

Dear Friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

The story of Purim is set in the land of Persia (current day Iran) at the time when Ahashverosh (Ahasuerus) was king. After dismissing Vashti and acting on advice from his counselors, Ahashverosh had women from all over the kingdom brought to him, so he could choose a new queen. Esther, a young Jewish woman from Shushan, was chosen. However, following the advice of her cousin, Mordechai (who raised her after her parents died), Esther did not reveal her Jewish origins to the king.

Meanwhile, the king's evil adviser, Haman, upset because Mordechai refused to bow down to him, convinced the king to kill all the Jews in the Persian empire.

However, Mordechai alerted Esther to Haman's evil plot, and Esther, in turn, revealed her Jewish identity to the king, convincing him to save the Jews and foiling Haman's plot. The Jews were allowed to fight back, Haman was hanged, Mordechai received Haman's estates and the position of royal vizier (adviser), and the Jews of Persia celebrated their narrow escape on the 14th of Adar, the day after they were supposed to be annihilated.

The pivotal point in our story occurs in chapter 4, when Mordechai approaches Esther and asks her to plead with the King to save the Jews. Esther first excuses herself explaining that it is "against the law" to appear in front of the King without being called. To this, Mordechai replies with the following words:

*Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to your royal position for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14).*

Esther agrees to Mordechai's request and the story starts changing for the better at this point.

What prompted Esther to conquer her fears, to overcome her apprehension, and to act decisively?

I'd like to suggest that the "magic words" she heard were: *And who knows whether you have not come to your royal position for such a time as this.* In

other words, Mordechai reminded Esther of something we all need to be reminded of, that each of us comes to this world with a task, with a mission tailored just for us. Esther was wondering, like many of us do, why me? Why am I here? What is this about?

Mordechai cannot be sure. After all, each of us must discover his or her own mission in life. However, he uses the words, "And who knows..."

When confronted with a crisis, with a particular challenge, with a situation where our first reaction is to want to run away, we should pause and ask the same question: And who knows, perhaps we are here for just such a moment.

Life's calling doesn't come in the shape of a certified letter, a fax (some of you may remember what that is), or an email. Most of the time the calling that will give meaning to our existence comes disguised in a situation we'd rather ignore.

The Purim story is an invitation to confront the calling, to run towards the challenge and not away from it, and to make a difference, only each of us is destined to make.

May God give us the sensitivity to hear the call and the courage and determination to respond to it.

*The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor (Esther 8:16).* So, may it be for all of us!

Happy Purim and many blessings!

*Rabbi Manes Kogan*