

Chai Today



purim

A WORD FROM THE RABBI

Dear friend,



As we gather together to celebrate the festival of Purim, we are reminded of the profound lessons embedded within its joyous festivities. Purim is not merely a time for revelry and merrymaking, but a poignant narrative of perseverance, faith, and redemption that continues to resonate with us today.

The story of Purim, is a tale of courage in the face of tyranny. It tells of Queen Esther, a young Jewish woman who, through her bravery and faith, thwarted the wicked schemes of Haman. With the support of Mordechai and the strength of their dedication to G-d and His Torah, they merited a great miracle that saved their people from annihilation.

Purim reminds us that even in our darkest moments, there is always hope. It teaches us that miracles can emerge from the most unlikely of circumstances when we hold fast to our beliefs and stand up for what is right. The triumph of Esther and Mordechai over adversity serves as a timeless reminder of the resilience of the Jewish people and the power of faith to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

As we commemorate Purim this year, let us draw inspiration from the courageous example of Esther and Mordechai. Let us renew our commitment to our heretige and traditions. Let us continue with our heartfelt prayers for the immediate release of all the hostages, a speedy recovery to all those injured, and condolences to all who have lost their loved ones.

*Let us rejoice and pray for blessings of freedom, peace, and unity.
May this Purim be a time of joy, renewal and redemption for us all.
Chag Purim Sameach!"*

Rabbi Menachem Hertz

Menachem Hertz

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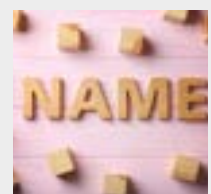
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OF HIS BAR MITZVAH

MAZAL TOV TO CINDY & LIOR PRIDAN
ON THE BIRTH OF A BABY GIRL

MAZAL TOV TO JEREMY DABUSH AND
ODELIA GOLDBERG ON THE OCCASION
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HER PARENTS AND FAMILY ON THE
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OUR CONDOLENCES TO PIERRE COHEN
ON THE PASSING OF HIS DEAR MOTHER

OUR CONDOLENCES TO ISAAC LEVY ON
THE PASSING OF HIS DEAR BROTHER.

OUR CONDOLENCES TO GERY BLIMAH ON
THE PASSING OF HIS FATHER.

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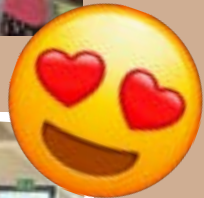
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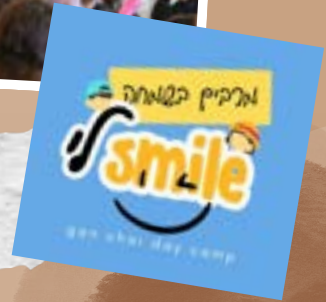
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THE STORY OF PURIM

PURIM BEGINS IN IRAQ/IRAN

The original Purim story happened over 2,350 years ago, after the destruction of the First Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews had been exiled to Babylon and then dispersed throughout the land of Persia, today's Iraq and Iran. Impressed by alien kings and lifestyles, palaces and parties, the Jews had no vision of their own destiny and future. Many Jews had lost faith in the Divine prophecies that predicted their eventual Redemption and return to Israel.

PURIM'S MAIN CHARACTERS: HAMAN

The vicious Persian Prime Minister Haman schemed to annihilate every Jewish man, woman and child. A shrewd and devious manipulator, Haman received the approval of King Achashverosh for his wicked plan

MORDECHAI AND ESTHER

Haman had almost executed his horrible agenda, if not for the intervention of Queen Esther, the heroine, and Mordechai, the righteous Jewish leader.

Sensing the danger, Mordechai rallied his fellow Jews to repent and return to G-d through Torah and Mitzvot.

By Divine Providence, Mordechai's niece, Esther, was chosen to become the new Persian Queen. Mordechai urged her to go plead with the King to save her people.



Before approaching the King, Queen Esther proclaimed a fast, prayer and penitence, and then went to the palace and invited the king to a party. That night, as the restless King Achashverosh was reading his memoirs, the pages turned to a long-forgotten episode, when Mordechai had saved the king's life from a plot by his courtiers to poison him.

The King immediately ordered Haman to publicly honor Mordechai by dressing him with the royal garments and parading him on the Royal horse through the Capital.

Later, at their party, Queen Esther pointed to Haman as the arch villain, and Haman was hanged on the same gallows he had prepared for Mordechai.



VICTORY

The Purim story is a tribute to the courage of Queen Esther, Mordechai and all the Jewish people. Throughout the whole year of Haman's anti-Jewish decree, not a single Jew chose to leave his people by converting out, even if that could have saved his life.

The fortunate turn of events aroused the Jews to return to their heritage and unite with their traditions, faith and observance. They rallied against their enemies on the 13th day of the month of Adar, the very day chosen by Haman to execute his "final solution." The Jews eventually returned to the Holy Land where they rebuilt the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

The Purim story concludes on the happy note that "the Jews enjoyed light and gladness, joy and exultation," so shall it be to us. May we, too, soon see the ultimate Redemption, speedily in our days.

THE 4 MITZVOT

1

MIKRAH MEGILLAH

LISTEN TO THE MEGILLAH

Megillat Esther (the scroll of Esther) recounts the story of Haman's plot to destroy the Jewish people and how it was miraculously foiled. We listen to the reading of the Megillah twice during the holiday. The first time is on Saturday evening, March 23rd and again on the following day Sunday March, 24th. When Haman's name is mentioned, we twirl graggers - noisemakers, and stamp our feet to "drown out" his evil name.



2

MISHLOACH MANOT

SEND GIFTS OF FOOD

Purim emphasizes the importance of Jewish unity and friendship. Packages containing at least two different kinds of food (e.g. hamantashen and fruit) are sent to at least one friend. If possible these gifts, called Mishloach Manot should be sent by a third person. It is customary to observe this mitzvah on the day of Purim, rather than the night before.



MATANOT LA-EUYONIM
GIFTS FOR THE POOR

3

Giving charity, while a year round responsibility, is a particularly special mitzvah on Purim. Give charity to at least two, but preferably more, needy individuals on Purim day (better then the night before), ideally by giving directly to the person. If this is not possible, place at least several coins into pushkas (charity boxes). Young children should fulfill this mitzvah as well.



MISHTEH U' SIMCHA
THE PURIM MEAL

4

Purim is celebrated with a festive and joyous meal during the daytime. Traditional foods include soup with 'kreplach' (dumpling) and triangularshaped cookies called hamantashen. The "hidden" fillings in both foods remind us that G-d's involvement in the Purim episode, although ever present, was hidden and not openly revealed. (In fact the name of G-d is not mentioned once in Megillat Esther!)

THE THERAPEUTIC JOY OF PURIM

BY RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS



There is a unique law in the approach to Purim. Mishe-nichnas Adar marbim be-simcha: “From the beginning of Adar, we increase in joy.”

The difficulties are obvious. Why an entire month? The key events were focused on a few days, the thirteenth to the fifteenth, not the whole month. And why simcha. joy? We can understand why the Jews of the time felt exhilaration. The decree sentencing them to death had been rescinded. Their enemies had been punished. Haman had been hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordechai. Mordechai himself had been raised to greatness.

But is joy the emotion we should feel in perpetuity, remembering those events? The first warrant for genocide against the Jewish people (the second if one counts Pharaoh’s plan to kill all newborn Jewish males) had been frustrated. Is simcha the appropriate emotion? Surely what we should feel is relief, not joy. Pesach is the proof. The word “joy” is never mentioned in the Torah in connection with it.

It is true that tragedy had been averted but there was no real change in the hazards of life for the Jewish people in the Diaspora.

You defeat fear by joy.

You conquer terror by collective celebration.



It seems to me therefore that the simcha we celebrate throughout the month of Adar is different from the normal joy we feel when something good and positive has happened to us or our people. That is expressive joy. The simcha of Adar, by contrast, is therapeutic joy.

Imagine what it is to be part of a people that had once heard the command issued against them: “to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day” (Est. 3:13). We who live after the Holocaust, who have met survivors, heard their testimony, seen the photographs and documentaries and memorials, know the answer to that question. On Purim the Final Solution was averted. But it had been pronounced. Ever afterward, Jews knew their vulnerability. The very existence of Purim in our historical memory is traumatic.

The Jewish response to trauma is counterintuitive and extraordinary. You defeat fear by joy. You conquer terror by collective celebration. You prepare a festive meal, invite guests, give gifts to friends. While the story is being told, you make a rumbustious noise as if not only to blot out the memory of Amalek, but to make a joke out of the whole episode. You wear masks. You drink a little too much. You make a Purim spiel.

*HUMOR IS THE JEWISH WAY
OF DEFEATING HATE.*

Precisely because the threat was so serious, you refuse to be serious – and in that refusal you are doing something very serious indeed. You are denying your enemies a victory. You are declaring that you will not be intimidated. As the date of the scheduled destruction approaches, you surround yourself with the single most effective antidote to fear: joy in life itself. As the three-sentence summary of Jewish history puts it: “They tried to destroy us. We survived. Let’s eat.” Humor is the Jewish way of defeating hate. What you can laugh at, you cannot be held captive by.



I learned this from a Holocaust survivor. Some years ago, I wrote a book, *Celebrating Life*, which was a cheer-you-up book, and it became a favorite of the Holocaust survivors. One of them, however, told me that a particular passage in the book was incorrect. I had written that a sense of humor keeps you sane – that was not enough in Auschwitz to keep you alive.

“On that, you are wrong,” the survivor said, and then told me his story. He had been in Auschwitz, and he soon realized that if he failed to keep his spirits up, he would die. So he made a pact with another young man, that they would both look out, each day, for some occurrence they found amusing. At the end of each day they would tell one another their story and they would laugh together. “That sense of humor saved my life,” he said. I stood corrected. He was right.

That is what we do on Purim. The joy, the merrymaking, the food, the drink, the whole carnival atmosphere, are there to allow us to live with the risks of being a Jew – in the past, and tragically in the present also – without being terrified, traumatized or intimidated. It is the most counter-intuitive response to terror, and the most effective. Terrorists aim to terrify. To be a Jew is to refuse to be terrified.

Why did Queen Esther go to the dentist before Purim?

Because she had a crown to prepare!



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WHAT ROLE DO YOU THINK JOY HAS PLAYED IN THE SURVIVAL OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE THROUGHOUT JEWISH HISTORY?



Terror, hatred, and violence are always ultimately self-destructive. Those who use these tactics are always, as was Haman, destroyed by their very will to destruct. And yes, we as Jews must fight antisemitism, the demonization of Israel, and the intimidation of Jewish students on campus.

But we must never let ourselves be intimidated – and the Jewish way to avoid this is marbim be-simcha, to increase our joy. A people that can know the full darkness of history and yet rejoice is a people whose spirit no power on Earth can ever break.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, a prominent Jewish leader and intellectual, championed the relevance of Judaism in modern society through his teachings on morality, ethics, and interfaith dialogue.

Serving as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013, Rabbi Sacks's eloquence and advocacy for unity left a lasting impact on global religious discourse and interfaith relations.

THE NATURAL REDEMPTION

BY LEVI GREENBERG

The Jewish calendar is composed of lunar months and solar seasons. Since twelve lunar months amount to 354 days, and solar years are 365 days, we resolve this discrepancy by adding an extra month of Adar every two or three years. The Jewish leap year therefore has 13 months.

A DOUBLE MONTH OF ADAR PRESENTS THE DILEMMA OF WHEN TO CELEBRATE PURIM



The Talmud concludes that Purim is celebrated in the second Adar. The reason: The two holidays of redemption — Purim and Passover (celebrated in Nissan, the month immediately following Adar) — should be celebrated in the closest proximity to each other.

Now, while both Purim and Passover commemorate momentous occasions of Divine deliverance, their respective stories are extremely dissimilar. During the Egyptian exile, the Jews were condemned to an existence of slavery and were at the mercy of an evil tyrant. Their socioeconomic status and morale could not have been lower. Contrast that with the setting of ancient Persia, where the Jews enjoyed religious freedom, prosperity and acceptance in the broader society, to the point that they were invited to participate in the royal feast in King Achashverosh's court.

Now, while both Purim and Passover commemorate momentous occasions of Divine deliverance, their respective stories are extremely dissimilar. During the Egyptian exile, the Jews were condemned to an existence of slavery and were at the mercy of an evil tyrant. Their socioeconomic status and morale could not have been lower. Contrast that with the setting of ancient Persia, where the Jews enjoyed religious freedom, prosperity and acceptance in the broader society, to the point that they were invited to participate in the royal feast in King Achashverosh's court.

The Megillah of Esther, on the other hand, can be read as a typical palace intrigue. In fact, G-d is not mentioned once throughout the entire scroll. One could easily interpret the story as simply serendipitous.

In truth, the Purim miracle is deeply significant, even compared to the miracles of Passover. On Passover, G-d interfered with the rules of nature that He had set up at creation. Nature was an obstruction to Divine revelation. On Purim, the Divine miracles occurred seamlessly within the rules of nature. The natural world itself reflected the Divine. ItThe Purim miracle is deeply significant is a greater "accomplishment," so to speak, to harness the rules of nature rather than break them.

Celebrating these two holidays close to each other emphasizes that miracles both without and within nature are worthy of recognition and gratitude. Let's open up our eyes to the miracles that are constantly occurring all around us. And let's be grateful.

THE HOLIDAY WHEN WE BECAME JEWISH

BY NAFTALI SILBERBERG

What is the significance of the name "Jew"? Where does the word come from and what does it mean?

The word Jew (Yehudi in the Hebrew) is a derivative of the name Judah (Yehudah), Jacob's fourth son; hence calling someone by this name would seemingly imply that the person is a descendant of that particular tribe. However, as is well known, Jacob had twelve sons, progenitors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, all of whom comprise our great nation. Why, then, is the entire Israelite nation known as "Jews"?

(The conventional answer to this question is that the majority of Jews today are descendant from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin--the two tribes which comprised the "Kingdom of Judea." The other ten tribes, the members of the "Northern Kingdom," were exiled to unknown lands. There must, however, be a deeper reason for the fact that the Chosen Nation has been called by this name for close to 2500 years!)

Perhaps this question can be cleared up by analyzing the very first individual to be dubbed "Jew." The first instance of this word appears in the biblical Book of Esther, which chronicles the story of Purim: "There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital, whose name was Mordechai the son of Yair... a Benjaminite" (Esther 2:5).

That's right: the first "Jew" was actually from the tribe of Benjamin!

AN OBJECTIVE STUDY OF THE PURIM STORY REVEALS THAT THE WHOLE FRIGHTENING EPISODE WAS PLAINLY AVOIDABLE

An objective study of the Purim story reveals that the whole frightening episode was plainly avoidable. The entire incident was a result of Mordechai's obstinate adherence to a code of behavior which was clearly outdated and inappropriate for the times. Mordechai was an elderly rabbi who yet recalled days - more than half a century beforehand - when the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem and Torah Law was supreme. His snubbing of Haman might have been condign during that generation. But things had changed dramatically. The people of Israel were in exile. How did Mordechai dare put his entire nation in danger of extinction by slighting the king's favorite minister? Apparently someone neglected to inform this sage that the ability to conform is the key to survival...

Mordechai, however, thought otherwise; and he had a famous precedent supporting his "foolish" actions. Many years earlier, a powerful Egyptian ruler wished to take his ancestor, Benjamin, as a slave. Benjamin's brother Judah wouldn't hear of such a possibility. In what would be his proudest and most defining moment, Judah completely ignored all royal protocol, angrily approached the powerful ruler - who, unbeknownst to him, was actually their brother Joseph - and threateningly demanded Benjamin's release.



Judah is the embodiment of the exiled Israelite who must walk a thin line: While he must live at peace with his neighbors, follow the laws and customs of the land, and "pray for the peace of the regime," he has the courage of his convictions to stand up against all the powers that be in order to defend his ideals. In the words of Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch, "Only our bodies were sent into exile; not our souls!"

Mordechai "the Jew" was a proud student of his great-uncle Judah. He knew that Torah law forbids a Jew from bowing to Haman (and the statuette which dangled from a chain around his neck), and for him that was the final word. Indeed, Judah's and Mordechai's actions were vindicated as events unfolded—no harm came to either of them as a result of their brave conduct.

JUDAH IS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE EXILED ISRAELITE WHO MUST WALK A THIN LINE

Leading by example, Mordechai succeeded in implanting this sense of pride in the hearts of the masses. When Haman issued his decree of annihilation, not one Israelite even considered abandoning his religion in order to be spared death. At that moment, we all became "Jews." Accordingly, the Book of Esther is the first place where our nation as a whole is referred to as Jews.

The name stuck. Because the next 2,500 years would repeatedly test our "Jewishness." Under countless regimes – both friendly and, as was usually the case, hostile – we struggled against friends and enemies who wished to impose their will upon us at the expense of our relationship with G-d. Again and again we proved ourselves true to G-d, earning the name Jew through oceans of blood and tears.

The grand story of history concludes in similar fashion as the Purim story: we are here to tell the tale and our enemies aren't... The joy of Purim is greater than any other holiday because it tells the story of the nation who never allowed its soul to be shackled – the story of the Jew.



THE SECRET OF THE HAMANTASH

BY ARON MOSS



Question:

Hamantashen are triangular pastries filled with jam or other fillings, which are traditionally eaten on Purim. Why is that?

I have heard that they are the same shape as Haman's hat.

But Haman was the man who wanted to wipe us out. Why would we immortalize him by eating cookies that bear his name?

This may be a case of mistaken identity. These Purim cakes were originally called mohntashen, which means “poppy-seed pockets.” Today most hamantashen are filled with jam, but poppy seed used to be the more popular filling. It was a short linguistic jump from mohntashen to hamantashen, as people assumed there was a connection between the food eaten on Purim and the villain of the Purim story.

Jews can always find a food to tell a storyThe real reason for eating hamantashen is that they symbolize the very nature of the Purim miracle. If you read the story of Purim, you notice that it was a string of seeming coincidences that saved the Jewish people from annihilation. There were no open miracles, no seas split, no plagues, just some twists and turns of history that, when viewed as separate events, seemed quite natural. Only at the end of the story was it revealed that a miracle had occurred.

Jews can always find a food to tell a story.

In this case, it is the hamantash. The outside of the hamantash is just plain dough. The true flavor is concealed inside. Beyond the very ordinary veneer is the heart of the hamantash, bursting with sweetness.

Our lives are much the same. At times it seems that we are being pushed and pulled by accidental forces. Things happen to us that seem haphazard and random; there seems to be no system in place, no direction to this cold and harsh universe. This is not true. There is a system. But it is hidden. Below the surface there is a sweet hand and a warm heart that directs the universe.

Rarely do we get to see this hand. Purim is one day when it was revealed, when a crack opened in the outer shell of nature and we glimpsed what lies beyond. Purim reminds us that all those coincidences are no coincidences, and nothing is random. We are still in the middle of our story, so it is hard to see the full picture. But in the end we will see that it's all one big hamantash.

ALL SHE REMEMBERED WAS HER NAME

BY ROCHEL YAFFE

It was late Shabbat afternoon, I curled up next to my mother on the living room couch, and begged, "Tell me a story. Tell me about myself when I was little." And my mother began:

You were born in a very sad and bitter time for our family, for the Jewish people. Wicked Hitler was on the march across Europe. His armies had not yet reached Hungary and had not yet arrived in our town. We had heard terrible stories, things we didn't believe, couldn't believe. But I was young, not much more than a girl, and I had just been blessed with my first baby. Forgetting all our troubles, I waited eagerly for the nurse to bring my baby to me. I sat in the large hospital bed, and watched the nurses bring the other women their babies. Finally, a nurse came walking toward my bed, holding a small bundle wrapped in a flannel blanket. "Take her," she said shortly, dumping you roughly at the end of the bed. "I don't know why we have to bother with these Jewish brats." I must have gasped, because she looked straight at me and repeated. "These Jewish brats. They are a waste of time and money. Hitler will take care of all of you before the year is out."

I couldn't answer her. I just held you tight in my arms and cried and cried. And suddenly I remembered. that it was Purim that day. Purim was your birthday. It was a sign, I thought, from Heaven, that my baby was born on the very day that Haman met his downfall. It was the day that was transformed from darkness to a great light. I was suddenly filled with courage and confidence. "In every generation they have risen up against us to destroy us, and G-d has always saved us from their hands. And He will again. He will again!"

Your father came to visit me that afternoon. My first words to him were, "Avrom, I know what our baby's name will be. She will be Esther, Esther Malka." Your father nodded. "Esther. Esther Malka. A beautiful name, a good name." Gently he stroked your little head. "G-d will surely help." Indeed, we needed G-d's help desperately in those days. Hitler's armies entered Hungary. By the time you were two years old, we were forced to leave our homes, and we were living in the ghetto. We lived with cold, hunger and fear. Many became sick and died. Others were taken away by the Nazis and never heard from again.

And then it was Purim, your third birthday. Your father and I were determined that this one day you would have a taste of Purim joy, that you would laugh, have some fun. I found a torn lace curtain which became your gown. From cardboard and old wrapping paper, I fashioned a crown. Your costume was ready. When the men returned from work, people gathered in our house to hear your father read the megillah. How little it takes to make a child happy! You wore your costume like a queen. Every time your father read the name Esther HaMalkah ("Esther the Queen") the other children smiled at you. You stood very proud, very serious. The megillah was your story.





But that was the last happy day I can remember in the ghetto. Things got worse and worse. Every few days now, German soldiers rounded up terrified Jews and forced them into cattle cars. They never returned. Finally, the day came when we realized that we had to send you away. The plan was to smuggle you out of the ghetto, and send you far away to the countryside, to one of the little villages so poor and small that it was forgotten, even by the Germans. There you would live with a peasant family until the war was over. For a sum of money, the last we had, they might agree to take in a Jewish child, and ask no questions.

When you woke up that morning, I had all your clothing packed in a large satchel. The young man who was going to take you was already waiting, sitting patiently in the corner. As I dressed you hastily, I tried to explain. I told you that the young man was a friend. He would take you to a place where there were no soldiers and no guns, where you could eat all the potatoes and bread you wanted. I told you that Tati and I were not coming with. "Remember one thing. You are not called Esther anymore.

Your name is Eva. Say it again. Eva. No matter who asks you and when they ask you. Nobody must know you are a Jewish child. Do you understand?" You were only three years old, and you didn't understand. You burst into loud sobs. "You won't come with me. Tati won't come with me. And I can't even have my name."

For many, many months, we did not hear from you. Towards the end of the war, roads and bridges had been bombed, and we were cut off from the countryside. Somehow, through many miracles, we survived, your father and I. We set out for the village where we had sent you. We knew that many villagers had driven out the Jewish children that they had agreed to shelter. Others had handed them over to the Nazis. We also knew that there were villagers who had grown to love the children in their care and did not want to give them back to their parents. And the children themselves were often too small to remember that they had Jewish parents.

Suddenly, we caught sight of a child, a small, sunburned girl with matted brown hair and bare feet. She was playing in the dirt in front of a house. Our hearts leaped. It was you. "Little girl," your father called in a trembling voice, "come here." You came over and stared at us with wide, wary blue eyes. You stood there with your thumb in your mouth. How can I describe how I felt? My heart sang with gratitude to G-d because we had found you, healthy, alive. But there was no welcome, no recognition in your eyes. You had forgotten us completely. Suddenly, you turned and ran into the house. "Ma," you called to someone inside. "There are people here, funny people. They're outside."

A small woman in a black kerchief came out. She was holding you tightly by the hand. Her face was blank, stony. She looked us up and down, our pale faces, our dusty city clothing. Suddenly, I was frightened. She was holding you so tightly, as if you belonged to her. "Ester'ke," I burst out. "Esther Malka. It's Mommy and Tati! Don't you remember us?" You froze. You stared at me, without moving. Suddenly, your face changed. You seemed to awaken from a dream. Recognition flared in your eyes. With a little cry, you tore your hands away from the woman who held you, and you were in our arms.

"How come," I asked my mother, "How come I forgot everything – you and Tati and being a Jewish girl—and remembered only one little thing, my name?" "I guess," she said, "I guess because a name, a Jewish name, is not a little thing after all."

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