

Purim is one of my very favorite holidays of the year. On the one hand, it is a holiday made for preschoolers. Princesses and costumes. Noisemakers and silly songs. Amazing stories of heroism, bravery and the triumph of good over evil. And Hamantashan.

That said, I've struggled with a few aspects of the story over the past few years. First of all, Queen Vashti was probably one of the original victims of the #MeToo movement. Here is a woman who is exiled for refusing to grant her husband's request to "dance" for and entertain his friends. And make no mistake, if you require permission before appearing before your husband, it's not an equal relationship.

Secondly the story credits beauty, not integrity or intelligence or kindness, as the reason for Esther's rise to royalty. Admittedly, I am trying to apply today's standards to biblical times, but when we are trying to use stories to relay messages of hope to young children, outdated social mores can be an obstacle.

The other problem we encounter in the telling of the Purim story is how to address Haman's cruelty and even more frightening, how do we explain the meaning of genocide? We often use euphemisms like "bad man" or we tell the children that Haman wanted to "send the Jews away." While we can tailor our words to make the story less scary for children, it is their initial introduction to the narrative of the forever embattled Jews and the enemies that continue to persecute us. Are we creating an environment that promotes an "us vs them" mentality? We have all seen the damage that can cause all too often.

I think like many stories, the details are not always pleasant, and our heroes are not always perfect. Our villains may be flawed, but not evil and our allies can be righteous, but wrong. I think, like all religious stories, we have to take from it what we need at that time in history. Let us walk away from this year's Magilla reading with an appreciation of Esther's bravery, Mordechai's commitment to saving the Jewish people and the belief that if we form a plan, work together and speak out against racism, inequality and injustice we will continue to raise children that improve the world.

Chag Sameach!