

## ***Voices: Jewish Holiday of Acceptance***

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The story of the Jewish holiday of Purim sounds like it could have been written by crime novelist Raymond Chandler. A pretty young dame with a secret marries a guy with a whole lot of dough. What follows is a tale of intrigue, deception, money, sex, murder and, ultimately, redemption.

It's also a story of intermarriage. The pretty young dame was Esther, and she had to hide her Jewish identity from the Persian king, Ahashuerus.

But all those adult-themed components of the story — the thinly veiled sexual innuendoes, the horrendous slaughter of the villain Haman's relatives in revenge for his misdeeds, and any difficult questions about an intermarriage gone right — are swept under the rug to create a kinder, gentler holiday we can share with our children.

Esther was raised in a household, where the religion of power and influence was of greater importance than the religion of her ancestors. Synagogue attendance and Jewish education were not priorities.

So when she meets someone who isn't Jewish but can give her everything she wants and more, they marry. Eventually she comes to identify strongly with her people and, luckily for all of us, her husband the king also throws in his lot with the Jews at a crucial moment in history.

Today, it's no secret that intermarriage is not looked upon favorably by many in the Jewish community. Other ethnic and religious groups in America feel challenged by intermarriage as well. In extreme cases, family ties are severed, but mostly it causes a lot of heartache. The reason is usually attributed to assimilation. Parents fear that if their children marry outside of the religion, the religion won't last very long.

But that doesn't have to be the case. Certainly some Jews have left the fold, but we also have hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish family members who are equally dedicated to preserving the Jewish identity. Purim is a good opportunity to honor and thank them.

In the Purim story, Esther and her uncle Mordechai were heroes, but so was King Ahashuerus, who "married in" to the Jewish people. If we are willing to bring the intermarried into our Jewish family, we too will live to see another day.

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