

## The Purim Conspiracy

### *Thought for the Day*

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Happy Purim!

In any other year, this Jewish holiday would have a carnival atmosphere. Adults as well as children would be putting on fancy dress, families would be preparing for usually quite boozy parties, people would be giving charity and delivering gifts to friends, to remember the events in ancient Persia around two and a half thousand years ago that the biblical Book of Esther describes. But obviously this year the parties, gatherings, and public events are cancelled, as people have to adjust their observances to today's strange new world.

Purim celebrates survival in the face not just of persecution but attempted genocide, and so has particular significance for a generation that still lives with the collective post-traumatic stress of the Nazi Holocaust and the expulsion of almost a million Jews from the Middle East. There's something chillingly familiar about the accusation by Haman, the villain of the biblical story, that "there's a certain people all over this country who don't abide by the law of the land", and his campaign to exterminate them. That's a reminder of how easily xenophobia slides into race hatred, and then into genocide, and a warning that when society fractures, any of us can be the next victim.

There's also another less obvious echo of Purim: the entire story is built round Haman contriving a conspiracy theory when his power is challenged, targeting an entire people, and engineering an armed insurrection in the streets of the capital. Sound familiar?

So like many Jewish festivals, Purim has a universal message, about resilience, about standing up for ourselves, even the paradoxical idea of fighting for peace, about unity in diversity. This year more than ever we all face a common enemy, so as we don a different kind of mask – not to disguise ourselves, but to protect others – I wish you all a happy, healthy, and peaceful Purim.

*Ephraim Borowski*

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