

PURIM

PLAYING IS A SERIOUS BUSINESS!

In a parent-teacher meeting at my son's school, the teacher explained the role of playing in children's life: the importance of each game in their physical, cognitive and emotional development. To conclude with the meeting, the teacher said: "As you can see, playing is a serious business!"

In general, we associate religion with formality and solemnity. The services for Yom Kippur would be a classic example of what we consider a serious religious experience.

Therefore, in many kehillot, the playful spirit of Purim is considered as something mainly childish and is reserved exclusively for children, leaving adults to a role of mere spectators.

But, paraphrasing my son's teacher, "in Purim, playing is a serious business!"

It's not in vain that our tradition has established a strong connection between Yom Kippur and Purim, which relies on the linguistic similarity between the words kiPPUR-PURim. They are the two most important parts of a mature spiritual life: the ceremony and the game.

The game appears in Purim in many aspects, but mainly in the use of masks and costumes.

There are various explanations to the use of masks and costumes in Purim. One states that the masks symbolize the *masked* presence of God in the story of Purim, as the name of God is never explicitly mentioned in the tale.

Another explanation refers to the double identity of several characters in the story: a king that didn't rule, a faithful minister that really wanted to be the king, a queen that hid her condition of Jew.

This last explanation for the use of masks and costumes invites us to explore and play with our multiple identities, including our Jewish identity: how we present it or hide it, or how we

affirm it or deny it.

Two important words of this festivity indicate this game of hiding and revealing identities, which happens when we disguise ourselves: **Esther**, the heroine of our tale, and **Megilla**, the scroll that contains the story of Purim. Esther has the same root as the word *Nistar*, which means "hidden". Megilla has the same root as the word *Galui*, which means "revealed".

A Jewish person was taking a long trip. When he arrived to a city in the middle of the night, he desperately searched for a place to spend the night, but he only found a shelter filled with soldiers. By begging to the manager, he managed to stay in the General's room, who was elsewhere for the night. The only condition was that he must leave before the General's arrival in the morning. The traveler was awoken by the landlord when it was still dark, so he mistakenly put on the General's uniform, and left the room. When he walked by a window and saw his reflection, he said: "This manager! He has awoken the General instead of myself!"

The ability to work with our multiple identities in community and in an environment of fun and relaxation is just a reflection of maturity and spiritual depth.

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