



## PURIM

### WHEN ORDINARY IS EXTRAORDINARY

*Finding Meaning, Purpose, and Wonder in Everyday Moments*

# HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

## Purim

The jolly festival of Purim is celebrated every year on the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month of Adar (late winter/early spring). It commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman's plot "to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day," as recorded in the Megillah (biblical book of Esther). The Persian Empire of the fourth century BCE extended over 127 lands, and all the Jews were its subjects. When King Ahasuerus had his wife, Queen Vashti, executed for failing to follow his orders, he arranged a beauty pageant to find a new queen. A Jewish

girl, Esther, found favor in his eyes and became the new queen, though she refused to divulge her background. Meanwhile, the Jew-hating Haman was appointed prime minister of the empire. Mordecai, the leader of the Jews (and Esther's cousin), defied the king's orders and refused to bow to Haman. Haman was incensed, and he convinced the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of all the Jews on the thirteenth day of Adar, a date chosen by a lottery Haman made. Mordecai galvanized all the Jews, convincing them to repent, fast, and pray to G-d. Meanwhile, Esther asked the

king and Haman to join her for a feast. At a subsequent feast, Esther revealed to the king her Jewish identity. Haman was hanged, Mordecai was appointed prime minister in his stead, and a new decree was issued, granting the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies. On the thirteenth of Adar, the Jews mobilized and killed many of their enemies. On the fourteenth of Adar, they rested and celebrated. In the capital city of Shushan, they took one more day to finish the job.

## QUESTION

How can we transform the monotony of our daily grind, imbuing the ordinary moments with profound meaning?

# TEXT 1

William Martin,  
*The Parent's Tao Te  
Ching: Ancient Advice  
for Modern Parents*,  
(Cambridge, MA: Da  
Capo Lifelong Books,  
1999), p. 59

Do not ask your children to strive for extraordinary lives. Such striving may seem admirable, but it is the way of foolishness. Help them instead to find the wonder and the marvel of an ordinary life.

Show them the joy of tasting tomatoes, apples, and pears. Show them how to cry when pets and people die. Show them the infinite pleasure in the touch of a hand. And make the ordinary come alive for them.

The extraordinary will take care of itself.



The Jews celebrated their salvation on the fourteenth of Adar, but in Shushan (a walled city), the war extended for one more day, the fifteenth of Adar.

Therefore, Purim has two dates, one for walled cities like Jerusalem and one for the rest of the world.

# TEXT 2A

Mishnah, Megilah  
1:1-2

מגלה נקראת באחד עשר, בשנים עשר, בשלושה עשר, בארבעה עשר, בתמישה עשר - לא פחות ולא יותר.

כרפין המקפין חומה מימות יהושע בן נון, קורין בתמישה עשר.  
כפרים ועירות גדולות קורין בארבעה עשר, אלא שהכפרים מקדימין ליום הכניסה.

כיצד?

חל להיות יום ארבעה עשר בשני - כפרים ועירות גדולות קורין בו ביום, ומקפות חומה למחר.  
חל להיות בשלישי או ברביעי - כפרים מקדימין ליום הכניסה, ועירות גדולות קורין בו ביום, ומקפות חומה למחר.

חל להיות בתמישי - כפרים ועירות גדולות קורין בו ביום, ומקפות חומה למחר.

חל להיות ערב שבת - כפרים מקדימין ליום הכניסה, ועירות גדולות ומקפות חומה קורין בו ביום.

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# TEXT 2A

Mishnah, Megilah  
1:1-2

The *Megillah* can be read on the eleventh [of Adar], on the twelfth, on the thirteenth, on the fourteenth, and on the fifteenth. Not earlier and not later.

Cities that were surrounded by walls since the day of Joshua the son of Nun read [the *Megillah*] on the fifteenth.

Villages and unwalled cities read it on the fourteenth. However, villagers advance their reading to the earliest market day.

How so?

If the fourteenth falls on Monday, the *Megillah* is read on that day in the villages and unwalled cities, and on the next day in walled cities.

If the fourteenth falls on Tuesday or Wednesday, the *Megillah* is read on the previous market day [Monday] in villages, on that day in large cities, and on the following day in walled cities.

If the fourteenth falls on Thursday, the *Megillah* is read on that day in villages and unwalled cities, and on the next day in walled cities.

If the fourteenth falls on Friday, the *Megillah* is read on the previous market day [Thursday] in villages, on that day in unwalled cities, and the following day in walled cities.



Purim was also celebrated on the eleventh, twelfth, or thirteenth of Adar.

This accommodated villagers who visited cities on market days to hear the Megillah, eliminating the need for them to make a separate trip.



# TEXT 2B

Talmud, Megilah 2B

כולהו אנשי כנסת הגדולה תקנינהו.

דאי סלקא דעתך אנשי כנסת הגדולה ארבעה עשר וחמשה עשר תקון, אתו רבנן ועקרי תקנתא דתקיננו אנשי כנסת הגדולה? והתנן: אין בית דין יכול לבטל דברי בית דין חבירו אלא אם כן גדול ממנו בחכמה ובמנין! אלא פשיטא כולהו אנשי כנסת הגדולה תקיננו.

היכא רמיזא?

אמר רב שמן בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן: אמר קרא: "לקיים את ימי הפורים האלה בזמניהם" (אסתר ט, לא), זמנים הרבה תקנו להם.

All these dates were established by the Men of the Great Assembly [when the festival of Purim was first established].

Had they instituted Purim only on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar, the sages of later generations would not have been permitted to add to those dates. For the law states that a court may not uproot the ruling of a previous court unless they are greater in wisdom or number. It is, thus, obvious that all these were originally established by the Men of the Great Assembly.

Where is this implied in the Book of Esther?

Rabbi Shemen the son of Aba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "To observe these days of Purim in their times" (Esther 9:31)

# TEXT 3

Shulchan Aruch,  
*Orach Chayim*  
688:8

המפרש בים והיוצא בשיירא ואינו מוצא מגילה להוליך עמו, יקראנה בשלשה עשר או בשנים עשר  
או באחד עשר בלא ברכה.

Those who have embarked upon a sea voyage or joined a caravan to cross the desert [on the fourteenth of Adar] and do not have a *Megillah* to take along should read the *Megillah* on the thirteenth, the twelfth, or the eleventh. However, they should omit the blessings [that are customarily recited before the reading].

## QUESTION

Why did the sages, in an exception to Jewish practice, choose to establish multiple original dates for this festival instead of simply adding makeup dates?



Initially, the sages didn't intend to make the thirteenth of Adar a Jewish festival, to avoid stirring jealousy among other nations.

Only after Esther confirmed that the Persians already recognized this date did they include it in our calendar.

# TEXT 4A

Talmud, Megilah 7A

שְׁלַחַה לְהֵם אֶסְתֵּר לְחַכְמִים: קִבְעוּנִי לְדוֹרוֹת.

שְׁלַחוּ לָהּ: קִנְאָה אֶת מְעוֹרְרַת עָלֵינוּ לְבֵין הָאוּמוֹת.

שְׁלַחַה לְהֵם: כָּבָר כְּתוּבָה אֲנִי עַל דְּבַרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מְדִי וּפְרָס.

Esther sent word to the sages, “Establish my festival for posterity.”

The sages sent word to Esther, “It would provoke the ire of nations against us.”

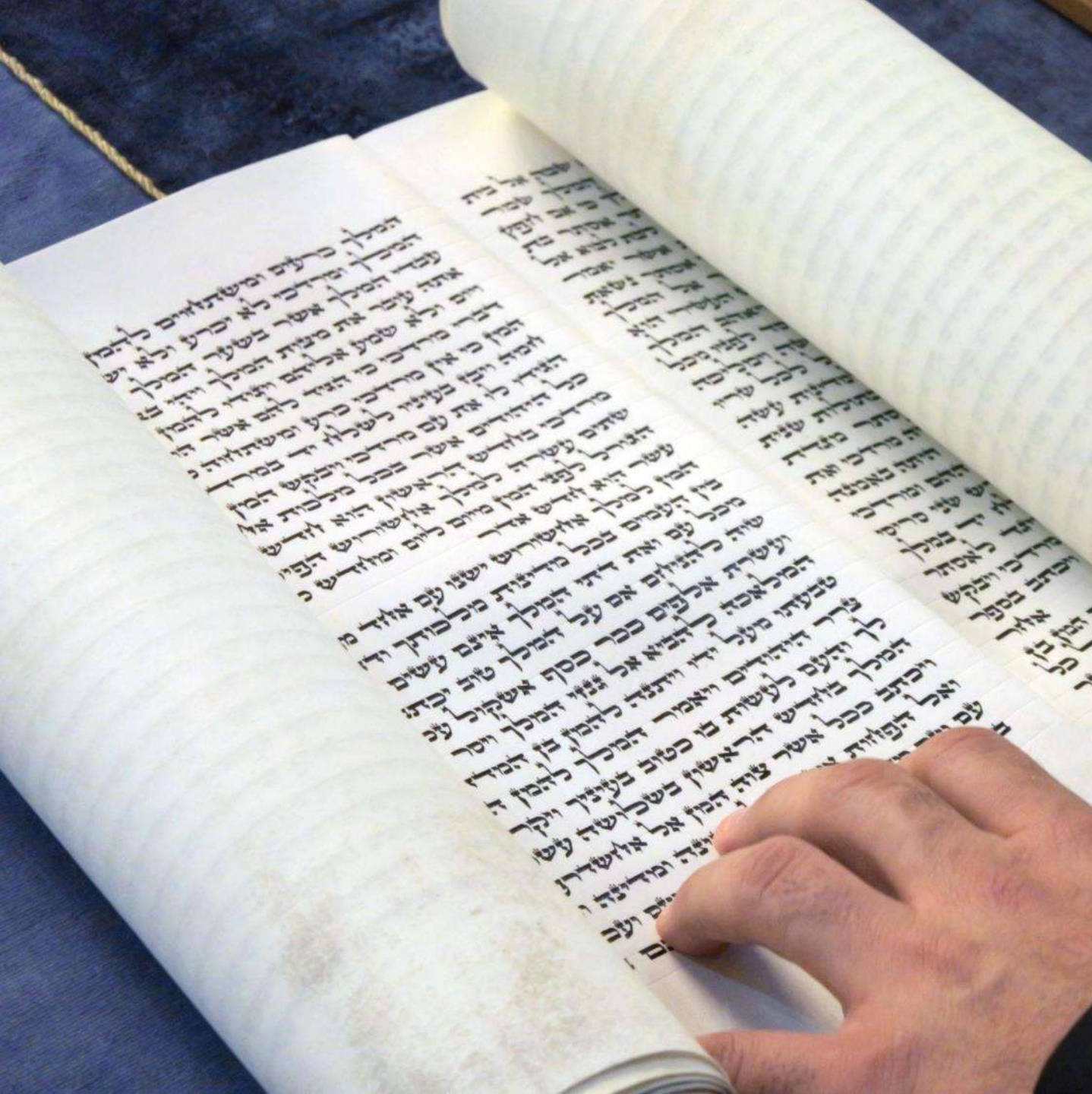
Esther sent word in return, “I am already written up in the royal annals of Media and Persia.”

# TEXT 4B

Midrash,  
*Yalkut Shimoni*,  
Proverbs 944

כל המועדים עתידין ליבטל, וימי הפורים אינן בטלים לעולם.

All the festivals will become null [in the messianic era], but the days of Purim will never be annulled.



Esther wanted the sages to incorporate the Purim story into the Torah.

They hesitated due to the multiple mentions of Jewish victories over the Amalekites, and agreed once they realized it was only mentioned twice in the Tanach.

# TEXT 5

Talmud, Megilah 7a

שְׁלַחָה לָהֶם אֶסְתֵּר לְחַכְמִים: כְּתוּבוֹנֵי לְדוֹרוֹת.

שְׁלַחוּ לָהּ: "הֲלֹא כָּתַבְתִּי לָךְ שְׁלִישִׁים" (מִשְׁלֵי כב, ב). שְׁלִישִׁים וְלֹא רִבְעִים.

Esther sent word to the sages, "Write me up for posterity."

The sages sent back in response, "[It is written] 'Indeed, I wrote for you in three parts' (Proverbs 22:20). [In the Torah, a story may appear] three times, but not four times."



# TEXT 6

Maimonides,  
*Mishneh Torah*,  
*Hilchos Megilah*  
2:18

כָּל סִפְרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים וְכָל הַכְּתוּבִים עֲתִידִין לְבָטֵל לִימֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ, חוּץ מִמְּגִלַת אֶסְתֵּר.

וְהָרִי הִיא קִנְיַת כְּתוּבֵי חֻמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה וְכִהְלָכוֹת שֶׁל תוֹרָה שֶׁבְעַל פֶּה שְׂאִינָן בְּטֵלִין לְעוֹלָם.

All the Books of Prophets and *Ketuvim* will be nullified in the messianic era except for the Book of Esther.

It will endure like the Five Books of Moses and like the Oral Laws that were transmitted by Moses. They will never become null.



"Purim" originates from the ancient Persian word "pur," meaning "lottery," to symbolize Haman's use of lots in determining the date of our potential annihilation.

# TEXT 7

Rabbi Shneur  
Zalman of Liadi,  
*Torah Or, Hosafot,  
Megilat Esther,*  
p. 123b

כי הנה ענין בחינת גורל הוא בחינה שלמעלה מן הדעת. כי על ידי הדעת, בוחר על פי טעם ושכל, ויש בחירה לברור כו'. מה שאין כן כשיפול גורל כו', היינו שמבטל הבחירה שעל פי הדעת, אלא יתלה הדבר רק כמו שהוא יפיל הגורל, גם שיהיה לנגד הדעת והבחירה כו'. ואם כן, בהכרח לומר שתולה הדבר בבחינה שלמעלה מן הדעת. והוא בחינת הרצון שלמעלה מן הדעת . . .

The results of a lottery [appear to be random]—not rooted in reason. [However, in truth, lotteries are determined by G-d in a manner that] transcends all reason. When you follow reason, you are free to make intellectual choices. When you throw lots, you suspend intelligent choice and place yourself at the mercy of the lottery, even if the results defy reason. This means that you throw your lot in with the Divine supernal will that transcends reason.

# TEXT 7

Rabbi Shneur  
Zalman of Liadi,  
*Torah Or, Hosafot,  
Megilat Esther,*  
p. 123b

"על כן קראו לימים האלה פורים, על שם הפור, הוא הגורל כו'" (אסתר ט, כו). כי הנה זהו עיקר הנס שנתבטל בחינת הגורל שהפיל המן, ולא נמשך מבחינת רצון העליון שלמעלה מן הדעת לקליפת עמלק. אלא אדרבה, נמשך לישראל דוקא על ידי המסירות נפש שהיה להם בבחינת ביטול, שמסרו נפשם באחד.

וזהו עיקר ענין שמחת הימים האלה, מה שנתבטל הפור של המן ונשאר גילוי רצון העליון לצדיקים בלבד.

"Therefore, they called these days Purim [a cognate of *pur*], which means *goral*" (Esther 9:26). Haman's *pur* [an attempt to co-opt G-d's blessing in defiance of all reason through a lottery] failed. G-d's transcendental will did not [defy reason in] support [of] the impure Haman. Rather, it supported the Jews who merited it through their utter self-abnegation—jeopardizing their lives for the One G-d.

The primary joy of Purim is that Haman's *pur* dissolved, and the transcendental Divine will focused exclusively on the Jews.

These aspects of Purim all seemingly lacked significance yet turned out to be the most extraordinary and holy.



**DATE**

Our sages had no intention of transforming the thirteenth of Adar into a joyous Jewish festival.



**MEGILLAH**

The sages doubted whether the book should be written down as part of Tanach.



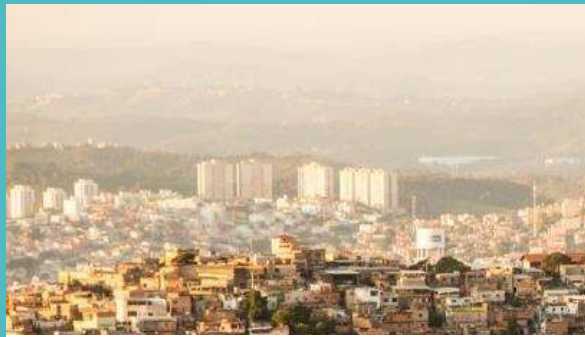
**NAME**

The Persian name would have implied a lack of Divine intervention.

# The 3 types of cities that celebrate Purim on different dates.



WALLED CITIES



UNWALLED CITIES



VILLAGES

# TEXT 8

“Town and City Life,”  
[www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)

Cities were far from self-sufficient, however, and all depended upon close relationships with the rural communities in their hinterlands. Renaissance Florence established such greatness in part because of the auspicious relations it maintained with sharecroppers in the Tuscan countryside who provided the urban elite with a secure food supply, as well as with grain, oil, and wine, which the Florentine elite in turn sold or traded throughout Europe.



WALLED CITIES



UNWALLED CITIES



VILLAGES

## Material Differences:

Safe, worry-free strongholds.

Provide the capital with necessities, but remain separate.

Simple and honest life style of growing crops and feeding the population.

## Spiritual Differences:

Secure and spiritual lifestyle focused on prayer and study.

Involved in worldly matters, yet maintain a deep connection to G-d.

Perceive themselves as simple, loyal soldiers of G-d's army.



## TEXT 9A

The Rebbe,  
Rabbi Menachem  
Mendel Schneerson,  
*Likutei Sichot* 21,  
p. 202

כרך המוקף חומה — זיין עבודה איז באשיצט, לאזט ניט אריין קיין צר ואויב וכו'.

עיר מושב — זיין עבודה מאכט, בויט אויף א מכון לשבתו יתברך דורך דעם וואס ער איז א בן עיר, ער דארף ניט אקערן, זייען, ווארטן ביז ס'וועט אויסוואקסן אין פעלד חטים וכו'. ער דארף נאר מאכן פון די צוגעגרייטע פארטיגע עניני העולם א דירה און א שטאט, עיר אלוקינן.

כפר — ער דארף פאנאנדעראקערן די קרקע קשה פון דעם העלם פון וועלט, עס זאל קענען דארט זיין זריעה וכו'.

People who live in walled cities can devote themselves completely to G-d. Their spiritual disposition is like an enclosed fortress that shields them from the unsavory influences of temptation.

The spiritual task of people in outlying cities is to [be surrounded by worldly temptation and nevertheless] use these worldly resources for holy purposes. Thus, they create a city—a home for G-d. They don't need to plow, plant, and wait until the crops grow. They just take the pre-prepared, ready-made resources and turn them into a home, a city for G-d.

Villagers must plow and soften the hardened soil—the corporeal world where G-d is not visible—to make it sprout and grow.



The unique dates of Purim were established specifically for the villagers, highlighting the message of Purim: there is hidden depth and holiness in the seemingly ordinary.

## TEXT 9B

The Rebbe,  
Rabbi Menachem  
Mendel Schneerson,  
Ibid., p. 203

כאטש אז אין דער עבודה פון בני הכפרים . . . הערט זיך ניט אלוקות בהתגלות (בתפיסת השכל, או בהתלהבות הלב), און דעריבער איז זייער עבודה און קאך נאר אין אן אופן פון הודאה (עשיה), אף על פי כן, איז אויך בא זיי דא דער ביטול לאלוקות אין זייער עבודה.

ואדרבה, דער ביטול מצד בחינת "הודאה" בלבד . . . איז אין א פרט נאך טיפער ווי דער ביטול און עבודה . . . וואס נעמט זיך מצד הבנה והשגה אין אלוקות.

Villagers . . . do not have a keen perception of G-d—they don't relate to G-d intellectually or emotionally. Their relationship is marked primarily by obedience. Nevertheless, their self-abnegation is complete.

In fact, the surrender to G-d driven by simple loyalty is greater and deeper in some ways than the surrender of those who enjoy a rich intellectual [or emotional] relationship with G-d.

# TEXT 10

The Rebbe,  
Rabbi Menachem  
Mendel Schneerson,  
*Hayom Yom*,  
Entry for 16 Iyar

אבי אדוני זקני מורי ורבי אמר להחסיד ר' אליהו אבעלער - איש פשוט מצד כשרונותיו וידיעותיו - כשנכנס אליו ליחידות: אליהו איך בין דיר מקנא. פאהרסט אויף מערק זעהסט א סך מענשען, איז ווען אינמיטען עסק רעדט מען זיך מיט יענעם פאנאנדער אין א אידישען ווארט א עין יעקב ווארט, און מ'איז מעורר אויף לערנען נגלה און חסידות, פון דעם ווערט שמחה למעלה. און די מעקלעריי צאהלט דער אויבערשטער אפ בבני חיי ומזוני. און וואס גרעסער דער מארק מעהר ארבעט, איז גרעסער די פרנסה.

In terms of scholarship and aptitude, the Chasid Reb Elyeh Abeler was a simple man. Once, when he had a private audience [with my grandfather, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the *Tzemach Tzedek*], my grandfather said to him, “Elyeh, I envy you. You travel to various fairs; you meet many people. Sometimes, during a business transaction, you get into a warm discussion about a Jewish aphorism, a Talmudic moral, etc., and you arouse that person’s interest in studying the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of the Torah.

“This causes joy on high, and G-d pays you a commission with the blessings of children, health, and sustenance. The larger the fair, the more work there is, and the greater the commission earned.”

## ANSWERS

How can we transform the monotony of our daily grind, imbuing the ordinary moments with profound meaning?

The trick is to pause for a moment before beginning our activity to consider how to infuse what we are about to do with holiness. Everything we do can be laced with holiness if we give it a chance.

Why did the sages, in an exception to Jewish practice, choose to establish multiple original dates for this festival instead of simply adding makeup dates?

Purim transforms multiple ordinary days into festive days because it is a holiday that reveals the secret of the Divine in all things. The holiest energies are found in the most ordinary things.



There is always an opening to bring G-d, Judaism, and holiness into our seemingly mundane lives.

## KEY POINTS

1. There are multiple dates for the elements of the Purim holiday. Villagers who cannot read the Megillah on the fourteenth of Adar can read it earlier; walled cities celebrate on the fifteenth.
2. Purim contains multiple elements that convey the same theme: turning the ordinary into something extraordinary.
3. The material differences between walled cities, unwalled cities, and villages represent spiritual differences in levels of G-dly awareness and connection.
4. Despite a village's distance from the city both geographically and spiritually, it is the villagers who are most dependable and capable of finding holiness in ordinary places.
5. Purim teaches us to find extraordinary holiness in ordinary, mundane things, places, and events.

