



Dancing Hora with Evil Puppets

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Uncompressed Thinking

A note before the reflection:

The positions and associations expressed in this essay are mine. They are not offered as a political argument or as an attempt to persuade anyone into a platform. I am not entering polemics here. I am trying to formulate, in a readable way, a chain of thoughts and images that came to me after the Israel Day Parade in New York City — thoughts about hatred, absurdity, memory, humor, and the strange power of making evil ridiculous.

The names that appear here are not meant as a historian's catalog. They belong to the imagined circle of this essay — some ancient, some modern, some symbolic, all reduced for a moment to the flat helplessness of puppets. On one side stand the figures who, in Jewish memory or in modern history, came to represent hatred of Jews and of Israel. On the other side stand the figures who, in Jewish memory and human imagination, represent continuity, courage, wisdom, and survival. The purpose is not to balance them. The purpose is almost the opposite — to let the imagination expose how primitive hatred looks once it is stripped of its costume of seriousness.

Reflecting on the recent Israel Day Parade in New York City, I found myself unexpectedly uplifted not only by the event itself, but by a brilliant twist from its organizers. I am referring to the two-dimensional puppet of NYC Mayor Mamdani walking the streets of

the city that he operates, the 2D puppet walking instead of him, since he excused himself from joining the parade in his own flesh, blood, and mind.

At first, I simply registered the image. There was something almost too easy about it, almost too playful to be important. A person does not come, and a puppet appears in his place. A cardboard presence fills the space left by a real absence. But then, while talking to an attendee at the parade, I was taken aback by his deep displeasure at having to see the M-puppet marching together with the supporters of Israel on the streets.

Being an occasional contrarian, after a quick reflection I told him that I thought it was a brilliant move. In essence, the organizers forced him to march with supporters of the country he himself does not totally embrace, and to do so against his will, yet powerless not to join the parade. Not physically, of course. Not in flesh and blood. But symbolically, which in this case was even better, because a puppet cannot resist. A puppet cannot give a speech. A puppet cannot explain itself. A puppet can only be carried where others carry it.

And then I started extrapolating, which is often where trouble begins, but sometimes where the useful image also begins.

What if the puppet did not just march, but danced with the people? And not just danced, but danced Hora?

At that moment the whole picture shifted. The puppet was no longer only a joke or a protest prop. It became part of an old Jewish solution to danger, arrogance, hatred, and history itself: you take what was meant to frighten you, you pull it into the circle, and you make it dance. Not because the danger disappears. Not because memory becomes light. But because for a moment the one who refused to stand with you is forced, in cardboard form, to move with you.

And from there I made another leap of imagination. Why stop with one puppet? Why not invite other folks, real and ancient, to join the circle?

Let Haman come in, with all his royal self-importance flattened into paper. Let Pharaoh join, still confused that the slaves walked out and kept walking. Let Antiochus try to understand why oil, memory, and stubbornness keep returning. Let Torquemada enter, severe and humorless, and let him discover that the people he tried to erase are still turning in a circle. Let Bogdan Khmel'nitsky and Symon Petlura be brought in, not as honored guests, God forbid, but as powerless figures in the dance they never wanted to see. Let Hitler be reduced to what he should always have been reduced to — a grotesque puppet without command, without terror, without history obeying him. Let the Mufti come in. Let Gamal Abdel Nasser and Arafat come in. Let all the innumerable in-between figures, large and small, named and unnamed, those who carried hatred proudly and those who carried it as fashion, be placed into the circle with happy painted faces.

And then, yes, let the Hora begin.

There is something almost healing in this absurdity, though I do not want to overstate it. Hatred is not defeated by a dance. History is not repaired by cardboard. People who feel unsafe in many countries, including, shockingly, in Europe and on other continents, cannot be comforted by a joke alone. Holocaust survivors, October 7 survivors, families who still carry the living wound of murder, kidnapping, humiliation, and fear — they do not need cleverness from me. They have earned the right to decide who belongs in that symbolic circle today, which names, which organizations, which movements, which polite voices that discovered old hatred under new slogans. I would leave that decision to them.

Still, the image does not leave me. The Hora circle keeps growing in my mind, and lately it seems to be growing alarmingly fast.

But the strange thing about a Hora is that it is not a military formation and not a tribunal. It is circular. Nobody stands at the head of it. Nobody controls its geometry for long. The circle absorbs. The circle exposes. The circle turns pride into awkwardness and cruelty into comedy. A dictator in a circle does not look like a dictator anymore. A hater in a circle cannot point from the outside with clean hands. A cardboard enemy, carried along by people still alive, becomes an accidental confession: you did not succeed. We are still here, and worse for you, we are dancing.

And then, because every image asks for its reverse image, I turned the table and contemplated the opposite scenario.

What if puppets of Jewish leaders and great leaders of the Jewish past and present were carried into anti-Israel rallies and demonstrations? What if Moses, King David, Queen Esther, Mordechai, Judah Maccabee, Rabbi Akiva, Maimonides, Theodor Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, Natan Sharansky, and others were turned into puppets and marched among the Israel- and Jew-haters, joining their cause, standing on the side of evil?

I shot this down easily and quickly as an impossibility.

Not because someone technically could not make such puppets. Of course they could. People can print anything, carry anything, chant anything. But to do this in the way I imagined the first scene would require a sense of humor, and that, to my eye, is sorely missing on the side of evil.

I am open to a counter-argument aimed at dismantling my suggestion about the absence of a sense of humor on the evil side. Real names, please.

This is not a small point for me, and I am only partly joking. I associate general intelligence with a sense of humor, and the examples are plenty. Humor requires distance from oneself. It requires the ability to see the absurdity of one's own posture. It requires a crack in the armor of certainty. It requires enough inner freedom to survive being laughed at. Evil, especially ideological evil, rarely has that freedom. It is too heavy. It is too certain. It is too busy arranging the world into purity and guilt, victim and

enemy, slogans and punishments. It cannot dance unless it commands the dance. It cannot laugh unless the laughter humiliates someone else.

That is why the puppet idea struck me as more than clever. It touched something deeper in the old Jewish instinct for surviving history without surrendering the human face. The Jewish answer to hatred was never only argument, never only defense, never only mourning. It was also memory, study, food, song, children, jokes, stories, stubbornness, and yes, dancing. Not because the world was kind. Often it was not. Not because enemies disappeared. They did not. But because hatred, however violent, remains spiritually primitive. It belongs to an earlier stage of human development, one that should have been outgrown long ago, one that by today feels grossly overdue for retirement.

This is what troubles me most about the current rise in hatred of Israel, and for that matter any hatred from anyone toward anyone. The old machinery is still working. The ancient reflex is still available. A crowd still gathers too easily around contempt. A slogan still saves people from thinking. A cause still allows hatred to appear dressed as virtue. And because of that, maybe a puppet is not such a small thing. Maybe ridicule is not a substitute for moral clarity, but it can sometimes protect moral clarity from becoming stiff and joyless.

To take the hater and make him dance Hora is not to forgive him. It is not to excuse him. It is not even to argue with him. It is to say: you wanted to stand outside and condemn us, but here you are inside the Jewish circle, powerless, ridiculous, and moving to our rhythm. You wanted history to end with your hatred, but history is turning, and you are now only a prop in someone else's dance.

There is lightness in that image, and also seriousness. The lightness matters because without it we become only reactive. The seriousness matters because the laughter is not empty. It comes from memory. It comes from knowing what hatred can do when nobody interrupts it early enough. It comes from knowing that cardboard is harmless only when real people remain vigilant.

So, Israel Day Parade organizers all over the world, get busy making puppets for June 2027.

Make them flat. Make them helpless. Give them fixed smiles. Put them in the circle. Let Haman, Pharaoh, Torquemada, Khmelnytsky, Symon Petlura, Hitler, the Mufti, Nasser, Arafat, and whoever the survivors and the frightened living recognize as belonging there, dance Hora with happy faces.

Not because they deserve joy.

Because we do.