



Purim is the most festive holiday of the Jewish calendar. It is an occasion for “serious partying,” a day of authorized abandon. Purim marks the celebration of an ancient victory—when Queen Esther, an

assimilated Jewish woman, found the courage to risk her life to save the Jewish people from an evil advisor who plotted to destroy the Jews of Shushan.

THE PURIM STORY

A long time ago, many Jewish people lived in the city of Shushan in the country of Persia. The king of this great country was named King Ahashverosh (A-hash-vay-rosh). The queen of the great country was named Queen Vashti.

King Ahashverosh loved to give big parties in his palace. One night, he gave a big party and wanted Queen Vashti to dance for his guests. Vashti did not want to dance, so she sent a message that she would not attend the King's party. “Nobody says ‘No’ to the King,” said an angry Ahashverosh, “Vashti will no longer be my queen!” And Ahashverosh sent Vashti away from the palace.

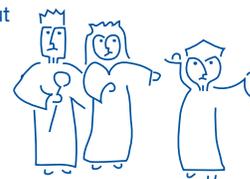
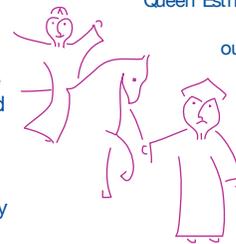
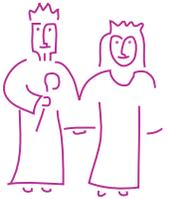
King Ahashverosh sent messages throughout his country calling all young women to the palace so that he could choose a new queen from among them. One young lady was a Jewish girl named Esther. She did not want to go, but her cousin, Mordechai, said she must. “Perhaps some day you may be able to help the Jewish people,” suggested Mordechai. The King chose the beautiful and kind Esther to be his queen.

The King had a chief assistant to help him with all his important work. His name was Haman. Haman was a selfish, mean and greedy man. He would walk down the streets and tell everyone to bow down to him. People were afraid of him so they bowed down to him as he ordered.

But there was one man who refused to bow down. “I won't bow down to any man,” he said, “I bow down only to my God, and Haman is not my God.” This brave man was a Jew named Mordechai and Haman did not like him. Haman decided to punish all the Jews because of Mordechai. Haman did not know that Queen Esther was Jewish.

One day, Mordechai was standing outside the palace walls when he overheard two guards whispering about harming the King. Mordechai let the King know about it and saved him. The King was thankful and wanted to reward him. He gave Mordechai his best clothes to wear and told Haman to lead Mordechai through the streets of Shushan on the King's beautiful white horse. This made Haman even angrier and more determined to punish all the Jews.

One night, Esther invited the King and Haman to a party. She told the King that Haman wanted to hurt her. “I don't want to hurt you,” exclaimed Haman, “You are my Queen.” “Well,” responded Esther, “you want to hurt the Jewish people and I am Jewish!” The King was shocked. He took Haman's job away from him and gave it to Mordechai. The Jews were very happy. They sang and danced and gave big parties.



CELEBRATING PURIM

Purim is undoubtedly the most high-spirited of Jewish holidays and probably the easiest to celebrate. Four mitzvot (plural of mitzvah) have become the essence of Purim. (A mitzvah is good deed that Jews do, or “a Jewish thing to do.”)

1 THE READING OF THE MEGILLAH

On Purim it is a mitzvah to hear the Megillah, the Book of Esther, read aloud. Purim's festivities center around this reading. The community gathers in costume, graggers/ra'ashanim (Purim noisemakers) in hand, prepared to hear the story. Carnivals, plays, special dinners and parties all follow from this moment.

The Megillah reading of Purim can be a wonderful opportunity to introduce children to a synagogue. Even without understanding the context, children can learn to associate Judaism with joy and celebration. They feel bonded to a people and community who know how to laugh and love their tradition enough to play with it and enjoy it.

The actual story of the Megillah is one of straightforward idealism. Its message for us and our children is that every Jew can be a hero and that individuals can make a difference. Attending a Megillah reading and discussing the story of Esther with your children can help to foster a sense of self-worth and provide a role model for every would-be hero.

2 GIVING SHALAH MANOT, GIFTS OF FOOD

Giving *Shalah Manot* reminds us that being a Jew means being part of the community and sharing celebrations with friends. Giving *Shalah Manot* is a simple mitzvah. It is just a matter of giving a gift of two or more kinds of food to the small circle of people important in your family's life. *Shalah Manot* may typically include hamantashen (three-cornered cookies named after Haman), fruit, and candy on a decorated paper plate.

3 GIVING MANOT LA-EVYONIM, GIFTS TO THE POOR

In the Jewish tradition, every act of celebration, every moment of significance, and every formal gathering includes an opportunity for giving *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah*, coming from a Hebrew word meaning justice, is the obligation to help those who are in need by sharing part of the wealth we have been fortunate enough to accumulate.

4 CELEBRATE AND BE HAPPY

On Purim, it is a mitzvah to celebrate and be happy. Parties, special meals, hamantashen, costumes, carnivals, plays and sounding graggers are all part of the Purim festival. It is even a mitzvah to get drunk—or at least drunk with gladness.

(ADAPTED FROM BUILDING JEWISH LIFE: PURIM, TOPAH ALFA PRODUCTIONS, LOS ANGELES, CA)

MAKING HAMENTASHEN

THE DOUGH

- 3 eggs • 4 tsp. baking powder
 - 1 cup sugar • 4 cups flour
 - 3/4 cup oil • juice of one orange
- Beat the eggs. Add the sugar and beat well. Add the remaining ingredients, mix until blended.

THE FILLING

Prune, apricot or other fruit pastry fillings can be store-bought.

MAKING THE HAMENTASHEN

- Roll out small amounts of dough at a time until 1/4" thick. Use enough flour on the rolling pin and board so it doesn't stick.
- Using a 2" round cookie cutter, cut out circles of dough.
- Place a teaspoon of filling in the center of each circle of dough.
- Fold up three sides of the circle and pinch the ends to make triangles.
- Place Hamantashen on a greased cookie sheet.
- Brush each Hamantashen with beaten egg for a golden finish.
- Bake 15 minutes at 350 degrees. When done, remove Hamantashen from cookie sheet to cool.

