

## FB LIVE - 12th Hebrew month ADAR

### *Be Happy, it's Adar!*

There is a Jewish saying that when the month of Adar enters...the world stands on its head.<sup>1</sup> The month reminds us that things can get topsy-turvy when the Kingdom of Heaven prevails. The weak are strong, the first is last, the least are the greatest, love your enemies, the poor will be rich. We who seek to live in the Kingdom of God often can find ourselves in a spin! As a friend Joseph Frankovic describes:

“God’s redemptive agenda continues to be expansive: the kingdom of heaven is centrifugal. As we align ourselves with G-d’s program and move with the expansion of his kingdom, we will find ourselves being spun outward, away from our comfort zones, across social, economic, religious and educational lines, and entering the world of the other—the stranger, the foreigner, the outcast and the downtrodden.”

It is not always easy living in accord with God’s ways, which seem “topsy turvy” to the world and its ways and can make those of the world uncomfortable. Dietrich Bonhoeffer proclaims, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, “And so the disciples are strangers in the world, unwelcome guests, disturbers of the peace. No wonder the world rejects them!” How, then, do we respond to this reality? Abraham Joshua Heschel offers an opinion in *God in Search of Man*:

The world is torn by conflicts, by folly, by hatred. Our task is [ *tikkun olam* - healing of the world] to cleanse, to illumine, to repair. Every deed is either a clash or an aid in the effort of redemption...Our task is to bring eternity into time, to clear in the wilderness a way, to make plain in the desert a highway for our God.

This sometimes can be a thankless task, but we are assured: “Happy is the man in whose heart are the highways [to Zion]” (Psalm 84:6). Our job, then, in our efforts to imitate God, in whose image we are created, is to aim to bring order where we find chaos, and to enable the transformation of any tangled mess and ugliness into gentle order and beauty

God chose to mark the last month of the biblical calendar year with joy.

When *Adar* comes, joy is increased. We are told in the book of Esther, “...it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into joy.”<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> The Jewish Chronicle, Article: *Topsy Turvy*

<sup>2</sup> Esther 9:22

During many months we learn to grow from pain and suffering; but Adar is a month when we see growth in joy and laughter. With its costumes, masks, spoofs, and masquerades, Purim has a spirit of playfulness and a dimension of merriment that outshines other festivals. It is a time of laughter and a letting loose of one's regular decorum and inhibitions.

The message of Adar is not to wear a mask of joy to cover up your true feelings. After all, pain and suffering touch every life, but this month of Adar reminds us that, as children of God, joy is our birthright.

Yeshua said, in Matthew 18:3, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." My late husband, of blessed memory, Dwight Pryor, once described:

"Yeshua of Nazareth undoubtedly was the most joyous man who ever lived. He was not a somber and stern Christian preacher – a type we know all too well – but a joyous and Spirit-filled Jewish rabbi. He did not think of himself as a sinner in the hands of an angry God but as a son beloved by a Father who invariably surprises us by His grace.

Christians are more inclined to focus on his suffering, or recall his pointed rebukes of hypocrites, or his righteous anger at the money changers, than to imagine him smiling, or laughing, or being "altogether joyous" as the Torah commands. Because he was continually conscious of the Father's presence and will, Yeshua lived in the fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11), and he was determined to impart that joy to his faithful disciples (Jn.15:11)."

Purim teaches us to have a more child-like heart in our relationship with God. Why is this a good thing?

Play is an expression of God's presence in the world; one clear sign of God's absence in society is the absence of playfulness and laughter. Play is not an escape; it is the way to release the life-smoldering grip of busy-ness, stress, and anxiety. Playfulness is a modern expression of hope, a celebration of the flickering light of the gospel [of life]...

You can find more on Adar and Purim, and an abbreviated story of Esther to read and share, on the website: [www.His-Israel.com](http://www.His-Israel.com) , under the heading Festivals.

## WOMAN OF THE MONTH : ESTHER

The book of Esther is the only book of Scripture that does not explicitly mention God, yet we see Him constantly behind and within this human drama. The words "Esther" and "*hester*" (hiddenness) are both from the same Hebrew root. *Hester panim* means 'hidden face.'

Christian author, Charles Ringma, gives further insight:

It is usually not God's anticipated action or His past exploits that give us great concern. It is the present, hidden character of His presence that gives us frequent difficulty. [Henri] Nouwen tells us that "God's presence is often a hidden presence." By this he does not wish to emphasize that we cannot see God. He means that God's presence is not discernible, not even to the eye of faith. In such circumstances, we will hardly attempt to develop a spirituality that seeks to control God. Instead we may discover a new humility and a new impetus to our prayers. It may lead us to a faith without signs and a spirituality without assurances. It may help us to discover a trust that can wait. God's hidden presence is not a non-presence, but one that awaits a future exposure.<sup>3</sup>

The story of Esther speaks of God's people who are in exile and the defeat of the enemy who plots to destroy them. The book of Esther illustrates the historical threat of Israel's arch-enemy Amalek, who rises up in every generation, and the timeless promise of God's salvation and ultimate victory.

Our Father God's constant message to us is highlighted in the month of Adar:

"I am with you, as I have been all along. I will always be here for you. Choose in faith to see Me in all circumstances, and let your heart be filled with joy and peace."

When we take a closer look at Esther, the woman, we see a paradigm of self-sacrifice. She lived during the fourth century B.C.E., when the Jews were subjects of the Persian Empire. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, a reflection of her purity and beauty. The king of Persia and his court were infamous for their gluttonous, depraved and hedonistic ways. When the king disposes of his queen, Vashti, the most beautiful girls in the kingdom are sought out and brought to the palace where they are to undergo a twelve-month beauty treatment in a harem before being paraded before the king. Hadassah is among them. Her world, as a spiritual, God-fearing young woman is turned upside down. Esther was orphaned at a young age and was adopted by her pious uncle Mordechai. We are told that she trusted and relied upon the directions of the wise Mordechai, who had advised her to hide her Jewish identity, in the verse: "Esther continued to do Mordechai's bidding, just as when she was raised by him" (2:20). It is difficult to imagine the situation she found herself

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Ringma, *Dare to Journey--With Henri Nouwen*, 113

in when she is chosen by the king to be his new queen. We can only trust that God's mercy and grace surrounded her and strengthened her for her role in saving and preserving the life of God's people.

Once Haman's evil plan is made known, and she and her people have fasted and prayed for three days, she takes her life in her hands and approaches the king unbidden. In being willing to sacrifice her life, she demonstrates that nothing is more significant than the relationship and bond between God and His children. In being willing to sacrifice herself for His people, Esther showed that, in her love for Him, she was in reality sacrificing everything for God Himself. Through her sacrifice, she was able to annul the decree calling for their annihilation and to bring about the redemption of her people. Thanks to Esther, we are able to remember the faithfulness of God and to joyfully celebrate the festivities of Purim each year.

### **TRIBE : NAFTALI**

The month of Adar corresponds with the tribe of *Naftali*.<sup>4</sup> As recorded in Genesis 30:8, he was the second son born to Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah. Why did Rachel name him Naftali? And what is his tribe's connection with the month of Adar?

Author Zvi Ryzman notes in his book, *The Wisdom in the Hebrew Months*, that the Hebrew letters of Naftali's name contain the letter combination of the word *p'til* (*pei-tav-yod-lamed*) that means fastening or connection.

He points out that at Naftali's birth, Rachel finally felt securely 'fastened' or connected, together with her sister Leah, as a mother of the children of Jacob, a matriarch of the tribes who would become the Jewish people.<sup>5</sup>

Rashi, the renowned medieval French commentator, associated the name Naftali with similar names in the Torah that mean "to turn to" and "to fall before HaShem in prayer,"<sup>6</sup> as in Moses' desperate prayer for God's grace and forgiveness of His people at the sin of the Golden Calf. This reflects how fervently Rachel had turned and persistently sought the Lord in prayer for the privilege of bringing Israel's ancestors into the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Pri Tzaddik, *Rosh Chodesh Adar*, quoting *Shaarei Orah*

<sup>5</sup> Zvi Ryzman, *The Wisdom in the Hebrew Months*, Artscroll Series, Mesorah Publications, NY, 2009; 98

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 99

When Jacob assembled his sons to his deathbed, he blessed Naftali as follows: “Naftali is a hind let loose, who delivers--*imri shafer*--beautiful sayings.”<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Proverbs 5:19 compares the Torah to a “beloved hind.” A possible reason for this is found in a verse in the Talmud, which states that just as a hind always remains beloved to her mate so too the Torah remains beloved to those who study it.<sup>8</sup> The Midrash explains that the word *shafer* alludes to the word *l’shaper*, to perfect or to beautify, and to the word *shofar*. The tribe of Naftali would obey and perfect, i.e., teach and clarify the words, or sayings, of the Torah that were given at Sinai with the sound of the shofar.<sup>9</sup>

By comparing him to a hind, a female deer, let loose, we can surmise that a characteristic of the tribe would be alacrity – the ability to swiftly reach “high places” and to be fruitful in their undertakings. Indeed, once the Israelites were in the Land, the northern Galilee area allotted to Naftali proved to be extremely fertile and was the first to rapidly produce much fruit.

The Scriptures also describe how the tribe of Naftali were ready and able soldiers, quick to defend their nation. With alacrity this tribe, led by Barak ben Avinoam, joined the prophetess Deborah and fought to defeat Sisera and his mighty army.<sup>10</sup>

When Moses blessed the tribe, he proclaimed, “Oh Naftali, satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord...”<sup>11</sup>

This was a blessed tribe indeed; those satisfied with their lot in life. They studied and shared Torah, produced an abundance of olives, fish, and fruits of the Land, and enjoyed the good favor of God and man.

It is not surprising to find that this is the area where Simon Peter and his brothers lived and which Yeshua loved. Here he performed many miracles and gave his key discourse on blessings on the Mount of Beatitudes. Physically, the green, fruitful surrounding and the beauty of the fresh water Lake Kinneret glimmering below could not have stood in greater contrast to the dry, barren wilderness landscape of Mount Sinai. However, a dark spiritual shadow covered the land and the people were suffering under harsh Roman domination. Their hearts yearned for Messiah and Redemption. Now, here in the Galilee stronghold of the Roman gentiles, they beheld the Light of the Torah Incarnate in their midst.

As we read in Matthew 4:13-16,

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 49:21

<sup>8</sup> *Eruvin* 54b

<sup>9</sup> Zvi Ryzman, *The Wisdom in the Hebrew Months, Artscroll Series*, Mesorah Publications, NY, 2009; 99

<sup>10</sup> Judges 4:10

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 33:23

...And leaving Nazareth [Yeshua] went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naftali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "In the land of Zebulun and the land of Naftali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.



Picture: Cindy Elliot

### **The Topsy Turvy Kingdom of God**

[www.beccaislearning.com](http://www.beccaislearning.com)

Blessed are those who have empty purses,  
for they will learn of life's eternal riches.

Blessed are those in debt,  
for they will know the freedom of having their debts cancelled for good.

Blessed are the aging, unkempt, overweight or exceedingly hairy  
for their true beauty will be surpassing.

Blessed are the spotty in face,  
for pure and unblemished will be their eternal identity.

Blessed are the clumsy, for they will know the hand of God that holds them fast.

Blessed are the failers, for they will know that the victory was never theirs.

Blessed are the smelly,  
as their Heavenly Father's savored fragrance is the one emitted from the heart.

Blessed are those who are broken, damaged or vandalized,  
for they will know restoration beyond recognition