horrific possibility that it is in fact God's sleep which is disturbed. הֲנִיחָה לָא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִשְׁרָאֵל! "Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!" (Psalms 121:4). Is it possible that God is asleep on the job?

Which brings us to the nature of Purim. What is Purim? Our usual association with Purim as a lighthearted children's holiday is inconsistent with its placement in the calendar. Purim actually functions as the conclusion of the festival year, which begins in Nisan with Pesah. As such, it should represent our most mature expression of faith, the growth we strive for all year.

And indeed it does. Purim represents that point in our spiritual development in which we trust that our relationship with God is strong enough to handle thoughts and feelings that may previously have been too scary, or too hard, to acknowledge. As in the the best human relationships, Purim celebrates the moment when our relationship with God has grown deep and mature enough that it is safe to voice our disappointment, our frustration, and even our anger at God. There is an anger beneath the seemingly child-like Purim story. Despite its happy ending, the story of Megillat Esther is deeply disturbing; it is not "ok." Yes, everything worked out in the end. But what if it hadn't? And what about all those times in life when it doesn't? We know all too well that evil people aren't always hanged, and innocent people aren't always rescued just in the nick of time. Sometimes our experience of life leaves us disappointed or angry at God. Sometimes we may wonder if there is a God, or worse yet (as C.S. Lewis says), that God isn't Who we think God is. Sometimes when we look at the world, it may indeed seem like God is asleep on the job.

So Purim comes, and allows us to own and acknowledge these difficult realities. Like any good therapeutic experience, it provides a container for these thoughts and feelings: our fear and anxiety, our doubt, our anger. We put on a mask and costume, taking on a new identity, so that it's "not really us" saying these things. We have a good stiff drink, so we can say it's the alcohol talking. And we say it all in jest -- because truer things are said in jest, and to acknowledge the terrible possibility that this is all a joke and that the joke is on us.

This, I believe, is the great genius of Purim. In providing that container -- in allowing us to put our questions and doubts out there, right in front of God and everyone, and laugh at them -- Purim allows us to move forward. It helps us reclaim our faith. It lets us begin the year again, with the naivete of a young lover following our beloved God once more into the wilderness, chanting Shir haShirim, confident that the strong hand and outstretched arm will be there to rescue us come what may.

Without that naive faith, without the rich and rewarding year of spiritual growth beginning each Pesah, who would ever have the courage to fully experience Purim? But without Purim, how could we re-immers ourselves in Pesah with intellectual and emotional integrity?

Purim teaches us that it's not either/or, faith or doubt -- that we don't have to choose. We can have room for both and still be a good Jew. We can allow ourselves to see what we see *and also* see beyond it, to own the fullness of our human response to the mystery and often deep pain of the human condition, and still claim God as our own.

# CREDITS

## SONGS FROM "CABARET"

Music by John Kander, original lyrics by Fred Ebb

## PURIM LYRICS

by Rabbi Jan Uhrbach

(These lyrics are dedicated to the memory of  
Elga K. Stulman z"l אסתר בת ברוך וגוטל)

## FRAULEIN SALLY (ESTHER/VASHTI) BOWLES

Hazzan Marcos Askenazi

## BAALAT KOREI

Sherry Fyman

## THANK YOU

Paula Dubrow for donating the new Megillah booklets and designing our ad

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