

Purim Against Kahanism



Introduction

“וישלח ספרים אל כל היהודים” (אסתר ט:טל)
"They sent out letters to all of the Jews" (Esther 9:30)

The final act of Mordechai and Esther in the Purim story is to disseminate their message, to reach out to the Jewish communities of all 127 provinces ruled by Achashverosh, with “words of peace and truth.”

We send you the text below in the tradition of Mordechai and Esther. We disseminate our message to our Jewish communities near and far because we want to join together in commemoration on the anniversary of the Goldstein Massacre, which took place on Purim day in Hebron twenty-five years ago. This year we want to read the following text as an act of public recollection and mourning. On Purim, we celebrate and remember the salvation of our people. Our ritual life, however, must also have space for that which is shameful, that which is heartbreaking, that which we must repair.

Purim is a complicated holiday, and the Book of Esther is a complicated text. It is at times dark, confusing, and violent. The rabbis of the Talmud even debate including the Book of Esther in the biblical canon because of their fear of how its violence will be understood (Megillah 7a). Further, many commentators explicitly connect Esther’s name to God’s threat to hide God’s face (*hester astir*) from us because of our wrongdoing. The world of Esther is a world in which God is absent; it is, in fact, the only book of the Hebrew Bible in which the name of God does not appear.

Perhaps this is why Purim and the Book of Esther can hold particular meaning today. The text is political, bringing up serious questions about power, violence, and the treatment of minorities. There are no easy answers to the questions brought up by these themes in the text, but we believe in struggling with and learning from this tradition.



Israeli settler children dressed up as Arabs on Purim, walking on the segregated Shuhada Street

It is because of this that our call to come together in public ritual this year is a particularly pertinent request for the holiday of Purim. While it may feel like we are living in a moment of political despair, Purim reminds us that a different reality is possible, one beyond which we can imagine at the moment. A story is told in the Talmud (Bava Batra 10b and Pesachim 50a) of Yosef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua, who became ill and had a vision: עולם הפוך ראיתי, עליונים למטה ותחתונים למעלה (“I saw an upside down world -- the upper parts were down below, and the lower parts were up above”), he tells his father. His father answers him, עולם ברור ראית, (“you saw a clear world”). This Purim, may we all work to build an עולם הפוך, an upside down world, and may we realize that the Purim ethos of נהפוך הוא (Esther 9:1) -- of reversal, costumes, and the topsy-turvy break from routine -- can mean that an upside down world can be the clearest of all.

The violence of Purim in Hebron twenty-five years ago is not only a historical memory; Purim today continues to be a day of violence in the city. We mourn and protest this, and we also do not want to give this holiday and these texts over to people who espouse violence and racism. These texts are ours as well, and we are their loving and faithful inheritors. We will use them for the pursuit of justice. On this holiday of Purim, this day of public memory, let us denounce Kahanism, both historical and contemporary, let us mourn the victims of Goldstein’s massacre, and let us speak out against the segregation and sterilization of Hebron and the occupation being carried out in our names.

Purim is the only Jewish holiday to commemorate an event that happened outside the land of Israel, and it is in this spirit as well that we send this text to you, our friends and comrades across the diaspora. We invite you to take the text below and read it in your communities. Together, let us boo at Goldstein’s name and recall the history of our people. We are inspired to be a part of a global community that takes our tradition seriously in “every generation, every family, every state, and every city” (Esther 9:28).

#PurimAgainstKahanism

When the World is Sick
Lyrics by Silver Mt. Zion
[Sung by If Not Now](#)

When the world is sick, can't no one be well,
But I dreamt we were all beautiful and strong.



Megillah

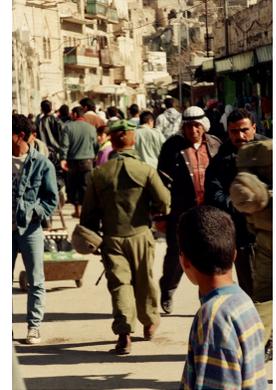


And it came to pass in the days of Yitzhak Rabin, after the signing of the Oslo Accords, that the peace some thought and hoped was near was not to be found.

In the heart of the ancient city of Hebron, the city of Abraham, our parent, who in his wisdom said, "Let there please be no strife between me and you, between your shepherds and mine, for we are siblings and compatriots" (Genesis 13:8), a small group of Israeli settlers and the policymakers and society that enabled and emboldened them forgot this ancient wisdom.

In the year of 1994, on the twenty-fifth of February, corresponding to the fourteenth of Adar, the Jewish holiday of Purim and the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, in the heart of the city, Muslim worshipers gathered to pray the first prayer of the day, Fajr. Parents and children, young and old, gathered together in devotion as the sun rose over the city.

Baruch Goldstein, *yimach shemo*, may his memory be blotted out among the wicked, had arrived in the land in 1983, a doctor by training, but sick at heart. Bringing with him from the United States the racist ideology of his teacher Meir Kahane, *yimach shemo*, he transplanted it to a land in which "no atonement can be made for the blood shed in it" (Numbers 35:33), in blatant defiance of God's hatred of "hands that shed innocent blood" (Proverbs 6:17).



Photograph of the bustling city center of Hebron before the Goldstein Massacre

Goldstein, *yimach shemo*, rose up in the hour of holy prayer and massacred the devout in their worship. Donning the uniform of the Israeli army, Goldstein entered the holy cave, military-issued weapon in hand, and opened fire on the hundreds bowed in prayer. He murdered twenty-nine people and wounded 125 more. Using the story of Purim, of our people's collective salvation, Goldstein desecrated that memory and tradition, brought blood and suffering on a day of joy and gladness. He tainted what was holy, turned a day of dance into one of mourning.

These are the names of the victims, who "were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and even in their deaths are not divided, they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions," (2 Samuel 1:23), may their memories be a blessing:

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| Arafat Musa Burkan - Age 34 | Suleiman Odeh Jabari - Age 30 |
| Jaber Aref Abu Sneineh Abu Hadid - Age 12 | Abdul Haq Ibrahim Jabari - Age 57 |
| Walid Thuhair Abu Hamdiyeh Gheith - Age 14 | Zeidan Hamoudi Abdul Majid Jabber - Age 30 |
| Marwan Mutluk Hamad Abu Nijmeh - Age 31 | Kamal Jamal Kafisheh - Age 13 |
| Abdel Rahim Abdul Rahman Abu Sneineh - Age 47 | Diab Abdul Latif Karaki - Age 20 |
| Ahmad Abdullah Mohammad Taha Abu Sneineh - Age 27 | Khaled Hamzi Karaki - Age 19 |
| Ala' Badr Abu Sneineh - Age 17 | Mohammad Kifah Abdul Mu'az Marakeh - Age 12 |
| Tareq Adnan Ashour Abu Sneineh - Age 12 | Nimer Mohammad Nimer Mojahed - Age 30 |
| Khaled Khalaweh Abu Hussein - Age 55 | Wael Salah Abed Muhtasib - Age 29 |
| Mohammad Sadeq Ayoub Abu Zanounch - Age 46 | Nour ad-Din Ibrahim Muhtasib - Age 20 |
| Saber Musa Katbeh Badr - Age 35 | Muezzin Jamil Ayed Abdul Fattah Natsheh - Age 50 |
| Talal Hamad Dandis - Age 24 | Raed Hassan Natsheh - Age 20 |
| Hatem Qader Fakhouri - Age 26 | Rami Arafat Rajabi - Age 12 |
| Mohammad Radi Gheith - Age 50 | Sufian Barakat Zahded - Age 20 |
| Mohammad Salim Idris Falah Idris Imam - Age 35 | |



And it came to pass, as the sun set and rose again on the blood drenched city, that where healing and mourning, justice and repair, should have been found there was instead persecution, oppression, and segregation. "Oh how the loyal city has become unfaithful, that which was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, has now but murderers" (Isaiah 1:21). Many more were killed and injured in clashes that followed the massacre. And against the victims there were closures -- roads and shops closed to Palestinians in Hebron. The spice market, the meat market, the fruit market shut down, roads on which only non-Palestinians can walk. "Oh how the city sits solitary, that was once full of people" (Lamentations 1:1). This policy of sterilisation continues until today, the heart of the largest Palestinian city in the West Bank turned into a ghost town.

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Goldstein's grave continues to be a site of pilgrimage. His tomb, located in the state-funded Meir Kahane Park, proudly announces that he "gave his soul for the people of Israel, its Torah, and its land."

Hebron is extreme, but it is not unique. The occupation is a story of violence, and our hands have shed blood. Today, rather than being universally and unequivocally shunned, the ideology of Kahane, *yimach shemo*, is making a resurgence. Emboldened by Donald Trump and in a deal brokered by Netanyahu, those who proudly espouse Kahane's beliefs will likely sit in the next Israeli Knesset. The most despicable margins of our community, those who support violence and racism, are in fact not so marginal. Denouncing Kahanism cannot end with Kahane or with Goldstein. It must include denouncing the sterilization in Hebron that Goldstein created, the occupation that his followers continue to support and uphold, as our communities and leaders give them a free pass and green light.



Israeli settlers in the annual Hebron Purim parade. Itamar Ben-Gvir (left) is dressed as a Palestinian prisoner, while Baruch Marzel (right) wears a Kach (a Kahanist party) t-shirt. Ben-Gvir is a member of the Jewish Power party and is currently running for a seat in the Israeli Knesset. Ben-Gvir has called for "non-loyal" Arabs to be expelled and is known to have a picture of Baruch Goldstein hanging in his home in Hebron.

“Oh how can I bear to see the evil that has come upon my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?” (Esther 8:6).

May we all rise up in the spirit of Esther, to plead on behalf of our friends, our allies, and our communities, “Oh how can I bear to see the evil that has come upon my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?” (Esther 8:6). And may we, in the spirit of the great queen, be moved to action, “because who knows whether it is only for this moment that I have arrived in the kingdom?” (Esther 4:14).



Breaking the Silence



Nirit Haviv

Photograph of the center of Hebron after the Goldstein Massacre and subsequent policy of closure and "sterilization" against Palestinians

Additional Resources

- A [film clip](#) by Breaking the Silence about the implications of the massacre in Hebron, along with a short film [clip of a Breaking the Silence tour](#). Here is a [video](#) of a soldier giving testimony to the organization about Purim in Hebron.
- [Photographs of Hebron](#) since the massacre.
- [A clip](#) on the reality of daily life for Palestinians in Hebron.
- Use your phone or computer to check out this [interactive documentary](#) on fifty years of Israeli settlement in Hebron.

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