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Area Jews find parallels to today as ancient holiday of Purim arrives

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As Jewish people across metro Detroit celebrate Purim this weekend -- with costume parties marking victory over a Persian leader centuries ago -- some say history is repeating itself.

Purim is traditionally a joyous time that recalls how Jews were saved from extermination in Persia about 2,500 years ago. In Michigan, synagogues and temples are to hold parties and readings from the Book of Esther tonight and Sunday to retell the story.

It's a narrative that is relevant today as Jews worldwide worry about Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has said the Holocaust is a myth and Israel is a fake regime to be wiped off the map, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

He's compared to Haman, the Persian leader in the Purim story who plots to kill Jews.

"He's a modern-day Haman," said Rabbi Aaron Starr, director of education and youth at Congregation Shaarey Zedek, a synagogue in Southfield.

Since World War II, many Jews have seen Adolf Hitler as a modern Haman.

"Purim really resonates with the Jewish diaspora," Starr said. "In every generation, there is someone ignorant who has risen to power with the plan to persecute, oppress, or worse, annihilate Jews."

At the same time, "Purim is a day to be happy," said Rabbi Jason Miller of Tamarack Camps in Ortonville and Congregation T'chayah in Oak Park. "On Purim, we should put aside our fears, have fun."

At Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills, Rabbi Aaron Bergman said he hopes that Jews and Iranians can get along, as they have in the past.

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