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P.O. BOX 14096 LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89114
Editor and Publisher Jack Tell
Business Manager Ben Tell, 876-1255
Vegas News Helene Stadler, 384-3685
MARK TAN, DICK MC INNES,
TRUDE FELDMAN

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Is Purim Jewish?

Is Purim, the Jewish holiday (which falls on March 18 this year), truly a religious holiday? Are its origins truly Jewish?

The main feature of Purim is the reading of the Scroll of Esther, but the story has always seemed suspiciously areligious. Prayers in the Scroll are never addressed to God in the hours of need, and no mention is made of thanksgiving to God after the salvation of the Jews. Indeed, references to God had to be read into the Scroll of Esther by rabbis of the Talmud.

Moreover, according to recent research reported in the Encyclopaedia Judaica (Keter, Inc.), the non-Jewish -- if not un-Jewish -- character of the narrative can be explained by the fact that the heroes of the original story were not Jews.

"The book, while it may be ultimately based on actual events, . . . contains two originally independent plots derived from oriental romance: one plot of harem intrigue of which Esther is the heroine and another of court intrigue of which Mordecai is the hero." The names Mordecai and Esther, incidentally, show a striking resemblance to the Babylonian gods Marduk and Ishtar.

"Having heard stories of the struggles of a Jewish courtier and of a Jewish queen against an evil vizier, the author apparently combined the two plots." He "invented his story to explain an already existing festival. . . of mock ritual combat between 'our side' and 'their side' celebrated for two days in the capital and one day in the countryside, followed by a day of pleasure. Similar festivals are well known in the ancient world. On these days, stories such as those which eventually contributed to Esther were told for the pleasure of the celebrants."

The Scroll of Esther was the only Biblical book not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Obviously, the sect writing the Scrolls did not feel the book of Esther was of the same category as the other biblical books.

"Purim" is derived from the Akkadian "puru", meaning lots. According to the book of Esther the Purim feast was instituted by Mordecai to celebrate the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot to kill them. Haman, the Persian King Ahasuerus' favorite, cast lots in order to determine the month in which to slaughter the Jews.

In the kabbalistic and hasidic literature much is made of Purim as a day of friendship and joy and as the celebration of God at work behind the scenes, unlike Passover which celebrates God's more direct intervention.

While some Reform congregations abolished Purim, others continue to celebrate it as a day of encouragement and hope.

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YOUR RENEWAL IS APPRECIATED --



A JEWISH CHAPLAIN IN JAPAN EXPLAINS A PASSAGE IN THE MEGILLAH OF ESTHER TO A JEWISH SERVICEMAN AND HIS LITTLE SON, WHO IS DRESSED FOR THE MASQUERADE PURIM PARTY WHICH FOLLOWED THE READING OF THE MEGILLAH. THE COMMISSION ON JEWISH CHAPLAINCY OF THE NATIONAL JEWISH WELFARE BOARD RECRUITS, ENDORSES AND SERVES JEWISH CHAPLAINS AND JEWISH LAY LEADERS WHERE THERE ARE NO CHAPLAINS.

U.S. Peacemaker

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

Now that the Arab-Soviet African bloc has a stranglehold on the United States, the world must look elsewhere for the achievement of peace in the Middle East. Logically, that hungry gaze is fixed on Washington, current magnetic attraction for Jordan's King Hussein and Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir. All that has gone on and continues to go on between President Nixon and these key leaders of the Middle East is of tremendous concern; but the big tug for peace in that long-troubled area probably will come when Russia's Mr. Big, Leonid I. Brezhnev, sits down with Mr. Nixon.

The United States has a huge stake in efforts to shatter the stalemate. By opening new doors of trade and new avenues of diplomatic negotiations with Communist China and Communist Russia, we have proved our adaptive power and have drawn world approval. By bringing off a cease-fire in Vietnam, we have strengthened our hand as peacemaker. It is time now to apply the demonstrated Nixonian and Kissinger skills for settling disputes to that old nagging Israeli-Arab vendetta.

A quarter of a century was far too much time to be spent in civil strife between North and South Vietnam. The carnage and the scars are horrible reminders of a bitter conflict affecting our own nation profoundly. And a quarter of a century is far too long for an absence of peace to afflict the Middle East. The season for a just settlement is upon us.

Save for those Americans who accept Arab claims and promises at face value, those good people who can think only of Palestinian refugees when the plight of the uprooted is mentioned, the case for Israel here in the United States seems clear enough.

For surely, it is not the Israelis who have stood in the way of peace, not they who fomented trouble and uttered threats. Consider the mischief of just this past year:

Emboldened by the Khartoum resolution calling for "no negotiations, no recognition, no peace," the Arabs let their terrorists roam and kill at will, their contempt for human life reaching its peak in September with the murder of 11 Israelis and a German policeman in the infamous Olympic affair at Munich. In November, this same Arab spirit helped bring on the defeat of

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election in November, are not violating the Hatch Act." Ogilvie said that Price did not understand the Hatch Act, which defines an employee as a person whose principle employment is in connection with an activity which is funded in whole, or in part, by federal monies. Ogilvie contined, "General County employment does not fall within the Hatch Act."

The third photostat was a copy of Price's second column, written after he had been apprised of the information in the preceding paragraphs. Here is what Price had to say: "Just so there will be no misunderstanding, we hold our position."

Price stated his story was based on Federal law and thoroughly researched by some of the most qualified lawyers in the city.

We ask, who are these "most qualified" legal minds? Would it not have been just as easy for Price to have named them? But this is typical of Price's finger-pointing, by relying on unnamed authority, who Price labels "most qualified", and who Price claims "thoroughly researched" the story.

Then Price goes on to consider the rebuttals of those he accuses. Price states, because the D. A.'s decision was probably favorable, that would not necessarily make it right. To support his contention Price quotes the regulations of the Act, completely ignoring our own D. A.'s interpretation of the regulation.

Price fluffs off Banner's complaint that it was "unfair" to raise the question after a public campaign and election with: "If he was elected through an illegal procedure, are we supposed to forget about it?"

Then Paul makes the statement that had everyone in the know giggling with glee: "What type of newspaper would the Sun be if it were to accept the philosophy that once a wrong is committed we forget about it, because it's already done and the hell with it?"

On many occasions in the past we have called the Las Vegas Sun a most corrupt influence in our community. Most of the infractions were vile accusations, unfounded, and untrue, and often based on ulterior motive. The highest breach of journalistic ethics by the Sun was its refusal to retract or correct a deliberate falsehood, even after proof positive was submitted to the contrary.

Price, who is currently under investigation for indictment on a charge of "shaking down" the District Attorney, Roy Woolfer, continues to confuse and confound with no apparent remorse for the consequences.

There you have the whole picture. Irresponsible statements backed by anonymous authority, discrediting the status of a man, whose only recourse is an appeal to the Israelite.

As we have said in the past, the only way to combat a corrupt newspaper is with an honest one.

the American efforts in the UN to promote international action against terrorism. A month later, Arab pleading forced a resolution through the UN, a calling on governments not to give assistance to Israel.

In that same season, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, squeezed between left and right extremists, once more called for preparation for war against Israel. There seems no end to the perfidy as a more recent report of the hanging of nine, possibly ten, Jews of Iraq.

Israel, for its part, has tried valiantly to stick to all armistice agreements despite constant provocation. Obligated to absorb thousands of Jews emigrating from the USSR, committed to do all that it must do to keep the Suez cease fire inviolate, plagued at all times by bellicose threats from Syria, faced with the responsibility of affording humane treatment to all Arabs brought into its domain as the result of the 1967 battles, Israel has provided a sterling example of patience in a time of unachieved peace.

On the eve of his election, President Nixon was quoted by the Washington Star to this effect: "The Middle East will have a very high priority because the Mideast has been, over the past couple of years, in a period of uneasy truce or armistice. . . it can explode at any time." Given that observation, given the huge plus of progress toward genuine peace in Indo-China, given the Russian withdrawal from Egypt, and given the blueprint for Middle East peace (i.e., the Nov. 22, 1967 UN Resolution), American peacemakers have a handsome opportunity.