

March 10, 2017

Dear Friends,

Are you too quick to judge? Many of us are. When you're kind enough to hold a door open for stranger but don't receive a thank you, do you think "what a jerk?" Perhaps you could begin to think "I wonder what's going on in that person's life that is so distracting for him?"

This past Sunday, Saul and I spent a few hours, as we do each year, lending our hands to our synagogue's Shalach Manot project. This wonderful, but chaotic task brings the many arms of our shul together, including the Religious School children. At one point in the morning, Saul wondered aloud about our community's need for our parking lot "crossing guard" during Hebrew School hours. Confused by his comment, I asked him to describe this "crossing guard" to me. Well, the long story short is that he was referring to Midway Jewish Center's hardworking Director of Operations, who happened to be donning her literal and figurative "safety attire" at the time. This is just a silly example of a rush to judgment based on one's appearance.

Tomorrow night, as we come together for the first of the two readings of the Megillah, we will be reminded that Purim is all about the *hiding*. Esther hides her Jewish identity from King Achashverosh. Haman hides his evil side from the King. And, as our tradition teaches, the name of God does not appear in the written account of Purim...maybe even God is hidden in the Purim story!

Jews have a custom of wearing costumes on Purim. Dressing up as someone or something gives us an opportunity to either give voice to a part of ourselves that might otherwise be hidden or, conversely, the costume might hide away parts of ourselves that we prefer not be seen. Also on Purim, Jews have a custom of eating delicious hamantaschen, cookies that have a surprise filling waiting to be discovered. This treat picks up the aforementioned theme and reminds noshers that there is usually more below than what we see on the surface.

This Purim truth about identity is one that is relevant year round. We should do our best not to make assumptions about people based on their appearances or assumed backgrounds. We should make the effort to see what lies under the facade because, like our yummy hamantaschen, there are likely to be some wonderful revelations.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach!

Grace