

Rebbetzin's Corner
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Justin Long

Purim offers us a chance to think about hospitality. The megillah opens with a feast and a hostess who draws the line at how far she will go to entertain her guests. Her successor throws a series of feasts, complete with some palace politics and the resulting execution of a guest. Today, we commemorate these events (and the attempted genocide followed by a Jewish rampage) with public drunkenness and a sort of Halloween in reverse, where children in costumes give treats to neighbors.

At our house, we tend toward fewer stripteases and we go lightly on the executions. But the questions of 1) how best to entertain a guest; 2) how to use a party for broader purposes; and 3) how far outside the home to extend our hospitality remain tricky issues.

First, even the most open host should feel free to throw a sheet over private parts of the home. If you've got your underthings drying on a rack in the utility closet, you can tell guests that that room is not part of the guided tour. Simple enough. Perhaps, though, Vashti's objection to Ahasuerus's request was about more than the affront to her modesty. Passive entertainment, like sitting around watching a performance by someone else, can leave guests who presumably have interesting things to say to each other feeling silenced. (The Super Bowl, and to a lesser degree, March Madness, is a rare exception where group TV viewing is okay). Keep your guests talking! Everyone likes feeling that their conversational contribution to the party is appreciated.

On the second point, today we would probably frown on inviting someone over for dinner only so that we could see their face when we reveal that we are destroying them. But not all politicking breaches decorum. Using a dinner party to set up a strong job candidate with a seeking employer, or to connect two people who might be romantically attracted, or to save the Jewish people, remain perfectly acceptable uses of the power of hospitality. If that's your plan, make sure your guests know when you invite them whom else you expect to join the party.

Finally, we can and should adopt an expansive view of our "home" and our responsibility as hosts. When we are in the synagogue, we can all feel comfortable welcoming newcomers as if the synagogue were our own home. We feed our guests and offer them a festive beverage. We can apply the same principles to our neighborhoods, and even our nation.