

Parashah Tzav has a unique place in our calendar. In leap years like this one it falls just before or after Purim, in the month of Adar II. Otherwise, it coincides with Shabbat HaGadol, the Shabbat before Pesach. The Talmud (Megillah 1:4) stipulates that in leap years Purim should be observed in Adar II so that it is closer to Pesach in order to connect these two holidays, which commemorate two different types of redemption. The juxtaposition of Parashah Tzav with Purim or Pesach adds to the many parallels between these two holidays, which actually almost mirror each other. One of the most prevalent teachings concerning the month of Adar is that it is a time of increasing joy (Talmud Ta'anit 29a), which in leap years is doubled. Rashi teaches that our joy increases during Adar because the holidays of Purim and Pesach remind us of the redemption that made them possible. In fact, Talmud Pesachim 6b tells us to begin studying the laws of Pesach 30 days before it begins – i.e., on Purim, the culmination of our Adar joy. One of the elements linking these holidays is that beginning with Nisan, the first month of the liturgical year and the month in which Pesach occurs, lots (*purim*) were cast before Haman to determine the date on which the Jews of the kingdom would be annihilated. This continued daily until Adar, the 12th month, when Haman approached King Achashverosh and received approval to enact his evil plan. For the enslaved Israelites in Egypt, the month of Nisan was equally pivotal, but the people were at a vastly different place in their development. Weak, subservient, and barely cohesive, the Israelites were not in a position to change their destiny on their own. They required HaShem's overt and forceful intervention. The succession of miracles that secured their release and escape far overpowered the human element. Significantly, and for this very reason, Moses is not directly mentioned at all in the Pesach Haggadah. HaShem is front and center, as it should be. During their 40-year trek through the desert this motley group of former slaves had to learn not only how to coalesce as a people, but most importantly, how to express their gratitude to HaShem. In addition to the rules surrounding worship in the *mishkan* that are laid out in our parashah, this also entails enacting laws that unite the people in the common goal of ensuring the wellbeing of all of HaShem's creation – the laws that still define us as a people today. Their human leader was Moses, but he acted solely at the bidding of HaShem, whose constant and obvious presence was imperative for their survival and success. A millennium later, the Jewish people are no longer dependent on overt miracles, or on someone who functions more like a babysitter than a leader. This is symbolically reflected in our calendar. Pesach, which marks our redemption from Egyptian slavery and the beginning of our peoplehood, takes place in the first month, the springtime of our lives, when we are as dependent as newborn infants. Purim occurs in the 12th month, when we are older and able to assume adult responsibilities. We have internalized the concept of our unseen God, and we know how to maintain cohesion even in exile, as the Purim story recounts. Although our human foibles have caused us to experience many setbacks and much tragedy over these thousand years, we have succeeded in developing an identity, and we have learned to trust HaShem without having to experience the overt miracles our ancestors needed. In the Purim story, humans are center stage, and the Megillah does not mention HaShem at all. Moses only had the courage to challenge Pharaoh because he was under the command and protection of HaShem. He was the conductor, but HaShem composed and performed the music. In contrast, the courage of Mordechai and Esther derived from their identity, which was founded on trust in our eternal covenant with HaShem. Midrash Mishlei 9 teaches that because of Esther, and based on Megillat Esther 9:28: ("And the days of Purim will not be rescinded from the Jews."), in the world-to-come all of the holidays are to be nullified, except Purim and Yom Kippur, which will endure forever. Esther was initially as reluctant as Moses to take the initiative, but whereas Moses needed HaShem's direct and tangible assistance, Esther understood that even if she should refuse, HaShem would find other means to save her people. As a first generation diaspora Jew in a culture that afforded her people the freedom both to assimilate and to retain their identity, she had many options. As queen, she was uniquely positioned to change the course of events, but the choice was entirely up to her and the risks were enormous. Unlike her (justifiably) fearful ancestors a millennium earlier, Esther did not flinch in the face of danger and uncertainty. Fortified by fasting and prayer, she accepted her responsibility as a Jew to help fight evil and ensure justice for her people, and ultimately for all of HaShem's creation. Year for year Megillat Esther inspires us to act accordingly, because, as we will read in the Pesach Haggadah, "In every generation they rise up to destroy us, and the Holy One of Blessing rescues us from their hands." But we dare not sit back and wait for miracles. Like Mordechai and Esther, and many others after them, we must take the initiative and do all we can to oppose baseless hatred, prejudice and cruelty wherever and whenever we are given the opportunity. It is a *mitzvah* (same root as *tzav*), a commandment. That is the true message of that old saw, "They tried to kill us; we won; let's eat." *Aleinu* – it's upon us!

Chag Purim sameach, and Shabbat shalom!