



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Mendy Portnoy



As winter disappears and Purim is just round the corner, things are changing. The Old City is once again bustling with visitors of all backgrounds and ages. From *Toldos Aaron* kindergarten *Chumash* parties; to Korean Pilgrimages; or anyone who Sunways (the tour group that makes everyone wear ridiculous yellow hats). We can even feel a change in the *Bet Hamidrash* location of many heated discussions regarding Purim.

Even the *NaNach* trance in *Kikar Zion* is changing. They now, unbelievably, have one or two Purim songs - with different words! (To those parents who are unfamiliar with what *Nanach* trance is, it's the music which a branch of the *Breslov Chasidim* -the *Nanachs* - blast out of amplifiers attached to two big white vans at the bottom of Ben Yehuda. Because they've never been particularly good with lyrics, they have very few tracks to which the words are not "*Na Nach Nachman Nachman Meuman.*")

Every single supermarket, corner shop and newsagent - or in fact any room with a door - has now become a *Purim* shop selling fancy dress costumes and every kind of spray, foam and glitter with which small children can cause huge amounts of destruction. You can feel the vibes!

However, there is something which really puzzles me. Right now, of all times, when Israel is faced with threats from so many different directions (ironically many from inside its own government), how is it that people are able to get into this festive spirit, and to go about their day-to-day activities, seemingly without a care in the world?

The President of Iran, Achmed Machmoud Al Jazeera Dinidinjad, has made it his mission to blow our country off the face of the earth - I'm not a rocket or nuclear scientist, but rumor has it that he's not so far away from being able to do just that.

We are living in dangerous times for the Jews - especially in Israel. Yet we go on with our daily lives, unfazed, and looking forward to the upcoming holiday -

Purim. How? Surely it's not because people are just oblivious to what's going on - there are enough problems within Israel to make anyone worried!

I don't know how or why this is, but since I got to Israel, I have noticed that there is a huge, heart-warming sense of unity during the build up to and on the *Chagim* themselves. People come together and start to feel a common purpose regardless of the size, shape or material of their *kippa*. There is a wide sense of tolerance for people who may not have anything in common with one another.

Just last night I noticed outside one of the pizza stores here, a typical *Mea Shearim Chassid* was engrossed in an intense conversation about *Purim* with a not-yet-so-religious (I would have been very very scared to have bumped into him on my own) looking guy who worked in the pizza store. This reminded me of *Chanuka*, when I was out with a few friends in town when we noticed three *Chabad Bochurim*, armed with donuts, a small menorah, and a lot of happiness entering one of the restaurants. After about 5 minutes, there was a rock version of *Maoz Tzur* blaring from the sound system, with everyone inside singing along. The waiters put on their *Yechi Hamelech Kippot* and lit the menorah.

There is a pattern in history. During this time of the year, on many occasions throughout history, the Jews had triumphant victories. In fact, the *Mishna Berura* states that if one has a court case, he should try and schedule it for the month of *Adar*, because this is considered a good time for the Jews.

I hope and pray that this year history will once again repeat itself, and the enemies of the Jewish people will not prevail. If through unity and loving every Jew, regardless of how incredibly different he or she may be, we can show *Hashem* that we do in fact know how to act as one people and one family, then He will act as our father and make us triumphant over our enemies once more!

Mendy graduated from Jewish Grammar, Manchester, England. Planning on staying in Israel next year. Favorite aspect at Orayta is the living in the Old City.