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If you don't know about Purim, a quick overview: The Jews were going to be slaughtered, and it didn't happen. This episode of being saved from something that was unlikely to leave us living has resulted in four things to do annually – review the story, celebrate as a group, give gifts of food to everyone so all can celebrate, and give money to the poor as well. When we ourselves have been saved from something – like cancer, or a deadly car crash – we can choose to do the same thing, to commemorate the positive part of the unexpected.

Now, on to the main topic for today.

Sometimes our world turns topsy-turvy. This can happen to anybody, on any side of any divide you might wish to provide. The secondary question often is, "What do I do now?" (The primary question is usually, "Why me?" and I don't often have an answer to that. When I do, it is because the answer is already known to the one doing the questioning.)

The story of Esther, which is read by Jews during the holiday of Purim (this year on Wednesday, March 4th and Thursday March 5th), can give us some possible responses when life throws us curve balls. Queen Vashti opted to do nothing (and may not have had a choice, after her first one, on what would actually happen) which is sometimes the only choice visible. From what the text tells us about her, choosing to do nothing takes you outside of the story. The story continues, and you might continue, but the two of you will be less likely to interact in the future.

You can opt for destruction. The prime enemy within the story (who may have been the original "he whose name is not supposed to be heard"), at each stage where somebody kept him from doing all that he intended to do, chooses to destroy. He is angry with Mordechai, who won't acknowledge his supposed superiority, so he decides to arrange for Mordechai's assassination along with the rest of Mordechai's people. When Mordechai ruins his good spirits after having dinner with the King and current Queen, he opts to speed up Mordechai's physical execution, with the King's permission. (Don't worry, he winds up not getting it.) In the end, the prime enemy's desire for the destruction of others rebounds on his head, and he (along with his family and those who share his attitudes) are destroyed instead.

You can opt to work towards life and survival. When the edict declaring open season on the Jews was announced, Mordechai went to ask the current Queen to intercede in some fashion. She did, as she would have been murdered along with the rest of them, making it clear that it was only because the Jews would have been murdered that she was making any kind of complaint.

You can choose to provide consistency. The King is not actually known for the wisdom of most of his decisions within this story, yet he remains the King throughout the entire document. When he discovers that his newly chosen Queen was scheduled to be destroyed by his newly chosen chief advisor, who was also planning on destroying the person who saved his life, it is easy to provide instant karma for the chief advisor. What is difficult was knowing exactly what to do next besides rewarding the life-saving types near him. So he stayed out of the way, letting them do their life-saving thing, while he merely provided the royal imprimatur.

One of the philosophical exercises the holiday of Purim affords us during the good years is discussing when each of these reactions leads to a good end, and when each of these reactions fails to provide solace in a crazy world.