



CONGREGATION AGUDATH JACOB

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MARCH 2026 ADAR/NISAN 5786

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From the Desk of
Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner



PURIM (KeYom HaKiPURIM)

Or the Story of a Stiff-Necked People Reenacting the Covenant at Sinai !

Purim is just a couple of days away, and if your household looks anything like mine, it's a whirlwind of costumes, last-minute Mishloach Manot planning & Matanot La'evyonim (the gift packages of food and drink we send to the poor and to friends and family on Purim), and Hamantaschen (*the traditional triangular pastries baked by our "great Sisterhood Team which you will realize, as soon as you taste them, are the Best in Waco, Texas*). But beneath all the joyful noise of the holiday, there is a message that often gets lost — one that speaks to the very soul of the Jewish people.

The Sages teach that on Purim, the Jewish people reaccepted the Torah -the same Torah they had accepted at Sinai over a thousand years earlier. The teaching comes from a close reading of Esther 9:27, and it raises an obvious question: why would the Jewish people need to reaccept a covenant they had already accepted?

What exactly was missing the first time?

[וְקָבְלוּ] הַיְהוּדִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַל־זָרָעָם וְעַל כָּל־הַנְּלוּיִם עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר

לְהִיט עֲשִׂים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כְּכַתְּבָם וְכַזְּמָנָם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וּשְׁנָה:

The Yehudim (the Jews) undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year. Megillat Esther 9:27

The Talmud explains that when G-d revealed Himself at Sinai, He held the mountain over the heads of the Jewish people like a barrel — accept the Torah or be buried here. This is derived from the verse in Exodus 19:17, which describes the people standing **Betachtit Hahar** — literally “underneath the mountain” — a phrase the Sages read not as a poetic description of the mountain’s foot, but as something far more threatening.

וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם לְקִרְאת הָאֱלֹהִים מִרְהַמְחִנָּה וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הַהָר:

Moses led the people out of the camp toward Hashem, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain, Exodus 19:17.

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, (1843 – 14 August 1926, was *an Orthodox Rabbi in the Russian Empire and Latvia*) reads this not as a literal threat but as a description of Divine pressure so overwhelming that it amounted to the same thing.

Let us not forget that these were people who had just walked through the split of the “Sea of Reeds” on dry land, eaten bread (Manna) that fell from heaven (Exodus 16), and drank water from a rock (from Miriam’s Well as quoted by Midrash Rabbah (Exodus 17:6).

When G-d speaks from a mountain in fire and thunder against that backdrop, “no” is not really an option. When the Israelites stood at Mount Sinai, they uttered one of the most remarkable declarations in Jewish history: **Na’aseh v’nishma**, “**We will do and we will hear/understand**” (Exodus 24:7).

By placing action before comprehension, the Jewish people demonstrated a radical, unquestioning loyalty to G-d’s commandments, pledging to fulfill the Torah even before knowing its full contents. This was no ordinary commitment. The Talmud in Tractate Shabbat 88a, teaches that this act was so noble that angels bestowed two crowns upon each Israelite: one for ‘**doing**’ and one for ‘**understanding**’. It represents the quintessential “leap of faith,” where observance itself becomes the path to understanding, and experiential Judaism takes precedence over intellectual demand.

Yet the Talmud also teaches that this first acceptance was, in some sense, incomplete. The Midrashic tradition understands the Sinai experience as carrying an element of coercion and fear — the mountain was held over them, so to speak. It was only during the events of Purim, centuries later, that the Jewish people reaccepted the Torah entirely of their own free will, but mainly out of Love of Hashem!

The verse in Megillat Esther (9:27) captures this with the phrase *kimu v'kiblu*, “they confirmed and undertook.”

Where Sinai was shadowed by external pressure and **fear**, the Purim re-acceptance arose from **love**, gratitude, and the clear recognition of divine providence, even in a story where G-d’s name is never once mentioned in the text. The hiddenness of G-d throughout the Megillah makes this recognition all the more profound. The Rabbis teach that Purim completed what Sinai began, transforming the Jewish relationship with Torah from obligation into joyful, voluntary devotion.

This devotion to G-d’s Torah, as expressed on Purim, bears potential for a great reward.

“We have an opportune moment right now, before Purim, to bring a great light into the world. In other words, “the acceptance of the Covenant at Sinai” was real, but it was the acceptance of a people who had no real alternative — you cannot say no to a G-d who has just split the sea before your own eyes. (6 million of them!).

The Purim story unfolds in a completely different world. The Book of Esther is the only book in the entire Hebrew Bible that never once mentions the name of G-d — not once, in all ten chapters. The events read, deliberately, like palace intrigue in the Persian court: a vain king, a scheming minister, an unlikely queen.

G-d’s presence must be inferred from the unbelievable and unlikely coincidences that pile up until they can no longer be called coincidences, for as I always maintain and believe there is no coincidences in Judaism. This is **Hester Panim**, the hiding of G-d’s face — and the Rabbis noted that the name Esther itself alludes to the verse in Deuteronomy 31:18, **Haster Astir et Panai, “I will surely hide My face”**.

The context of that verse gives the connection its full weight. It comes from Moses’ final address before his death, in which G-d warns that when the people enter the Holy Land and turn to other gods, He will hide His face from them — Divine concealment as a consequence of faithlessness.

The Rabbis’ connection of Esther’s name to this verse is therefore deeply loaded: the hiding of G-d’s face in Persia is not incidental, but the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. The truth is that the entire Book of Esther is a coded message about Divine concealment.

And it was precisely in this darkest moment of darkness, with no miracles to compel them and no Divine thunder to astonished them into submission, that the Jewish people chose to remain Jews. That choice, made freely, with no supernatural leverage, was the real acceptance of the Sinai Covenant.

At Sinai they accepted. At Purim they confirmed — because this time, they had the genuine freedom to refuse.

But Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l, finds an even deeper root for all of this, buried in an exchange that takes place immediately after the terrible sin of the Golden Calf.

G-d has just watched His newly covenanted people worship an idol only forty days after the thunder of Sinai faded. His verdict is disastrous and incriminating: **"I have seen these people, and they are a stiff-necked people"** (Exodus 32:9).

He intends to destroy them and start over with Moses. Moses intercedes and succeeds — and then makes one of the strangest arguments in the entire Torah. He asks G-d not only to forgive Israel, but to remain among them — and gives as his reason the very character flaw G-d had cited as grounds for their destruction:

וַיַּמְהַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקַּד אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה Moses hastened to bow low to the ground in homage, Exodus 34:8.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים מִצָּאתַי חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֲדֹנָי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּי עִם-קִשְׁיֵנוּ הָיָה וְסָלַחְתָּ לְעֹנֵינוּ וּלְחַטֹּאתֵינוּ וְנִחַלְתָּנוּ:

and said, "If I have gained Your favor, O Hashem, pray, let Hashem go in our midst, even though this is a stiff-necked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for Your own!" Exodus 34:9.

How could Moses possibly invoke the people's obstinacy as a reason for G-d to stay with them, when that same obstinacy was precisely what had driven G-d to want to abandon them in the first place?

The answer, given its most powerful expression by Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum, is that Moses was asking G-d to see this people not only as they were in that moment, but as they would one day become.

Yes, they are stiff-necked in their disobedience now — but the same stubbornness that made them build the Golden Calf will one day make them go to their deaths saying "I believe..."

Nation after nation will demand rejection and denial of their beliefs and that they assimilate; the same "stiff-necked" people will refuse. Empires will offer them survival at the price of conversion; the same "stiff-necked" people will resist.

The very quality that is today their worst failing will one day be their most heroic virtue. So, forgive them, says Moses — not despite who they are, but because of who they will become.

Rabbi Nissenbaum wrote these words in the Warsaw Ghetto. Unfortunately, he did not survive to see their vindication.

This is the thread that connects Sinai, the Golden Calf, and Purim into a single story. When faced with G-d's overwhelming presence at Sinai, Israel disobeyed Him. But, when confronted with His absence in Persia, they remained faithful.

The people who could not resist the Golden Calf are the same people who could not be broken by Haman. The transformation Nissenbaum describes — from obstinate disbelief to obstinate belief — is precisely what Rava means when he says that Purim confirmed what Sinai began in Talmud Tractate Shabbat 88a.

Mordechai embodies this transformation into a single gesture, or rather, in his refusal to make one. The main narrative of the Book of Esther opens with four words that set the entire plot in motion: *“And Mordechai would not bow down”* (Esther 3:2).

Rabbi Sacks captures the irony with precision: there is one thing that is practically and genuinely difficult to do if you have a stiff neck, and that is bow. Mordechai could not bring himself to bow to Haman — and that refusal, that stubbornness and unbending dignity before a man who held the power of life and death, is what set the entire salvation in motion.

That is one of the paradoxes of Purim. The holiday of masks and concealment is also the holiday of the most unmasked moment in Jewish history — the moment when Israel’s faith was stripped of every external prop and shown to be real. The covenant struck in fire at Sinai was ratified in silence in Persia. And in that silence, the stiff-necked people — obstinate, impossible, unkillable — confirmed who they had always been and who they will always be, for eternity. The other paradox is that although it is difficult to imagine two holidays more different than Yom Kippur and Purim! Kabbalah reveals that both Yom Kippur and Purim share a profound similarity in their ability to connect us to the Divine.

The phrase *Yom Kippurim* hints that Yom Kippur is indeed like Purim, pointing to the joy and transformation that lie beneath the solemn surface of the day.

On Yom Kippur, we seek closeness to Hashem through fasting and negation of the physical, peeling away our material layers to reveal the soul’s pure essence. In contrast, Purim teaches us to elevate physicality itself, revealing G-d’s guiding hand even within the seeming randomness of our lives.

The connection between these two Holy days lies in their shared potential for joy and deep spiritual intimacy. Although Yom Kippur is solemn, it is not a day of mourning. The Talmud in Tractate Ta’anit 26b, teaches that it is one of the most joyous days of the year because it offers the chance for a fresh start, cleansed of past mistakes, with the slate wiped clean.

Kabbalah’s teachings go further, emphasizing that the true essence of Yom Kippur is not just repentance but reunion with G-d — *teshuvah* in its deepest sense, a return to our Divine source.

Once atonement is achieved, we can celebrate with the same joy as Purim, rejoicing in our renewed closeness with Hashem.

Yom Kippur is for fasting, while Purim is for feasting!

Purim and Yom Kippur appear to be complete opposites, but the ancient Rabbis say they are really two sides of the same coin. On Yom Kippur Jews consider their own certain mortality, on Purim they celebrate unlikely escape from the clutches of death. On Yom Kippur, Jews confront themselves in the hopes of entering the New Year with a clean slate. On Purim, they celebrate a successful confrontation with their evil attackers.

“Zachor Et Asher Assa Lecha Amalek – Remember what Amalek did to you!”.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with a quote from the “Zohar”, the premier mystical text, which explains that the clue to this unlikely pairing of the names (Purim & Yom Kippurim) is in the names of the festivals themselves:

It is called Purim because of Yom HaKippurim for, in the future, people will rejoice on Yom Kippur and will transform its required afflictions to delight.

Yom Kippur has many Hebrew names, including the pluralized form: Yom HaKippurim. While the word *kippurim* literally means atonements, if we adjust one vowel and read it as *kappurim*, then its meaning becomes “like Purim.” This is a clue, says the Zohar, in Tikkunei Zohar 57b:4, to the future purpose of Yom Kippur, in the Messianic era, when it will become a day not of affliction, but of delight — just like Purim.

AM ISRAEL CHAI !

CHAG PURIM SAME'ACH UMEVADE'ACH !

Looking Forward to Seeing Y'all At Our Purim Festivities, Monday, March 2, 2026, at 6:00 pm for the reading of the Megillat Esther followed by our one-of-a-kind Costume Contest with sensational prizes and scrumptious dinner.

Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner



President's Message

Last month I wrote about the distressing topic of the *apikorsim*, apostates, among us who also fail to support us when we are under threat and instead run to support our enemies. This is a downer of a subject, for sure, so I would like to leave that behind, yet address a somewhat related topic: the consequences to themselves of our Jewish brothers and sisters who choose to distance themselves from Judaism, from Torah, from the Jewish people, and from support of our homeland, Israel. These are folks, in other words, who may not necessarily have turned on the rest of us but who have separated themselves from G-d and His *mitzvot*. What are the results, personally?

This is an interesting question and, according to Torah, there is an interesting consequence. No, it's not quite the same as in other faiths, with eternal lakes of fire and the like. For us the receipt, if you will, is more nuanced, but the debt that is paid is just as consequential and the risk that one takes is quite treacherous.

In several places in Torah, we learn that when Jews turn away from our commandments and resist the call to be "a holy people unto the L-rd," G-d will "hide His face," withdrawing His support for and protection of us and letting us be subject to the natural laws of the world, with all sorts of negative consequences. In other words, distancing oneself from Judaism and Torah is self-reinforcing, for us as a whole and for each of us individually. In the end, we will be "cut off from our people." The more we cut ourselves off, G-d forbid, and are then in turn even further cut off, the easier it becomes to do and we may even believe that we are being wise or righteous.

This is a truth of faith that is apparently so universal that it is acknowledged even in other religious traditions besides ours. One is reminded of the verse in the Christian scriptures, in Thessalonians, that says that if one fails to hew to divine precepts, then G-d will send a "strong delusion." As well, in Islam the Qur'an notes that those who reject the truth will find a seal placed over their heart; in Hinduism the Gita warns that when one turns away from spiritual discipline they will fall under the influence of darkness; and according to Buddhism when you turn away from the right path your consciousness will become deluded. So, this idea appears to be universal among traditions of faith.

Why do people risk this? Why do Jews eschew our beautiful religious and moral traditions, enshrined in the *mitzvot* which we are told in Deuteronomy were given to us for "*I'tov lanu*," for our own good, for our spiritual and character refinement? A life of Jewish commitment—in whichever ways the respective Jewish movements/denominations define this—is a wonderful, fulfilling life, so why separate oneself from that? I'm not a psychoanalyst, so I'm afraid that I don't have a convincing answer. Some may be fearful of seeming out of step with the *zeitgeist*, which lately rewards antipathy toward Israel and Jews. Or they may simply feel that religious identity or affiliation, in general, is not their cup of tea. Or they simply may not like the worship options available in their local community. Or, who knows? So, they may start to build an emotional wall between themselves and the rest of our people. What a shame. As observant Jews, we maybe have a hard time relating to this, myself included. But do know that, according to Torah, there may be a price to pay.

The Rabbis explain that this is not, of course, because G-d is vindictive, as in, "That'll show 'em." Not at all! It's simply that we bear the results of our actions, or non-actions. Those who separate themselves from our faith and from our people risk bringing the consequences on themselves. Thankfully, though, it doesn't have to be forever. In time, *bezrat Hashem*, disillusioned, dispirited, separated Jews will have an awakening and come to a realization that committing to our faith is the most natural thing that we can do—it's an in-born call tugging on each Jewish *neshamah*. If there are people in our life whom this kind of alienation from our faith describes, let's pray for them, model the joy of a committed Jewish life, and invite them in, so to speak, whenever we get the chance. That includes inviting them to join us for services and holidays at *shul*, and welcoming them in every way.

Finally, I'm reminded of something that was said by the late Rabbi Samuel Karff, z"l. For those who don't know of him, Rabbi Karff was considered the dean of Texas rabbis for many years. He was a past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a former editor of the *Journal of Reform Judaism*, on the faculty of the University of Chicago and Rice University, and beginning over 50 years ago had the pulpit at Congregation Beth Israel in Houston until he retired in 1999 and then founded what became the McGovern Center for Humanities and Ethics at Texas Medical Center. Also, incidentally, he was my childhood rabbi in Chicago, and a great *mensch*. In 2005, he published a wonderful book entitled, *Permission to Believe: Finding Faith in Troubled Times*. He noted that in his discussions over the years with Jews who were estranged from Judaism it seemed that so many of them truly wished that they could be more observant and were looking to him to say something that would help them to fulfill their "deep longing for permission to believe." In my observation, his take was right on the money: so many people who aren't connected to Judaism and to their fellow Jews wish deep down that they could be and perhaps simply need a convincing reason to begin.

This is a helpful reminder to each one of us at CAJ that we can serve as a model for the joy of living a religiously observant Jewish life. There's no telling whom we might reach by exemplifying in the way that we live the wonderful fruits of living Jewishly and being involved in the religious life of our Jewish community. There may well be Jews out there who feel alienated from our faith and from our people and who are looking for something to convince them that they should try joining with us. We can be that living witness to them. This is something for each of us to keep in mind throughout the coming year.

L'shalom,
Jeff Levin

AGUDATH JACOB SISTERHOOD

Topic: Inez Bonneville's Zoom Meeting

Time: March. 10, 2026 05:30 PM

Every month on the Second Tue

Meeting ID: 797 4634 9817

Passcode: 2RJKfU



COME ONE AND COME ALL

TO THE CONGREGATION AGUDATH JACOB'S PURIM FESTIVITIES!! 😊 ✨

- ❖ Please come wearing a costume, Jewish-themed or whatever your choice is. Prizes for the Best Child, Best Adult and Best Overall costume! The festivities begin on Monday March 2, 2026 @ 6:00.
- ❖ We will read from the Megillah Esther, and have yummy eats and treats and let's have a celebration! ✨

The sisterhood has prepared delicious homemade Hamantaschen, Also, there will be a salad bar AND PIZZA!!! So come dressed up in costume and let's PARTY!! 😊



Donations are encouraged.



Sisterhood Hard at work making Hamantaschen. 😊

March Service Schedule

Purim Monday March 2
 Purim Service begins @ 6:00 pm

Friday, March 6

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm
 Candle Lighting 6:13 pm

Saturday, March 7

Shacharit 10:00 am
 Shabbat Ends 7:07 pm

Friday, March 14

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm
 Candle Lighting 7:18 pm

Saturday, March 15

Shacharit 10:00 am
 Shabbat Ends 8:12 pm

Friday, March 21

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm
 Candle Lighting 7:22 pm

Saturday, March 22

Shacharit 10:00 am
 Shabbat Ends 8:17 pm

Friday, March 28

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm
 Candle Lighting 7:27 pm

Saturday, March 29

Shacharit 10:00 am
 Shabbat Ends 8:22 pm



March 15

Gerald Bonnevillie
Anna Papernov

March 16

Richard Alpert

March 27

Susan Silver

March 22

Susan & Abbye Silver



THANK YOU for your donations in February!

Shabbat

Susan Raphael
Jeff Levin
Joseph Settle

Inez Bonneville
Paty Haessly
Steve & Carrie Draher

George & Kathleen
Keller

In Memory Of

Mark Papernov
Semyon & Anna
Papernov

Anna Gulman
Jeff Levin

Dr. Stanley Hersh
Florence Hersh
Judy Hersh
Leibel Harelík
Harry Harelík

Dominic Keller
George & Kathleen
Keller
Paul Leka
Paul & Paula Farmer

In Honor of Esther Lipinsky's 100th Birthday - Jeff Wolf and
Michaele Brown



The following names of dearly departed will be read aloud by the Rabbi preceding the Mourner's Kaddish on Shabbat morning. It is fitting and customary that the nearest of kin be present in the synagogue for the recitation of this special prayer in their memory. Attendance not only honors the departed but also enhances and guarantees that a Minyan is present to recite the Kaddish.

Kaddish will be read on March 6

Adar 17	Mrs. B Genecov*
	Bessie Zoblotsky*
Adar 18	Blanche R Ellis*
	Louis Esserman*
	Rebecca Hayman*
	William Lender
	Seymour Neuwirth*
	Deana Stupak
	Robert Todd
Adar 19	Jack Blutman
	Mrs. I Chodorow*
	Esther Harris
	Anna Jacobson*
	Ben Keen*
	Max Wise*
Adar 20	I J Gollob*
	Eli Hoffman*
	Norma Norat
Adar 21	Harry Brodkey*
	Pearl Greenfield*
	Frank Israel
	Thelma Lipinsky*
	Bessie Novy*
Adar 22	Carlos Sifuentes
Adar 23	Anna Goldman Hersh*

Kaddish will be read on March 13

Adar 24	Mrs. Harry Brodkey*
	Robert Gurkoff
	Dave Wizig*
Adar 25	Emanuel Kestner*
	Ana Nieves

Adar 27	Gerardo Romero
	Goldie Stern
Adar 28	Zahira Meiling Camacho
Adar 29	Secil Chazanov*
	Sherwin Fischman
	Ethel Cecile Israel*
	Bessie Katz
	Pamela Powell
	Sophia Rubenstein
	Dorothy Marie Taub*
Nisan 1	Esther Jornitzky*
	Morris Wise*

Kaddish will be read on March 20

Nisan 3	Leon T Aronson*
	Israel Goodman*
	Molly R Schwartz*
	Phillip Harold Schwartz*
Nisan 4	Beatrice Dorman Drainman
	Florence Hendler Feldt*
	Shirley Helfer
	Mrs. Meyer (Freda) Hoffman*
Nissan 5	A Adelman*
	Lum Howeth
	Dora Torchin*
Nissan 6	Ada Ellis
	Minnie Hornstein Feldt*
	Sophia Harris*
Nissan 7	Somone Bauer*
Nissan 8	Minnie Hoffman*
	Lena Aronson Lynn*
Nissan 9	Bella (Birdie) Citrin
Nissan 10	Abe Greenberg*
	Louis Genecov
Nissan 11	Willie Bauer*

Frank Chazanow*
Evelyn Chernoff

Kaddish will be read on March 27

Nissan 12	Harry Leeson Adler*
Nissan 13	Bernard Rapoport*
Nissan 14	Mitchell M Marcus Jack Ruttenberg*
Nissan 15	Mrs. Adolph Rubel* David Stein Mollie I Wiseman*