

The holiday of Purim is one filled with revelry. We wear costumes, we drink, we eat, we yell at the sound of Haman's name. All of the features of Purim disguise one of its essential points: Evil exists in the world.

Evil's existence is a contentious issue in some circles. In fact, for some time, a class of people has existed that denies the reality of evil altogether. Certain events, however, jar us out of our complacency and scream at us to recognize that evil is a feature of this world.

The attack on the Capitol on January 6 was one such event. During the second impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump, the prosecution played footage from that day, and the horror of it struck me even more powerfully than it did when the events themselves transpired.

What is perhaps most troubling about the insurrection of January 6 is the attitude of the participants. They believed that they were doing something good, something heroic. In fact, this is not an aberration when we look at evil in the world. Many people who do evil in the world claim that they are actually doing good. With that in mind, we can see how the problem of good and evil could be denied or at least cause terrible confusion. Evil's way is not to wear its true face. It masquerades, like a person wearing a mask on Purim, as good. Even the Nazis and the Soviets framed their actions in terms of a concept of good.

Today, we witness the strongest attacks against Israel coming from the most idealistic quarter of society. The people who are most interested in how to improve the world advocate for the isolation, sanctioning, and boycotting of Israel. How is this possible?

No one here needs to be told that human beings are complicated creatures. What makes us complicated is our imperfection. That imperfection manifests and inconsistency, and no where else is this more in evidence than with respect to Israel.

President Biden will have to navigate a difficult issue during his presidency. He will have to address Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. Iran has done all that is possible to muddle the issue of good and evil. As it pursues a nuclear weapon, it frames this pursuit as something good –

either a form of self-protection or access to a resource, nuclear energy – which will improve the welfare of its citizens.

We who love Israel know, however, that Iran is an evil actor in the arena of geopolitics. Its support for Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon are just two outstanding examples of how the Islamic Republic seeks to wreak havoc in the region.

I am watching President Biden's approach to this issue with great interest. That interest is not a detachment but a passionate involvement. In short, how will President Biden tackle the problem of evil. To be sure, he will encounter many voices that convince him that he must make a deal – any deal – with the Iranians because war is surely a kind of evil and must be avoided.

By framing the issue as one of war and peace, President Biden can gain the upper hand of morality and identify his opponents as hawks and warmongers. That would be a highly unfortunate course to follow, but it is tempting. The prospect of war is alarming.

Yet I assure you that no country wants war less than Israel. Watch very carefully as the issue of Iran's nuclear program unfolds, and keep this in mind. Israel is a seeker of peace. What the Jewish people has learned, however, through its travails in history is that to be an effective seeker of peace, one also has to be capable of going to war. Israel has proved time and again that it is capable on the battlefield.

I sometimes imagine what will happen if Israel does attack Iran. A kind of chaos would ensue. A vortex would open up, and the Jewish people in the U.S. and around the world will be harassed and even persecuted.

All this is reason for Israel to seek a solution to this threat that is non-military. As American Jews, we should stay informed about how this issue develops so that we can communicate with our elected officials that the pressure needs to be kept on Iran and sanctions need to increase, not diminish, in order to weaken this regime.

## Purim Tetzavah

Evil is a present force in our world. The Jewish people has consistently encountered evil in its course through history, and this time is no different.

The story of Purim is a reminder that evil is real. Haman's attempt to destroy the Jewish people – an extension of the attacks of Amalek when Israel left Egypt – is one of the Bible's boldest accounts of evil. In that story, the ending is happy. Evil is defeated. Israel survives and even flourishes. One hopes that our present confrontation with evil will conclude in the same way, but it won't unless we are vigilante.

I hope President Biden has success in every one of his endeavors, including his attempt to prevent Iranian nuclearization. I will not, however, stand by silently as he pursues whatever plan seems appropriate. I hope that he will consult with the Prime Minister of Israel both before and after the upcoming election to formulate a plan that takes into account Israel's deep concerns about Iran's behavior in the region.

The irony is not lost on me that I am speaking about the danger of Iran by employing a text that is set in ancient Persia. History has taken an awful and stranger turn here, and the situation is beyond uncanny. Nevertheless, we must keep our heads and our resolve. We have a responsibility to ourselves, our ancestors, the martyrs, our children, and grandchildren to do what is in our power to prevent the triumph of evil especially when that evil has its sights set on Jerusalem.

The conviction that good and evil exist in the world is one of the Torah's most fundamental teachings. The good can never be complacent, for the evil are aggressive and do not stop unless they are stopped.

Amidst the jocularly and fun of Purim, a deeply serious message is before us, and we should take it seriously.