



from
RABBI KRESS'
study

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It's What's Inside That Counts

The Talmud tells the story about the daughter of the Roman emperor and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya. "What a shame for glorious wisdom such as yours to be contained in such an ugly vessel," she tells him. Without missing a beat, the Rabbi asks, "Does your father keep his wine in simple clay vessels?" The emperor's daughter thought for a moment, and said, "Of course! What else would he keep it in?" The beguiling Rabbi said, "You, who are so important, should put your wine in vessels of gold and silver. The emperor's daughter relayed this to her father, who put every last drop of his vast wine cellar into beautiful gold and silver vessels.

Any wine drinkers will know what happened next: it spoiled.

Sometimes, like the emperor's daughter, we lose sight of what's important (the wine!). We deem the vessel more important than the contents inside. So wrapped up in our focus on external appearance, we forget that the inherent value is found within.

This year, the Hebrew calendar is in a leap year in which we have two months of Adar: the creatively named Adar I and Adar II. During these leap years, we get an added holiday called *Purim Katan*, or little Purim, that precedes Purim itself a month later. In effect, our calendar encourages us to celebrate Purim twice.

Much like our Talmudic tale of gentile royal and Jew, the Purim story features the gentile King Ahasuerus and Jewish Esther. Here too, we find our tradition admonishes the importance placed on external beauty. Though the gentile King puts on a beauty pageant to find his next queen – which Esther soundly wins – her beauty is not what makes her our hero.

Esther is our hero because her internal moral compass guides her to stand up to injustice. Esther is our hero because she stares down the nefarious Haman, a hyperbolic embodiment of evil, and wins. Esther is our hero because she reminds us that value isn't found in external appearances, it's found in acting out who we are on the inside.

So, over these two months in which we celebrate Purim twice, reflect on what our tradition values: integrity, intellect, and a healthy dose of wit. Consider where you find these innately Jewish values in your life. And, on a holiday where we drink much wine, remember that it's not all about the bottle it came in.

Chag Purim Sameach!

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