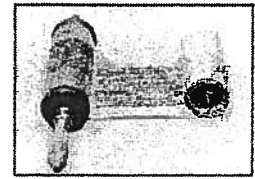


Dear Families,

*Purim* is one of the most festive holidays on the Jewish calendar. The story of *Purim* (meaning “lots<sup>1</sup>”) is retold in the Biblical book, *Esther*, and is set in ancient Persia in the city of Shushan<sup>2</sup>. It tells of the story of the villainous Haman, an advisor to King Ahasverosh, and his plot to destroy the Jews.



Haman convinced the King to allow him to destroy the Jews by saying:

*“There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm. Their laws are different from those of every other people’s, and they do not observe the king’s laws; therefore it is not befitting the king to tolerate them.” Esther 3:8*

However, thanks to the bravery of Esther and Mordechai, the story’s heroes, the Jewish people were saved. Esther used her influence as the King’s wife (a position she won) to convince the King to help the Jews. While living in the King’s palace, Esther did not at first reveal her Jewish identity. According to Biblical commentators, she saved that revelation for just the right moment, when it would most benefit her people. And indeed, she reveals it only at the end of the story, when she needed to convince the king to help the Jews beat Haman.

There are four *mitzvot* (commandments) associated with *Purim*.

- 1) One must hear the *M’gillah* (the Book of Esther) being read, both on the evening and morning of *Purim*.
- 2) One must eat a festive meal on *Purim* afternoon.
- 3) One must give gifts of food to friends.
- 4) One must give *tz’dakah* (monetary contributions) to the poor.

Today, *Purim* is a very fun holiday! Synagogues often overflow with congregants and their children, all dressed in vibrant costumes and masks. All are there to listen to the *M’gillah* and (often) to enjoy a “*Purim* carnival.” While reading the *M’gillah*, it is a custom to drown out the name of Haman with a noisemaker; many people take advantage of the opportunity to be loud and rowdy in the synagogue.

It is traditional to eat *hamantaschen*, triangular pastries filled with fruit or other tasty ingredients. Many people also make fun food baskets to hand-deliver to their friends.

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1 Haman, the villain, chose an arbitrary date for the destruction of the Jews by drawing *lots*, as in a lottery. That is the origin of the holiday’s Hebrew name, *Purim*.

2 Shushan was a walled city, an important detail because the fighting in Shushan lasted a day longer than the rest of the kingdom; any city that was walled at the time of the *Purim* story celebrates the holiday on the day after everyone else, on the 15th of *Adar*. Today, for example, people in Jerusalem celebrate *Purim* the day after those in Tel Aviv.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A FAMILY



**FIRST MITZVAH:** Attend synagogue on *Purim* to hear the *M'gillah*. Most synagogues have wonderful, fun and age appropriate celebrations which are free and open to all. Call for times. A number of customs make this *mitzvah* special fun:

- Because Queen Esther kept her Jewish identity hidden from the king, it is traditional to hide one's identity on *Purim*. Have your child(ren) create costumes or masks to wear to the *M'gillah* reading or a *Purim* carnival.
- To drown out Haman's name while the *M'gillah* is read, it is customary to make noise with noisemakers called *groggers* (or *greiggers*, depending on your family's European heritage; both words are Yiddish). In Israel, these are called in Hebrew: *ra'ashanim*. With your children, create noisemakers:

\*by placing beans in an empty soda can (or other kind of container) and taping the top shut. The children can decorate the can by gluing tissue paper on the outside or covering it with contact paper.

\*by stapling two paper plates together with dried beans safely inside. Children can decorate the outside of the plates.

If you don't have time to make a *grogger*, other noisemakers will do such as children's tambourines, horns or symbols!



**SECOND MITZVAH:** Eat a large festive meal on *Purim* day, hopefully with some friends or family. Don't forget to include the traditional *hamantaschen*.



**THIRD MITZVAH:** Create *shalah manot*, portions of food, by baking *hamantaschen* (see the website below for a recipe) and deliver them to your friends and family! Since the word is plural ("portions"), people send at least two food items . . . but often more . . . in festive baskets or containers.



**FOURTH MITZVAH:** Send gifts to the poor. As a family, give items to a food drive, or choose an organization that helps those less fortunate and donate money to it.



**NOT A MITZVAH, BUT AN IDEA:** Borrow a book or two on *Purim* from the public or synagogue library to read to your child(ren). If your child is old enough to understand, talk about the Queen Esther and/or Mordehai's good qualities as leaders (e.g., they were brave, they thought about the problem before acting, they acted when their help was needed). When similar situations arise in your family, label them and praise children for acting like Queen Esther or Mordehai.

For additional background information, family activities, and holiday recipes, see:

<http://www.jccathisnewmonth.org> (click on *Adar*)  
or <http://uahc.org/educate/parent/> (click on *Purim*)



This family education Jewish holiday newsletter was created by  
The Curriculum Department of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland,  
which is supported by  
The Fund for the Jewish Future of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland.