



MACCABI WORLD UNION

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ה' אדר תשע"ח

פורים, שושן פורים ומרכזיותה של ארץ ישראל

Purim, Shushan Purim

and the centrality of the Land of Israel

Dear Friends,

Purim, probably the most joyous festival in the collective practice of our people, celebrates the salvation of our ancestors under Persian rule during the reign of King Ahasuerus – in Hebrew, "Achashverosh" – some 2,400 years ago. It marks the first time in our **national history**, in the era of the Second Temple, we were in danger of mass slaughter at the hands of a dictator, Haman, and his followers.¹

The **happy ending** to the story has **two sets** of key dates: **13 and 14 of Adar**, on the one hand, and on the other, **14 and 15 of Adar**. The first set is the celebration of Purim, and the second, of Shushan Purim. The reason for this difference arises from the text of the Book of Esther, *Megillat Esther*: the great battle against the followers of the evil Haman – Grand Vizier to King Ahasuerus and chief conspirator of the planned genocide against the Jewish People – occurred on Adar 13, ending in decisive victory and the death of 75,000 enemy troops. The Jewish People, mostly dispersed throughout an empire of 127 provinces², celebrated the victory on the next day, Adar 14, thereafter forever fixed in our Hebrew calendar as the Festival of Purim³. But in Shushan, capital of the Persian Empire, the battle persisted, ending only Adar 14, so our success was celebrated on Adar 15⁴, so that day of victory celebration is called "Shushan Purim".

Our sages ordered that we maintain the differentiation of celebrations for **Purim** and **Shushan Purim**⁵. They indicated that Purim would be celebrated in all cities worldwide on Adar 14; but in the walled cities of the Land of Israel, i.e. **cities that had walls Joshua's time** (successor to Moshe Rabbeinu and great conqueror of the Land of Israel 3,300 years ago), the celebration would be on Adar 15, as in Shushan, "Shushan Purim".

So far, these are easy-to-understand reasons for celebrating an event of true

¹ This is described in the Bible, the Book of Esther, Megillat Esther.

² Esther I, 1.

³ Esther IX, 16, 17 & 19.

⁴ Esther IX, 14, 15 and 18. The Jews killed Haman, his 10 children and 800 enemies in Shushan – Ester IX, 6 & 15.

⁵ They inferred that this happened in the Persian Empire itself, as it says in the Book of Esther - IX, 19: "The Jews in rural areas and those living in areas without walls celebrated [Purim] on 14 Adar. "



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salvation. However, this is unique: our Sages sought to unify our celebrations, so why divide the celebration of Purim into two different dates?

Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona⁶ provides a clear answer to this question - ***an answer that relates Purim to the centrality of the Land of Israel in our Faith.*** In his commentary to the Talmud⁷, Rabbeinu Nissim teaches us that:

"... Because of the fact that the Israelites who lived in rural areas and those living in Shushan did not rest on the same day once the fighting was over, but the first ones on Adar 14 and the second ones on Adar 15, each group held different days of parties and banquets. For this reason, when [The Sages] established the dates of the holiday [Purim] for future generations, they gave the walled cities of Israel the same status as Shushan [itself a walled city] - where the principal miracle happened.

We should still clarify why a "walled city" is one which had walls *"at the time that Joshua conquered Eretz Israel"*. This was done to award proper honor to the Land of Israel ...

Let's explain this issue: at that time [the time when the Talmud was written under Roman rule], most of the cities of Israel were in ruins along their walls. If [the Sages] had distinguished between strong cities and rural areas, taking into account the current situation, it would have resulted that almost all cities of Israel would be in the rural area category, and that would have been an insult [to the Land of Israel]. This is why they set the status of the cities *at the time of Joshua*: to preserve the pre-eminence of Eretz Israel over the cities of the Diaspora. "

Rabbeinu Nissim provides us with a powerful message, which expresses two complementary components:

- The first emphasizes **the centrality of the Land of Israel** and its cities, and **defines Israel as the center of our celebration, our memory, our peoplehood and national existence.**
- The second **restores our hope for reconstruction, our trust in a better future, indeed our National Redemption. Our sages, who lived at the beginning of the era of our long Galut** - the loss of our national independence and the expulsion of our People from the Land of Israel – **ferently believed in an uplifting and prosperous future: a future in which the cities of Israel would be rebuilt,**

⁶ Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven (1320 - 1376, Hebrew נסים בן ראובן) of Girona, Catalonia, was an influential talmudist and authority on Jewish law. He was one of the last of the great Spanish medieval talmudic scholars. He is also known as the RaN(ר"ן), the Hebrew acronym of his name.

⁷ Talmud, Tractate Megillah 1.



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repaired, and even extended. In those dark and sad days, facing the ruins of what once had been our national glory, the Sages encouraged their fellow Jews to believe in redemption for our People beyond the sadness and despair with which they were confronted in their own times.

Today, when we celebrate Purim across the length and breadth of Medinat Israel - with its intensity, its colors, its diversity - we must be grateful to our Sages, who kindled the spark of hope in our return to national independence, and preserved the status that the Land of Israel deserves in the Faith of our People.

May God inspire us in this Purim to feel closer
to the Land and the State of Israel –
central to our creativity, to our collective identity, to our life as a People.

May God grant us Purim's message of life, hope and salvation to
encourage us to celebrate together, evoking the feelings and emotion
which led us to our present glory.

And may God will that each and every one of us hears the story of
Esther, Mordechai⁸ and their redemptive history, and adopt it as our
own.

With our best wishes,

Chag Purim Sameach!

Rabbi Carlos A. Tapiero
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Maccabi World Union

⁸ The heroes of the salvation of the Jewish People.