

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY THROUGH THE STORY OF PURIM

Like most Jewish texts, Megillat Esther teaches strong values, morals and ethics. Behind the miracles in this story lies the value of community, and we learn that communities are comprised of both bullies and allies.

In the story of Purim, Haman is a **bully**:

וַיִּבַּז בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמֹרְדֵכָי לְבַדּוֹ כִּי־הִגִּידוּ לוֹ אֶת־עַם מֹרְדֵכָי וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הַמֶּן לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶת־כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים
אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְלָכוֹת אַחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ עִם מֹרְדֵכָי:

But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone; having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus. (Megillat Esther 3:5)

While Haman had very strong views and a great deal of power, his ideals did not win out, because people chose to stand up to him. In Hebrew we say, **להפך** (on the contrary), which is to say that while he wanted to harm others, it was this desire that led to his own harm.

Haman's hatred is contrasted with the behind-the-scenes bravery from our hero, Mordecai. It is Mordecai who instructs Esther, the Jewish queen, to reveal her religious identity and save the Jews.

Mordecai is someone in whom Esther can confide and look to for strength — an **ally**. All the while, he does not take credit for his role in saving his community:

כִּי אֵיכָכָה אוֹכַל יִרְאֵיתִי בְרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־יִמְצָא אֶת־עַמִּי וְאֵיכָכָה אוֹכַל יִרְאֵיתִי בְּאַבְדֹן מוֹלַדְתִּי

For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people! And how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred!" (Megillat Esther 8:6)

It is good for our mental health to identify who or what in our lives is a "Haman" and who or what is a "Mordecai." When we reflect on these ideas, we can decide what boundaries to set or the people to whom we can go to for support.

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ACTIVITY

Print out this page.

On the hamentashens, identify the “Hamans” in your life, e.g., politics, antisemitism, cold weather. On the Stars of David, identify the “Mordecais” in your life, e.g., friends, veganism, the Humane Society.

