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Thought Tools

## Feast? Fast? Both?

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10th day of Adar, 5770

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Purim will be celebrated this Sunday. This holyday celebrates events described in what in Hebrew is called The Scroll of Esther.

In the Persian Empire, which is now Iran, a high ranking leader named Haman reacted furiously to an obscure Jewish leader called Mordechai who failed to pay homage to him. Haman then began to obsess about destroying the Jews.

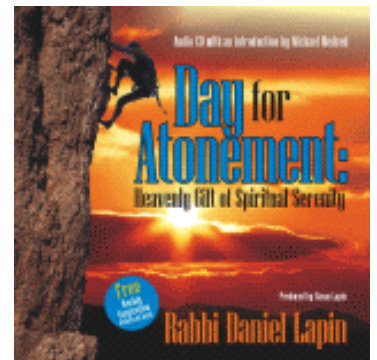
Meanwhile, just over 2,000 years later, again in Persia/Iran, a high ranking leader named Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that any airliners whose pilots referred to that body of water as the Arabian Gulf would be banned from Iranian airspace. Unless they called it the Persian Gulf they would have their planes grounded in Iran and their flight permits revoked. Furthermore, he too repeatedly obsesses about destroying the Jews and Israel.

You would have thought that both Haman and Ahmadinejad would have more important things to worry about. However, the Scroll of Esther helps us see that both Haman and his latter day look-alike have no more urgent priority than extinguishing the light of the Bible.

Ancient Jewish wisdom informs us that nothing random ever happens to the Jewish people. Our fate is inextricably linked to our conduct and the fidelity of our faith. Therefore this question must be asked: What made the Jews of Persia vulnerable to Haman's obsessive machinations which brought them to the very edge of extinction?

The answer is that they attended King Achashverosh's decadent orgy of debauchery described in the first chapter of the Scroll of Esther. The book informs us that the drunken revelry lasted for over six months in order to teach us that this wasn't a one-night affair.

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For a full half year, the Jews of Shushan allowed themselves to be distracted by a destructive diversion. They became vulnerable to Haman because they indulged in the depraved royal party and forgot who they were. By abusing their past they imperiled their future. But they employed spiritual strategies to repair the past that restored their future.

The remedy that saved Persia's Jews included fasting and atonement as required by Esther at the end of chapter 4 and instituted for all time at the end of chapter 9. Employing certain strategies of atonement helps us purge the pain of the past and forge a festive future. In other words, you can fast in order to feast.

This helps us understand a perplexing paradox in the Torah. While English translations conceal the connection, the most joyful day of the Jewish year, Purim, and the most serious day of the year, commonly called Yom Kipur, are linked. You see, the Day of Atonement is known throughout the Five Books of Moses, as Yom HaKiPurim, which literally means "The Day Like Purim."

The twenty-five hour fast of Yom HaKiPurim, Day of Atonement, is preceded by a day of ceremonial festive meals. By contrast, the Feast of Esther is preceded by a day called the Fast of Esther. Thus we see that feasting can lead to fasting and fasting can lead to feasting.

Another way of putting it is that atonement and celebration are connected. Because atonement is a chance to embark on a new and bright beginning, we don't approach it with sadness, but with joyous, though solemn, anticipation. When done properly, as by the Jews of Persia, the aftermath of atonement is also joyous.

As nations and as individuals we go astray and reject our roots. How wonderful that we can reset our pasts in order to sculpt our futures. If you are interested in this topic, I hope you will explore my audio CD, [Day for Atonement: Heavenly Gift of Spiritual Serenity](#), available by download or mail. You can also find it as part of the regularly discounted six-volume [Biblical Blueprint Set](#), which is available on the web at an even more special price through this Friday evening.

I look forward to meeting many Thought Tool readers when I appear this Thursday night at [Citadel Church](#) in Des Moines, WA and on Monday night at [New Heart Worship Center](#) in Auburn, WA. I am excited about these two evenings devoted to equipping people with tools to fashion a future filled with faith and fortune.

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## Susan's Musings

This week's musing - [Glamour Girls](#)

To post comments and feedback, or to print, go to [www.susanlapin.com](http://www.susanlapin.com). You can also reach me at [susan@rabbidaniellapin.com](mailto:susan@rabbidaniellapin.com).

The Purim holiday, as described in the Book of Esther, is only a few days away. A truly joyous day, Purim festivities include a strong tradition of dressing up in costumes. For very young girls...

To read the rest of Susan's Musings click [here](#)

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### Ask the Rabbi



Dear Rabbi,

In Genesis 6:2, what is the definition of the "sons of gods that took the daughters of men"?

Thanks,

Carolyn B.

[See Rabbi Lapin's Answer](#)

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### Ask a Question



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