

## PURIM AND MEDICAID CUTS

There is a family on my block that flies a different flag from their house based on the seasons of the year. They also hoist special banners that make appearances on certain holidays. (As I write this in mid-February, the flag is filled with hearts) My son Gabriel loves to talk about the flag *du jour* as we walk Zoey to Flynn Park, and the other day he asked what kind of flag would fly from the house on Purim. "Upside down," I replied.

The story contained in the Book of Esther is filled with fantasy, hyperbole and caricature. If it were not canonized in the Hebrew Bible and not itself the origin of the Purim story, this tale of palace intrigue would rank with the best of Purim *spies*, the no-holds barred parodies performed at this season in synagogues around the world. Haman's diabolical plot to wipe out the Jews leads to his own destruction! Instead of the planned pogrom against the Jews, the story ends with a Jewish massacre against anti-Semites! Through their acts of courage, Esther and Mordechai are elevated from obscurity to royalty! No wonder we're obliged to treat the Purim holiday as farce and allow the carnival atmosphere to so confuse us that we can no longer tell the difference between Haman and Mordechai.

And yet, and yet...We know from our actual history that stereotypes have led to unspeakable cruelty and worse; that a people can be so victimized that they resort to imitating the worst behavior of their victimizers; and that ordinary people acting with righteousness can reverse the trend and give us hope that goodness can prevail.

We are, on the eve of Purim, facing a modern day evil plot hatched out of stereotypes and indifference. The proposed \$600 million cuts in Medicaid for the Missouri State Budget for 2006 presupposes that many of the people (60, 714 working families to be exact) who benefit from state-sponsored health care are not somehow needy enough and are exploiting the system. With the cuts, our health care system will only be able to provide for the most desperate, creating a state-sponsored threat against many of the people we have come to know and love as we work for justice and compassion in our *sukkat shalom*-the clients of our health clinic and food pantry, the guests we serve at the Trinity lunch program, the children who shop for free at The Back-To-School Store. Our tradition is clear-God, the heart of the world, is most open to the most vulnerable, thereby teaching our own hearts where to direct our compassionate actions. To overcome a financial deficit by causing suffering, pain and possible death to children, the elderly and the disabled is to invite a moral deficit that is far worse. As our Purim story teaches, the consequences of victimization are most grave, and so we must act as Esther and Mordechai before it is too late. Please refer to our new advocacy page on the CRC website to learn about ways to raise your voice and stop the cuts.

Celebrating Purim gives us a day to imagine that we can blot out evil through disguising ourselves, jeering, and self-deprecating humor. The next day we are hopefully more prepared to get on with the real challenges of building a more just, loving and compassionate society. Maybe this is why CRC does Purim so well-we know it is part of the spiritual program towards *tikkun*! Join us under the upside down flag as we pass on the zany traditions to our children at the **carnival on Sunday, March 20 at 1:00**, display the creative side of Judaism at the **reading of the Magillah on Thursday, March 24 at 7:00**, and laugh out loud at **Café Oy Veh, our Purim shtick extraordinaire, on Friday, March 25 after 7:30 services.**

B'Ahavah (With love),

Rabbi Randy