

FAMILY EDUCATION PRESENTS

Purim
deliverance
people from
Persian



celebrates the
of the Jewish
destruction by a
tyrant during the

period of Babylonian exile in the fifth century B.C.E. The story (told in the biblical book of Esther) begins with the banishment of the proud Queen Vashti and the choice of Esther in a beauty contest to become the new queen. The courtier, Haman, becomes the grand vizier, but Mordechai, Esther's cousin and protector, refuses to bow down to him. Haman decides to take out his fury on all the Jews and convinces King Ahasuerus to consent to a decree calling for the massacre of all the Jews throughout the kingdom. Haman casts *lots* (Purim literally means lots) to determine the day of the Jew's destruction. But the intervention of the beautiful and courageous young Jewish queen saves the day for the Jews. Esther reveals that she is Jewish (a previously kept secret) and convinces the King to save her people.

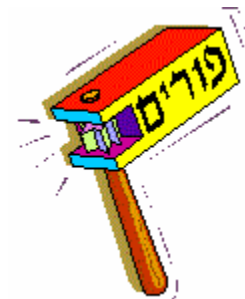
The wicked Haman is executed and Mordechai becomes the king's new prime minister. The Jews, who are enabled to defend themselves from their enemies, rejoice. In commemoration, Purim has continued to be observed. The Purim story resounds with recurrent themes of Jewish history in its long Diaspora. Time and again, Jews have been objects of anti-Semitism and baseless hatred but continue to preserve.

Purim has gained a new interpretation among American Jews. Modern commentaries often picture Esther as an assimilated Jew (by virtue of her own and Mordechai's non-Jewish names and the fact that she married the non-Jewish king) who discovers her identity at a critical moment. The idea of an assimilated, intermarried woman rediscovering her identity and finding that it is possible to be prominent in the non-Jewish world while open about her Jewishness directly relates to Jews in American life.

"Mi shenichnas Adar, marbim besimhah"

"When Adar arrives, rejoicing increases"

Adar, the month in which Purim falls, is traditionally considered a lucky and joyful month. There are four major Purim observances: listening to the megillah (scroll) reading, two acts of tzedakah, and having a festive meal.



The festival of Purim, the most joyous of Jewish holidays, is a good opportunity to affirm the uniqueness of being Jewish, the values that we cherish, and the values that set us apart. Even in the midst of raucous good cheer, we remember our obligations to do good deeds and to stand up to tyranny.

The commandments of Purim emphasize this message by presenting opportunities to perform acts of tzedakah or charity that symbolize our partnership with God in perfecting the world.

The "giving" mitzvot or commandments of Purim are:

1. Mishloach manot--sending gifts of food to friends and family.
2. Mataonot La'Evyonim--giving gifts to the poor. This practice is part of the theme and celebration that those less fortunate should be able to enjoy the festival and, more broadly, their lives.

These mitzvot present wonderful hands-on Purim activities you can do with your children as well as an opportunity to teach that the best kind of rejoicing takes place within the context of sharing with others.

To perform the mitzvah of mishloach manot, all you need to do is package two different kinds of food (usually hamantaschen pastry and then either fruits, nuts or candy) and deliver them to at least two different friends. Contributing to your local food pantry can easily carry out the second mitzvah.

The meal shared at Purim is called "*Seudah*". It is held late in the afternoon. No special kiddush is recited, but a special prayer, *Al HaNissim*, (*For the Miracles*) thanking God for the Purim miracles, is added.



Hamantaschen is often the dessert and liquor is often served. Beginning in Talmudic days, Purim became the one of the rare times when even respectable Jews drank enough alcoholic beverages to become "tipsy". According to the Talmud, one drinks *Ad Delo Yada* – until one cannot distinguish clearly between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai".

The Megillah

It is customary to collect half a shekel (50 cents) either before the service or before the Megillah reading. This money is then given to charity, and serves as a remembrance of the half shekel tax collected in biblical times from every adult male for support of the Temple.

At the conclusion of the Maariv Service, the Megillah is read. It is traditionally written on a scroll of parchment. An interesting aspect of the Megillah of Esther is that it is the only book of the Bible in which the Name of God is not mentioned at all. Because of this, it is possible to have elaborate decorations or pictures accompany the text—and there can be no claim of making graven images of God.



The reading can be long with small children in tow (they don't call it "the whole megillah" for nothing), but the kids are having so much fun with their noisemakers (*graggers* is the Yiddish and *raashanim* is the Hebrew word) and costumes that they usually don't mind.

The most famous and delightful part of the reading is the obligation to fulfill the curse of *Yimah shmo*---*May his name be erased* (or in this case drowned out!).

Every time during the megillah reading that the name of the villainous Haman (who for some represents all anti-

Semitic enemies) is mentioned, the congregation drowns it out with boos, shouts and noisemakers. In Jewish tradition, the obliteration of a name, of a memory, is considered the ultimate destruction. Some more fun for kids is to write Haman's name on the bottom of their shoes so they can stomp and stamp his name out. How do Jews get even with Haman? By refusing to hear Haman's name, we simply take away his place in history. We destroy his memory. We make him a nothing.

Remember that the mitzvah involved with the reading of the Megillah is to hear it.

Traditionally, every single word must be heard.

All our other Purim rituals are based on the one verse in *Esther 9:22*.

"They were to observe them as days of feasting and gladness, and as a time for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor."

Some more interesting things about Purim:

- The Megillah has its own special *trop*.
- The verses listing the ten sons of Haman are recited in one breath because they were hanged together.
- Because the Jews of Shushan fought against their enemies for an extra day and did not rest until the fifteenth of Adar, they observed Purim on the fifteenth of the month rather than on the fourteenth. The rabbis ruled that all cities walled at the time of Jousha would observe Purim as in Shushan. Thus, today in Jerusalem, Purim is observed on the fifteenth of Adar, also known as 'Shushan Purim'.
- The word "megillah" has become part of the English language and has come to mean, "a story repeated in its every detail".
- It is commonly believed that Hamantaschen is shaped with three corners to resemble Haman's hat but there is no evidence for this claim. Some believe that Queen Esther got her strength from her antecedents, and the three cornered cookie represents the three patriarchs: Abraham, Issac and Jacob.



Why is the name of God not mentioned in the entire Book of Esther?

Since the Book of Esther was written in the form of a scroll and was sent out as a letter to all the outlying districts of Persia, the name of God was omitted lest the letter be desecrated or otherwise improperly handled. This is the only book or scroll in the Bible in which the name of God does not appear.

Costumes are the “norm” for the festival of Purim, the crazier and more colorful, the better. They can represent characters in the Purim story or any kind of gorgeous or silly fantasy you and your kids can dream up.

Purim wouldn't be Purim without the “*shpiel*”, (Purim play) which dates back perhaps to the Middle Ages. It's customary to present a parody or silly version of the Purim story for everyone to enjoy either before, during or after the reading. Puppets and anything else foolish are common at Purim time. This custom of masquerading and putting on plays during Purim is fairly new for Jews. It is about 400 years old. It was probably taken over from the Christian custom of masquerading during the week before Lent, and particularly on the day before Lent begins—Mardi Gras. The two holidays come about the same time of year. All of these activities are meant to make Purim a day when everything is topsy-turvy, and a Mardi Gras spirit runs wild.



Although five books of the Bible are called megillot, “scrolls” (Esther, Lamentations, Song of Songs, Ruth and Ecclesiastes), when the word megillah is used without specification, it refers to the Scroll of Esther. This is so because in early Talmudic times (up until 250 C.E.), the Book of Esther was the only scroll read in the synagogue.

Survival of the People

On this holiday we say: If things are good, be joyful. If things are bad, they'll get better; so be joyful. And if things are very bad, perhaps a miracle may save us. This doesn't mean that the Jews were always saved. They weren't. There was no Purim for the Jews of Europe during the Nazi period. But even though millions of Jews died, the Jewish people survived. We are still sad over the frightful suffering of our people then. But being sad is not enough. We must not let Hitler and people like him keep us from living life, from working to bring the Days of the Messiah. So each year when we go to the synagogue on Purim we

are a little sad—but when we see all the Jews still there, not defeated, serving God, wanting to build a good world, we are happy. Happy for all the Mordecais and Esthers that were and will yet be.



Here is an easy Hamantaschen recipe to try.

Ingredients:

1 pkg. Deluxe yellow cake mix (1 lb. 2.25 oz)	2 eggs
1 Cup all purpose flour	2 Tablespoons water



Fillings: Prune filling can be made easily by mashing 1 cup of whole, pitted prunes. Add 3 tablespoons of honey and 2 teaspoons of lemon juice. There are also a variety of canned pie fillings available, such as blueberry, cherry, apple, etc. A Hershey's chocolate kiss is always a favorite filling for an extra sweet cookie.

With an electric mixer, combine the dry cake mix, flour, eggs and water until well blended. Dough will be soft. Chill 1 hour or more. On a lightly floured surface, roll out a quarter of the dough 1/8 inch thick. Cut into 2 ½ to 3 inch circles. In the center of each circle, place 1 teaspoon of filling. Bring edges together to form a triangle, pinching the seams together while

leaving a small opening in the center.

Place on a lightly greased cookie sheet and bake at 375 degrees Fahrenheit for 6 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove and cool on rack. Makes about 4 dozen.

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