

On Our Own

By Cheryl Kupfer



A Heavenly 'Shidduch' In Shushan: A Purim Shpiel

"Another day another *dinar*," sighed Esther as she prepared her daily infusion of Turkish coffee before leaving for her job as an assistant editor at her Uncle Mordy's business, Megillah Publishing. As usual, she turned to the classified/singles section of her favorite newspaper, The Persian Press, the largest independent Anglo-Persian weekly in the world – distributed in all 127 provinces. "Sounds interesting," she thought to herself as she glanced at an ad announcing a singles *shabbaton* taking place in the much buzzed about B'nai Benyamin *shul* that recently opened (at the cost of a million *dinar*) in the suburban sand dunes outside of the city. There would be tent hospitality for the guests since there was no hotel in the vicinity.

Esther loved *davening* – it wasn't unusual for her to pray for three days non-stop, barely taking the time to eat or drink. She had great *hakarat hatov* to her Creator and was constantly thanking Him for His many kindnesses. She especially loved *davening* in new venues, the fancier the better. She would daydream about *davening* to the King of Kings in a royal palace. How cool and appropriate would that be?

As for the potential for meeting her *bashert* at the *shabbaton*, that would be nice, but so far the many, many, smart, *erlich* earner/learner boys she had met were so... ordinary. In her heart, she knew she was destined to be more than a housewife.

As Esther flipped the pages of the Persian Press to get to the insightful, hard-hitting editorials, a full-page ad caught her eye.

"Recently widowed king looking for replacement

wife. Must be gorgeous, beautiful, stunning and thin – intelligence not an asset. King has a bit of a drinking problem – but wouldn't you if your late wife was uppity and refused your command to appear before you? Willing to give up to half his kingdom for the right candidate – guaranteed in the pre-nup. To reply, email Heggai@palace.org.

Esther grimaced and tossed the paper aside. Royalty didn't exactly impress her. After all, she was a Jewish princess herself, being related to the first ever king of Israel, Saul: Kindhearted but foolish Saul who let pity overrule his good sense, allowing the King of Amalek to live long enough to produce offspring, like that slimy, lowlife Haman.

Esther shuddered with disgust as she remembered that weasel-eyed Haman, who despite being married – with 10 sons no less – had tried to crash a *shabbaton*, pretending he was Jewish and available. Luckily his three-cornered hat gave him away. What self-respecting Jew would be caught dead with a head covering like that? A *kippah serugah* or a *streimel* maybe, but a triangular hat? Only a loser like Haman would be so stupid to think he could pull a fast one on a crowd of Jews. Besides, he smelled like a horse. No way anyone would have given him the time of day. In fact when he had tried to pick up Esther's friend Hadassah, she told him in her best Persian "to go hang himself."

As she took the subway to downtown Shushan, Esther noticed that all the females on the train were abuzz with excitement. "Are you going to answer the ad," one asked the other – "the one the king put in ALL

the newspapers?"

"Are you kidding," answered a rather *zaftig*, pimply young royal wannabe. "This is even better than trying to be the next "Persian Idol" You don't need any talent at all. The king didn't ask his wife to sing in front of an audience – only to appear in her birthday suit. I can do that," she declared with pride.

Esther shook her head in disbelief. Hadn't these girls ever heard of Henry the Eighth? The merry, wine-guzzling monarch whose wives were almost literary "A Queen For The Day." Everyone knew that kings traditionally had short attention spans when it came to their spouses. Besides who needed the paparazzi bothering you every time you went out the door?

"Nothing like being left alone," thought Esther as she got off the train. Unfortunately for her, but luckily for the Jewish people, God had other plans. While downing a soda in a kosher pizza place during her lunch break, Esther was "discovered" by a scout hired by the king to find the "face" of the future, and was, despite her frantic protests, carted off to do a commercial for Heggai's Beauty Spa and Pickling Products. (It was not uncommon for the prestigiously employed but poorly-paid palace professionals to have a side business to help make ends meet.)

After being oiled, lathered, soaped, shampooed, scrubbed, scraped, submerged, sanitized, slathered, steamed, sunned, manicured, massaged, kneaded, exfoliated, pedicured, pummeled, perfumed, parboiled, pulled and poked – for a year – a rather exhausted Esther, who could barely see out of her water-logged eyes, was finally going on her first "blind" date with the king.

Much to her deep dismay, she apparently had the "it" factor the king was looking for (we know it as Yiddishe *chayn*) and she became the new queen of Persia.

"Things could be worse," Esther thought to herself as she moved into her new digs in the palace and introduced herself to her maidservants. "At least I won't have a problem getting cleaning help for Pesach!"

The Light And The Blessing

By Shoshana Shore

Remember! Never Forget! Never Again!
Slogans. They do stick in your mind, but do they galvanize you into action? Human nature is such, that if you are not directly affected by a tragedy, your feeling of empathy with the individual involved is fleeting and short-lived. The same may be said for our reaction to a historical event. How much concern, pomp and circumstance is given to a historical event that happened years ago? Nine years after the fall of the World Trade Center, how many of us still fly an American flag from our car antennas? When tragedy strikes we all run immediately to help. Whether its preparing meals for a family whose mother is ill, paying a *shiva* call, making a phone call or sending an e-mail, once the *mitzvah* is completed, do we give those most hurt any further thought or assistance?

My husband and I just celebrated our first anniversary as *Olim chadashim*. A crucial part of the *klitah* (absorption) is networking and searching for employment. I was lucky to recently begin working at a non-profit called Ohr Meir & Bracha: The Terror Victims Support Center. Located in the heart of Yerushalayim, it serves as a haven for victims of terror who do not receive assistance from the government. Please do not misunderstand! This is not a criticism of the social services available; in fact, social workers refer clients to us because they do not meet the government's criteria for disability or because the processing of their claim is taking time and they are in need of immediate help.

Our organization's Director, Liora Tedgi, was herself a victim of terror in 2002. Liora sought to fill the gap left by the government and provide aid for this population. As I said, only once you have shared in a tragedy are you now invested in providing relief for its victims. I can go on and on about Liora's character, personality and sincerity. Stop by any Thursday and help her and other volunteers assemble and pack 400-600 baskets of food. It is an experience not to be missed! Baskets

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of food are packed with fruit, vegetables, chicken, challah, wine and anything else that a family needs to celebrate *Shabbat*. If there is a chag that week, additional items are included. For example: honey and pomegranates for Rosh Hashana, jelly doughnuts and oil for Chanukah. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, Liora accepts phone calls from victims who are experiencing difficulties.

Mind you, it is not only the individual caught in a terrorist attack who needs help...it is the entire family. A victim of terror first and foremost suffers from psychological distress. This can affect their daily quality of life, which then spills over to the remainder of the family. For those suffering from psychological distress, as well as those with physical injuries, their time is taken up with medical visits rather than at the workplace. The family income is diminished when a remaining family member is also the caretaker. Ohr Meir & Bracha steps in and provides after-school centers for children, winter shoes for children, baby formula, psychological and legal aid, clothes and school supplies, kitchen essentials for the new bride, electrical appliances, direct financial aid, hospital visits, etc.

Living in Israel and working at Ohr Meir & Bracha makes it easy for me to remember the victims of terror. It is easy for me to deal with anyone I come in contact with since that is all I talk about. For the rest of you, perhaps, it is "out of sight out of mind." But these victims suffer each day; their sacrifice is forever. Please do not forget them. Just because it is, Baruch Hashem, "quiet" here and terrorist attacks are not front page news, does not mean that the aftermath of the bombings is over, it doesn't mean they are not still occurring.

Please do not forget the Victims of Terror! When in Israel join us any Thursday at 3 Rechov Yakim off Rechov Shmuel HaNavi. In the meantime visit us at www.terror-victims.org.il. Keep the victims of terror in your *tefilot* and when the time is appropriate to give *tzedakah*, think of Ohr Meir & Bracha.