



PURIM

IN **60** MINUTES (OR LESS)

BY RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

The Name of the Holiday

“In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Achashverosh, they cast pur, that is the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.”

Megillat Esther 3:6,7

Whereas most Jewish holidays bear multiple names, the holiday of Purim is known only by this name and none other. The name Purim derives from the “*pur*” [lot] cast by Haman to determine the most suitable time to destroy the Jewish people. While surely a significant act, it remains to wonder why this particular facet of the entire nine year episode should reflect the story more aptly than all other possible names. Shouldn’t the name of the holiday have also included Esther or Mordechai? Should it not have referenced the imminent destruction and G-d’s salvation? What was so noteworthy about the lots cast by the ignoble Haman that they were chosen to headline the story?

The story of Purim transpired near the end of the seventy year exile that followed the destruction of the First Temple. The vast majority of Jews lived in Babylon where they rapidly grew accustomed to the ways of the non-Jew. Their passion for Torah and Mitzvot waned to such a degree that even their enemies noticed it. So thoroughly did they acculturate that they spread throughout the vast Persian kingdom and no longer was Hebrew their first language. (In fact, this inability to express themselves natively in Hebrew is what led to the creation of formalized prayer texts.) They desperately sought acceptance from the non-Jews and were prepared to sacrifice integral aspects of their Jewish identity in order to acquire it.

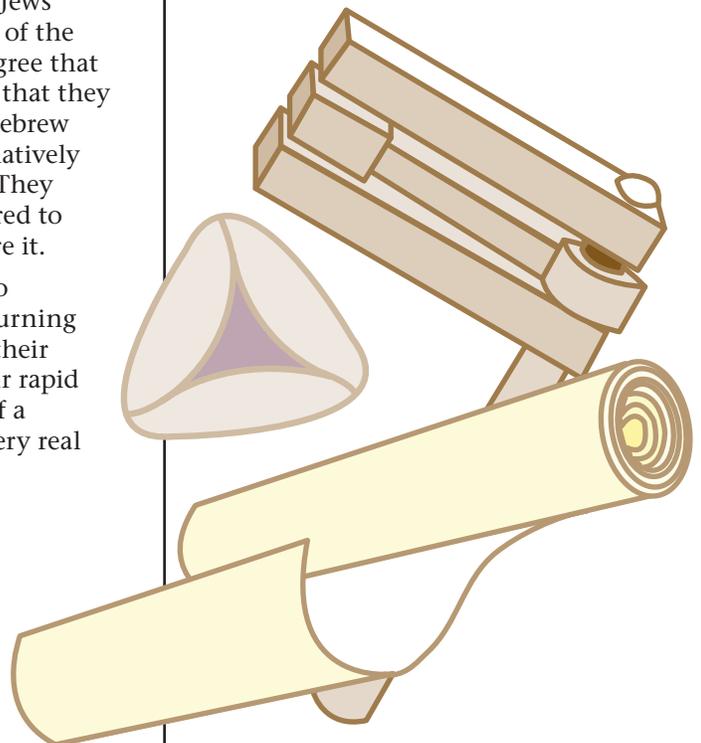
Yet, the Prophet Isaiah, had specifically warned them not to get too comfortable in their land of exile because they would soon be returning to the Land of Israel. They were instructed to retain the deeds to their homes in Israel because they would soon reclaim them. With their rapid descent into Persian culture, this hope grew dimmer by the day. If a turnaround in their attitude could not be achieved, there was a very real possibility that there wouldn’t be anyone left to return to the Land and rebuild the Temple when the moment arrived.

The situation grew ever more dire when the wicked king Achashverosh sponsored a party in celebration of what he believed was a refutation of the prophecy that they would return after seventy years. He brazenly donned the garments of the High Priest and drank from the holy Temple vessels. Instead of recoiling in horror and protesting, the Jews, unable to withstand the social pressure, attended the party celebrating their supposed

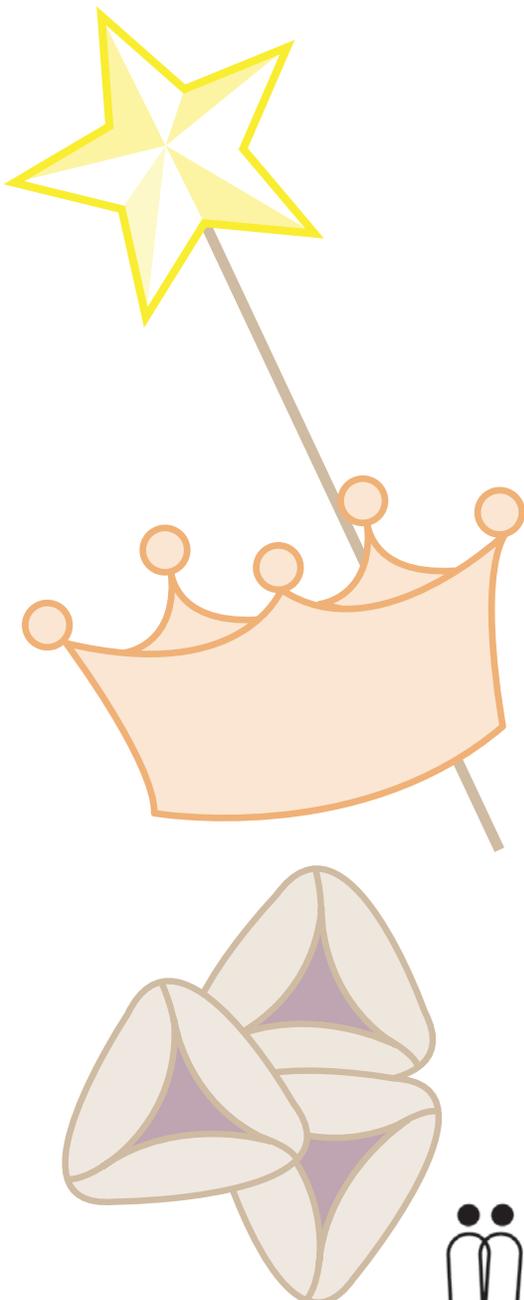
From the Chassidic Masters

The name Purim evokes similarities to another holiday, Yom Kippurim. In fact, our sages taught that in certain respects the sanctity of the day of Purim is even greater than that of Yom Kippurim, which literally can be understood as, Yom Ki-Purrim [A day like Purim,] implying that Purim is the more prominent of the two. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies and reach a unique level of ascendancy. Only he, however, merited this exalted level. On Purim, through fulfilling the Mitzvot of the day, every single Jew can enter the “inner sanctum” and reach the highest levels.

R’ Yechezkel Halberstam of Shinaveh



In Megillat Esther, the city of Shushan is referred to by three names: Shushan HaBirah, Ha'lr Shushan, and Shushan. This is because there were two Shushan's; the capital which was known as Shushan HaBirah, and the suburb which was known as just Shushan. The two cities were separated by the Ulai River and it was forbidden for Jews to live in the capital city. They were however, permitted to live in the city of Shushan. When referring to King Achashverosh, the Megillah uses the name Shushan HaBirah. When it refers to the Jews, it says either Shushan or Ha'lr Shushan [the city Shushan] in which they were permitted to dwell.
Yaaros Devash



demise. Mordechai, one of the last remaining members of the Great Sanhedrin, implored them to withstand the pressure, but they were no longer capable of doing so. They were too far along the path of assimilation to appreciate his warnings and dismissed him as an “out-of-touch” relic of the past, incapable of grasping the nuances of politics.

What turned them around? What finally brought them to their senses? How did they eventually rebound and re-stake their claim as the Chosen People? It's a long story and it can all be read in Megillat Esther, skillfully authored by none other than Esther and Mordechai, but it all began with a “pur.” This “pur” was not a whimper; rather it thundered, shook them up, and woke them from their stupor with a powerful jolt. Suddenly they realized that the people they sought to curry favor with would soon be wielding weapons of destruction against them. Suddenly they perceived that all their efforts at appeasement were for naught. In the blink of an eye, Haman, who had only recently been appointed as an advisor to the king, had turned the king and the nation against them.

It took some work on their part, and more than a few miracles on G-d's part, but eventually the message sank in. They repented fully and rededicated themselves to the Torah in a manner more powerful than they had previously while standing at the foot of Sinai. Mordechai was hailed as a hero and Jewish identity was at its zenith. Eventually a Jewish king, the son of Achashverosh and Esther, rose to the throne and permission was granted to rebuild the Temple. Tens of thousands of Jews returned to Israel under the leadership of Ezra and Nechemiah in three waves. The Temple was rebuilt and Jewish life flourished in Israel for another 420 years.

The story of Purim, a story that weaves together numerous minor and seemingly unremarkable events that occurred over a nine-year period, with nary a mention of G-d, asks us to see beyond the seemingly trivial events and perceive the unmistakable hand of G-d, Who directs and manipulates events to achieve the desired outcome. All the “little” things, however, all started with a “lot.”

Purim Personalities

ACHASHVEROSH: A brother of Nevuchadnezzar, he rose to the throne by staging a coup and eventually ruled over the entire world. His hatred toward the Jews exceeded even that of Haman but his love for Esther remained intense even after discovering that she was a Jewess. He assessed enormous taxes upon his subjects, wrecking the economy in the process. He was exceedingly paranoid, always fearful that someone was out to destroy him. This is what led him to repay those who had shown him favors, in the hope that they would later protect him from his enemies.

ESTHER: Orphaned at birth, Esther, also known as Hadassah, was raised by Mordechai who later married her. Of only average height, she was exceedingly beautiful and found favor in the eyes of all who beheld her countenance. She was taken from Mordechai at an advanced age, and refused all attempts to enhance her appearance. Nevertheless, Achashverosh gravitated toward her and remained loyal to her until her death. She despised him, but had no choice but to cooperate with him as per Mordechai's advice. Her modesty was virtually unparalleled, having inherited this trait from her ancestor King Saul, and her commitment to Jewish law was legendary. She was a Prophetess and co-authored the Scroll of Esther with Mordechai.

HAMAN: A direct descendant of Amalek, Haman [also known as Memuchan] had a visceral hatred toward the Jewish people and could not rest until he had annihilated them. He advised Achashverosh to execute Vashti for her

insubordination and Achashverosh never forgave him for that. He fancied himself a deity and greatly resented Mordechai's refusal to acknowledge his self-imposed elite status. A barber in his former life, he rose to great power in the courts of Achashverosh and spawned a large family, all of whom he raised to despise Jews. He was outlandishly wealthy, having plundered the treasures of the Temple and Judean kings. Among his descendants numbered a few who studied Torah in Bnei Brak.

VASHTI: A granddaughter of Nevuchadnezzar, she was a virulent anti-Semite who maltreated Jewish maidens and forced them to violate the Sabbath. She refused to allow Achashverosh to grant permission to rebuild the Holy Temple, reasoning that her ancestor had destroyed it and he had no right to rebuild it. She was fully prepared to present herself immodestly before him, but an unsightly blemish prevented her from doing so and she insulted her drunken husband instead. She was executed upon the advice of Memuchan [Haman] and it took four years for Achashverosh to find a suitable replacement for her.

MORDECHAI: Descended from the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin, Mordechai was one of the last remaining members of the Men of the Great Assembly who had descended to Babylon when Nevuchadnezzar destroyed the Holy Temple. He alone, stood up to Haman and argued that it was forbidden to attend the royal feast. He was initially unpopular among his brethren, who questioned his judgment, but he was later proven correct and his popularity soared. He saved Achashverosh from assassination at the hands of Bigsan and Seresh, an act that ultimately led to a reversal of the decree against the Jews. He guided Esther throughout her ordeal and later co-authored the Scroll of Esther with her.

Parshat Zachor

Although Purim is either on the 14th or 15th day of Adar, there is an associated mitzvah which must be performed on the Shabbat that precedes Purim. Instead of one Torah scroll, two Torah scrolls are taken from the ark; one for the weekly parsha and one for Parshat Zachor, when we read the Torah's exhortation in Deuteronomy [25:17-19] to, 'Remember what Amalek did to you' (Dvarim 25).

These verses obligate us to recall Amalek and his descendants and the devastation they sought [and seek] to visit upon us. We must educate our children in each generation to remember what they did to us during our exodus from Egypt and of our mandate to rid the world of their noxious presence lest they succeed in carrying out their sinister plans.

To properly fulfill this commandment, the Sages have prescribed the public reading of this passage from a Torah scroll, once each year, on the Shabbat which precedes Purim. In this manner, the 'erasure' of Amalek will be proximate to the 'erasure' of Haman, a descendant of Amalek.

Who was Amalek?

A grandson of Esau, he was born of an illicit relationship between Esau's son Elifaz and Timnah, the wife of Se'ir. Elifaz, his father, grew up in the shadow of Isaac, and was circumcised by his father to please Isaac. Amalek, born after the death of Isaac, was never circumcised and inherited Esau's intense hatred of his brother Jacob and his descendants. This loathing was rooted in the fact that Esau never forgave Jacob for obtaining the coveted blessings from Isaac and insisted that although he had forfeited all rights to them by virtue of their sale and his subsequent misbehavior, he should still enjoy their benefits. Of course, he had no desire to abide by their strictures, only to reap their manifold benefits.

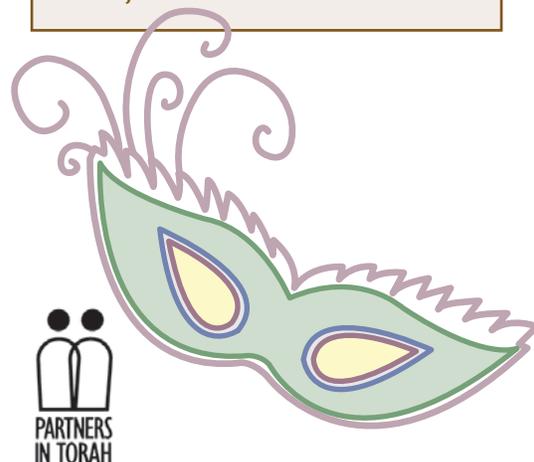
Amalek's loathing of the Jewish people is unlike that of any other anti-semitic nation. The others can be appeased through bribery, scared off by Jewish might, convinced to drop the subject to attend to more pressing matters, or dissuaded from pursuing their sinister goals by the fear of suffering terrible losses themselves. Amalek, on the other hand, cannot be swayed from their mission and will pursue it even at the cost of mutually assured destruction. They are driven by an unabating hatred that cannot be placated under any circumstances. For this reason, in the Messianic Era, all the nations will rethink their attitudes toward the Jews and choose to live peacefully alongside us. Only Amalek will refuse to reconsider and will cease to exist as the world transitions into an era of eternal peace.

From the Chassidic Masters

"While parading Mordechai through Shushan bedecked in the royal garments, Haman proclaimed: *"Thus shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor."*

A follower of the Rebbe of Ger once asked him, "Why did Haman agree to degrade himself in this manner being forced to shave, dress, parade and praise his arch-enemy? Wouldn't it have made more sense for him to take his own life than to be forced to endure such humiliation?"

The Rebbe answered, "The law in Shushan was that any decree enacted by a dignitary would automatically be annulled if that dignitary passed away prior to the implementation of the law. Haman's hatred toward the Jews was so great that he was prepared to endure all the embarrassment and humiliation just to be able to keep his demonical decree against the Jews in force for so deeply is Amalek's loathing of the Jew embedded in his soul."



From the Chassidic Masters

"And when Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow, nor prostrate himself before him, then Haman became full of wrath. But it seemed contemptible in his eyes to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had made known to him the people of Mordecai; wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus..." Megillat Esther 3:5,6 Why would knowledge of Mordechai's nation inspire Haman to kill them all? So what if he was a Jew? Upon learning that Mordechai was a Jew, Haman became aware that killing Mordechai would not solve his problem because the Jewish nation can produce many "Mordechai's." Thus, he realized that if he wished to rid the world of its moral conscience, he must destroy all of the Jews, not just their current leader.

R' Yitzchak of Vorkeh

Mordechai could have avoided Haman entirely instead of remaining in his proximity and refusing to bow to him. Why did he insist on doing so and place himself in such danger? Mordechai was a descendant of Benjamin who was not yet born when the Patriarch Jacob prostrated himself before Haman's ancestor, Esau. Mordechai wished to demonstrate that he, who derived from the only son of Jacob who was not taught to bow to Esau, was not about to engage in such behavior, not now, nor ever!

From the Chassidic Masters

Contrast the desire of Haman to slaughter all Jews, parents and children in one day, as it is written, *"And letters were sent by messengers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day..." [Esther 3:13]* with the Torah's admonition not to display such coldheartedness even when dealing with animals, *"Whether it is a bull, a sheep or a goat, do not slaughter [a female animal] and its child on the same day." [Leviticus 22:28]*

Amalek and his descendants have never treated the Jews with the same measure of dignity as the Jews have treated the animals.

Bikkurei Aviv

Esau entrusted Amalek with the responsibility to take revenge against Jacob and advised him to wait until his descendants faltered spiritually and then to pounce upon him. So long as Elifaz lived and enjoyed some sort of relationship with Isaac, the desire to eradicate Jacob was overshadowed by a desire to retain the good that he and his descendants contributed to the universe. Once Elifaz and Isaac were no longer among the living, this appreciation for Jacob was lost and only hatred remained in its place.

Amalek enjoyed an exceptionally long life and watched the Jews descend to Egypt and subsequently become enslaved. He was certain that they'd never emerge intact, but just in case they did, he indoctrinated his offspring to hate them and plotted to ambush them upon their exodus. When they did escape from Egypt, Amalek's entire nation pursued them and sought to annihilate them although they posed no threat to him or his nation.

Over the centuries, Amalek periodically appeared on the scene to wage war against the Jewish people. What follows is a short list of ancient battles waged. In recent times, there is good reason to believe that the Nazi's [may their name be blotted out] were descendants of Amalek, as well.

REFIDIM: Following the Exodus and prior to the Revelation at Mt. Sinai, Amalek attacked those who lagged behind [i.e. those whose Torah study was fainthearted.] *[Exodus 17]*

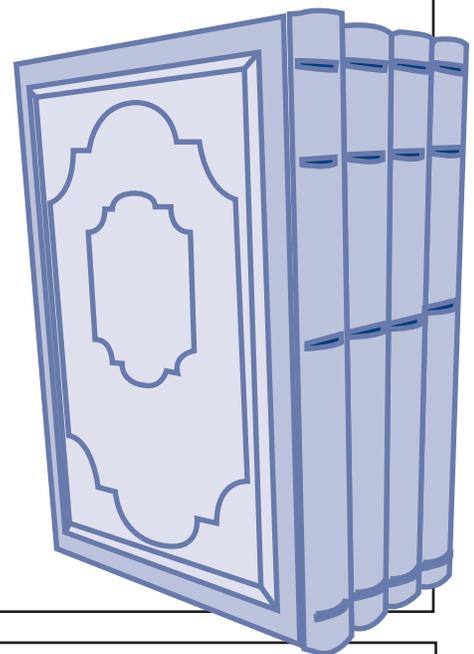
SIN OF THE SPIES: When word came down from G-d that the Jews would not be entering the Land and would have to wander the desert, a small group insisted on ascending to the Land. Amalek attacked them and wiped them out. *[Numbers 14]*

AHARON'S DEATH: When word reached them that Aharon had passed away and that consequently the protective Clouds of Glory left them as well, they immediately attacked in a deceitful manner. *[Numbers 21]*

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM: Although Amalek was not the prime destroyer of the First Temple, when they saw that the Jewish people were certain to be defeated, they happily joined in the battle against them. *[Obadiah 1:11]*

Why Don't We Forgive Them?

Although forgiveness is an important Torah value, it only applies once a sinner has repented and pledged to desist from his harmful ways. Insofar as he eagerly awaits his next opportunity to wreak havoc upon the Jewish people, one is not a candidate for forgiveness. To the contrary; he is ripe for the application of another Torah value that insists that *"One who rises to kill you, rise against him first."* *[Sanhedrin 72a]* Knowing as we do that Amalek and his descendants will never relinquish their mission to eliminate the Jewish people, we are bound to preempt them and do all in our means to destroy them. This is not only an act of self-defense, but a form of Kiddush Hashem [sanctification of G-d's Name] which is sullied each time His precious nation is harmed by its enemies.



Notable Dates in the Month of Adar

ROSH CHODESH: With the onset of the month of Adar, we are bidden to increase our joy and sustain it throughout the month of Adar.

SEVENTH OF ADAR: Seeking to ascertain the ideal time to wage his genocidal war against the Jews, Haman cast lots of all twelve months and drew the month of Adar. He reasoned that this was an auspicious time to harm them since the great Moses perished on the seventh day of that month. He assumed that this month must be short on spiritual merits for the Jews, or their leader would not have passed away in it. Little did he know that Moses was also born on that very day, a fact that indicated the reverse of his fallacious belief.

SHABBAT ZACHOR: On the Shabbat prior to Purim, we read Parshat Zachor from the Torah scroll in fulfillment of the obligation to orally recall the genocidal intent of Amalek and his descendants.

13 ADAR: On this day, all Jewish communities rose in self-defense against their enemies and were victorious in miraculous fashion. In commemoration of the three-day Fast ordained by Esther and Mordechai which led to the salvation of the Jews, we observe the Fast of Esther on this day.

14 ADAR: On this day, Jews throughout the Kingdom of Persia, with the exception of those in Shushan, rested from their battle of the previous day and celebrated their victory. Jews in Shushan were granted an extra day to battle their enemies. In recognition of their victory, Purim is celebrated on this day by all cities which were not settled and surrounded by a wall during the times of Joshua's conquest of the Land of Israel.

15 ADAR: On this day, the Jews of Shushan continued their battle of the previous day against their enemies, again scoring a tremendous victory. Although unsettled and unwallled at the time of Joshua's conquest, Shushan and all cities that were, celebrate Purim on this day. (Other than Shushan, the only city which definitely follows this practice is Jerusalem. There are others whose status is uncertain such as Lod, Akko, Sefad, Haifa, Be'ersheva, and Hebron, and they must read the Megillah on the 14th and 15th.)



What does the fact that a city had a wall at the "time of Joshua" have to do with celebrating on the fifteenth, when Shushan itself did not have a wall at that time? Indeed, initially, only walled cities celebrated Purim on the 15th. Later, in an effort to honor Jerusalem which lay in ruins at the time, and in order to ensure that a Persian city was not honored more than a ruined Jerusalem, the Jewish Sages decided to use an earlier period in time, when Joshua conquered the Land of Israel, at which time the city of Jerusalem had walls surrounding it, to determine which cities were walled cities. Even if those cities and walls were now in ruins, or their walls no longer existed, they were nevertheless considered important cities and assigned the 15th day instead of the 14th.

From the Chassidic Masters

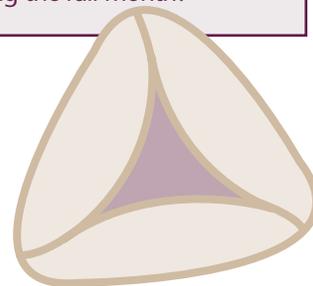
It is said that Rabbi Avrohom Bornsztain zt"l [Avnei Nezer] would begin celebrating Purim beginning Rosh Chodesh Adar instead of waiting until the 14th of the Adar. When questioned by his disciples for the reason behind this practice, he explained that if Haman truly desired to eradicate the Jews, why did he only request one day to do so from Achashverosh. Surely, a monumental task of this nature would require at least a week or a month? Haman knew that whenever the enemies of the Jews rise to destroy them, inevitably a miracle of salvation occurs and they end up celebrating a holiday in commemoration. Fearful that he would end up endowing them with a month-long celebration, he instead downsized his original intent and only requested one day so that the subsequent Jewish holiday not last longer than one day. "Nu," said the Avnei Nezer, "Just because he was wicked and refused to sanction a longer holiday, does that mean that I have to follow his wishes. I'm celebrating the full month!"

From the Mystics

Sin was introduced to the universe by the Primordial Serpent who urged Eve to partake of the forbidden food, a tragedy that resulted in death and suffering for all of mankind. Achashverosh followed in the footsteps of the Primordial Serpent with the aid of Haman and the result was almost as tragic. Truthfully, in the hearts of each and every man lies an ember of Haman and Achashverosh which continually tempt him to engage in foolish behavior. Only through attaching oneself to Torah can one overcome these dangerous temptations.

Ohr HaMeir

The royal feast of Achashverosh featured a full array of kosher foods and drinks. Nevertheless, while the food was kosher, the atmosphere was anything but. The behavior of the Persians and the entertainment provided was of a lewd nature and thoroughly unworthy of Jewish participation. One of the lessons of Purim is that something need not be 100% non-kosher in order to be rendered problematic. To the contrary, it must be 100% kosher in order to be acceptable.



The acceptance of this Fast of the 13th of Adar for later generations is alluded to in the Scroll of Esther in the verse, 'And as they accepted upon themselves and upon their children, the matters of their fastings and their cry.'
(Esther 9)

The Fast is named after Esther for it was she who demanded of Mordechai the observance of a fast when she sent him a message, 'Go and gather all the Jews who are found in Shushan and fast for me; do not eat and do not drink for three days, night and day; and I and my maidens will also fast thus.'
(Esther 4)

In the event that the 13th of Adar occurs on Shabbat, the Fast is observed the preceding Thursday. Since it is no longer observed in any event in its proper time, it was not fixed for Erev Shabbat, in deference to the honor of Shabbat.

Seeking permission to destroy the Jews, Haman made Achasverosh an offer he couldn't refuse: *"If it pleases the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those that have the charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries."* [Esther 3:9] He almost succeeded, but through the Mitzvah of donating Shekalim to the Holy Temple, the Almighty ensured that his plot would fail. As the Talmud [Megillah 13b] writes, *"It was clear before the One Who created the universe that one day Haman would measure out 10,000 silver talents in an effort to destroy the Jews. Therefore, He preempted those shekalim with His shekalim [by instructing us to donate a half-shekel to the Temple] during this time of year."*

The 13th of Adar is significant for another reason as well. The Torah records that on that day vengeance was executed during the Hasmonean era against a tyrant who oppressed the land of Judeah cruelly and arrogantly blasphemed the city of God. His name was Nikanor and he was felled by Yehudah, the son of Matisyahu, on the 13th of Adar. Henceforth, this day was celebrated as a festive day.

The Fast of Esther

Whenever Jews face war, the practice is to refrain from food consumption as a means of affirming that man does not prevail by physical or military might, but by lifting his eyes heavenward in prayer and seeking Divine Mercy.

Jews fasted when facing Amalek and the Jews fasted at the time of Haman, when they gathered to defend themselves against those who sought to destroy them. In memory of that Fast, a yearly Fast was fixed for generations on the same day. Through this practice we are reminded that God accepts our prayer and penitence in the hour of our trouble.

Although the original fast lasted for three days, our custom is to fast for only one day and not on the date upon which it was originally celebrated, the 13th of Nissan. Rather, it is observed on the 13th of Adar, in memory of the Fast observed by Jews on the day of their mobilization for war against their enemies.

Who Must Fast?

There are four Fast Days which are specifically mentioned in the Prophetic Writings, but the Fast of Esther is not among them. Therefore, it is observed with greater leniency than the others. For example, pregnant women and nursing mothers, as well as anyone who is generally of weak health who would be adversely affected by fasting, are not required to fast. However, the supplemental prayers, and the Torah Reading, which are imposed for the other Fast days are also required on the Fast of Esther. The Fast lasts from dawn until nightfall and leather shoes may be worn as well as washing one's hands and face with water.

Three Halves Equal One Whole

During the time of the Holy Temple, a half-shekel was donated to the Temple Treasury by every adult Jew during this time of year. In commemoration of this custom, during Minchah on the Fast of Esther, it is customary to give three halves of the coin which is the basis of the local currency to charity. In the USA, this translates into three half-dollar coins. This money is distributed to the poor to satisfy their needs.

Those who seek to observe Mitzvot in enhanced fashion, donate the half-shekels for each member of the household including minors, and in the case of an expectant mother, for the unborn child as well. Prior to embarking on this custom, one must first consider the fact that once a father has begun to give a half-shekel for a minor child, he is required to continue to do so each year.



Mitzvot of Purim

There are four primary Mitzvot that one must fulfill on Purim. Of course, since Purim is entirely of Rabbinic origin, none of these obligations are Scripturally mandated. Nevertheless, great effort must be expended to ensure that each is fulfilled to the maximum of one's ability.

MEGILLAT ESTHER: THE SCROLL OF ESTHER

Megillat Esther is read twice on Purim, once at night, and then again during the day. Men and women alike are obligated to read the Megillah and anyone may fulfill this obligation by hearing it read by a person qualified to do so. However, in this instance, it is necessary to hear every single word or one has not fulfilled his obligation.

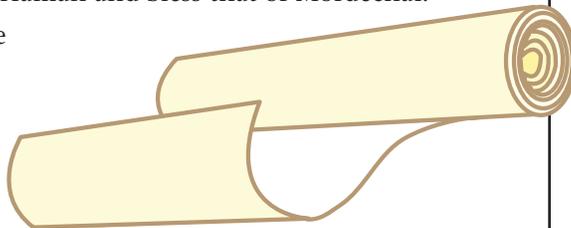
Although only of scriptural origin, all mitzvot, even the study of Torah, are deferred for the sake of hearing the Megillah. Ideally, the Megillah should be read publicly, and in the Synagogue. This is in order to maximize the publicity that the miracle of Purim receives.

PRIOR TO COMMENCING THE READING, THE READER RECITES THREE BRACHOT:

- 'Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the reading of the Megillah'
- 'Who has made miracles for our fathers in those days at this time'
- 'Who kept us alive and sustained us until this time'

Upon the conclusion of the reading in the evening, he rolls up the scroll and then recites one lengthy blessing, *"Who waged our quarrels..."* After the morning reading, this blessing is not recited. Following this blessing, the congregation recites a passage and then sings Shoshanas Yaakov, a song whose hymns curse the name of Haman and bless that of Mordechai.

Prior to reading the Megillah, the custom is to unroll it and fold it in the form of a letter, because it is referred to as a "letter" in the verse, *"Therefore because of all the words of this letter..."* [9:26,] and letters are usually unfolded before they are read. This unique method of reading it also reminds us that the events described therein are highly unusual and helps publicize the miracle even further. A note of caution: One must be careful not to allow the sides of the Megillah to hang over the table and lie on the floor, as that would be disrespectful to the holy scroll.



Those who do bang when Haman's name is read must be careful not miss any of the words that the Reader reads. Thus, they should limit their noisemaking and the Reader must remain silent while the banging occurs and repeat any words that the congregation may have missed.
See Be'er Heitiv O"C 690:14

Nowadays, many people only attend Megillah Reading in order to bang at the mention of Haman's name. This, of course, is incorrect and every father must control his children to ensure that they limit their activity and not disturb the concentration of the adults.
Mishnah Brurah O"C 689:18

When reciting the blessing, 'Who kept us alive,' prior to the reading of the Megillah by day the reader and the congregation should also have in mind to apply this blessings to the other Mitzvot of the day [i.e. Purim Feast, Sending Gifts, and Distributing Gifts to the Poor.]

When Esther at first refused to approach Achashverosh to plead on behalf of her nation, Mordechai warned her, *"If you remain silent at this time...you and your father's house will perish."* Megillat Esther 4:14 However Esther was an orphan so what did Mordechai mean when he warned that her reticence to intercede would cause her father's house to perish? Esther was a descendant of King Saul who was instructed to destroy the entire people of Amalek in their battle hundreds of years earlier. King Saul, however, had compassion and spared a few of them for one night. Agag, king of Amalek was one of them and that night he fathered a child from whom Amalek later descended. For this failing to heed the instructions of the Prophet Samuel, King Saul lost his monarchy and his great name was sullied. Esther, his descendant, now had an opportunity to destroy Amalek and undo the harm caused by her ancestor. If she took advantage of this opportunity she could atone for his misdeed. If not, explained Mordechai, the House of King Saul would forever be relegated to oblivion.

"The children have a custom to draw an image of Haman on sticks and stones, or to write the name "Haman" upon them, and to strike them one upon the other so that the name [or image] is erased. This is in keeping with the spirit of the verse, 'You must obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens.' [Deuteronomy 25:19] and, *'The name of the wicked shall rot.'* [Proverbs 10:7] From this custom derives the practice that they strike [the table] when they read the Megillah in the synagogue and pronounce the name 'Haman.' One should not discontinue nor deride any custom for they were all established with a valid purpose.
Shulchan Aruch O"C 690:17

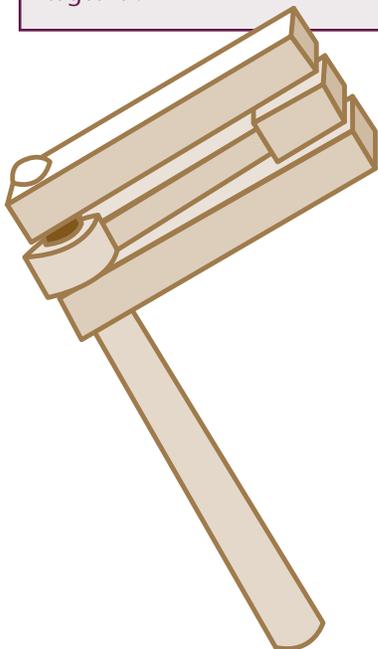
From the Chassidic Masters

There was an incident in Istanbul many years ago where a prominent minister decreed that the Jews must not bang when Haman's name is mentioned. He stationed guards outside each synagogue in order to ensure that his orders were followed. Fearful for their lives, the Jews refrained from banging with the exception of one elderly gentleman who showed up just before the reading commenced and banged heartily with each mention of Haman's name. His fellow Jews protested his actions, but he continued, entirely oblivious to their protests. Furious, the guards attempted to enter the synagogue to arrest him, but they found themselves unable to open the door. Their efforts created a commotion and soon the town was in an uproar. The matter was brought to the governor of the city who grew infuriated at the minister who had interfered with Jewish practice and he sentenced him to death by hanging in front of the synagogue where the offense had taken place.

Imrei Pinchas

Esther had another name as well: Hadassah. Our sages debate which was her proper name, and which was added later. Each reflected her beautiful attributes. Hadassah means a "Hadass" – myrtle, and Esther derives from the word "Istahar" – beautiful as the moon.

The names of the ten sons of Haman are all read in one breath; an indication that they were all slain and hung together.



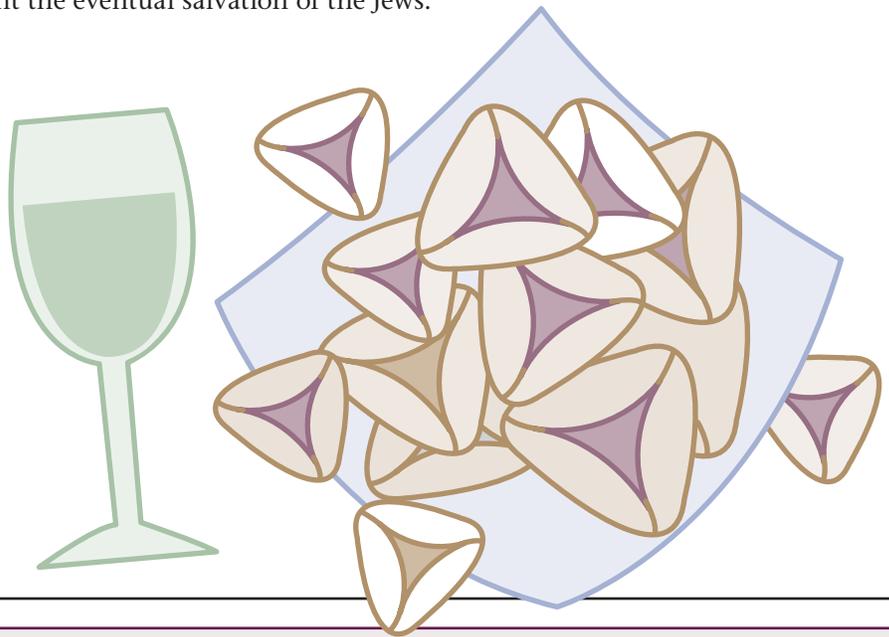
PARTNERS
IN TORAH

Interspersed into the Megillah are four verses which are integral to the redemption. The reader must pause when he reaches these verses to allow the congregation to read each verse aloud and he then repeats them from his Megillah. The reason for this is to keep the children from dozing off so that the importance of the great miracle performed for the Jews in the days of Mordechai and Esther, might enter their hearts.

THE FOUR VERSES ARE:

1. *There was a certain Jew in Shushan the capital, whose name was Mordecai the son of Yair the son of Shimi the son of Kish, a Benjaminite." 2:5*
2. *"And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan shouted and was glad." 8:15*
3. *"Among the Jews, there was light and gladness, and joy and distinction." 8:16*
4. *"For Mordecai the Jew was second to the king Ahasuerus, and prominent among the Jews, and accepted by the multitude of his brethren; seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his seed." 10:3*

Upon reaching the passage, 'On that night could not the king sleep; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king,' it is customary for the Reader to raise his voice and to vary the melody because the events described in that verse begin to bring to light the eventual salvation of the Jews.



From The Mystics

After transcribing the miracle in the Scroll of Esther, Esther requested of the Sages to establish Purim as a festival for all generations. They refused on the grounds that to do so would arouse the enmity of the non-Jews. She responded that it was already inscribed in the royal chronicles of Persia and Media. Esther's interest was in demonstrating how G-d's hand was seamlessly interwoven into the all these seemingly disconnected events. The Sages feared that it would be too brazen to demonstrate this in the face of the Persians and Medes who would resent allegations to this effect. To this Esther replied that they too, had come to an awareness of this fact and had even inscribed thus in their royal annals. No one who witnessed the chain of events could possibly think that it was anything other than the hand of G-d carrying out our salvation.

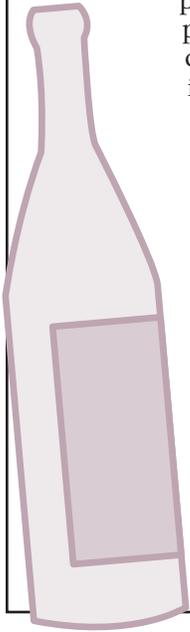
Resisei Laila

PURIM MEAL

It is a Mitzvah to participate in a festive meal on Purim and to serve meat and wine at this meal. This feast is held in memory of the feast that Esther held for Achashverosh and Haman and which played an integral role in the redemption. One cannot fulfill this obligation on Purim night, but must wait until daytime to do so. Since people are occupied with delivering Mishloach Manot [food parcels] during the first half of the day, the custom is to hold the meal in the afternoon and extend it into the night.

Since wine played an integral role in the miracle of Purim, our sages prescribed the drinking of wine on Purim, and they said: 'A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he no longer can discern the difference between 'Cursed is Haman,' and 'Blessed is Mordechai.'

1. The frightful decree was leveled against the Jews partially because they partook of the wine at Achashverosh's feast. Through their subsequent repentance, they atoned for their sin and merited the redemption.
2. Thanks to the inebriated state of Achashverosh and his guests, the wicked Vashti was removed from her throne and Queen Esther replaced her.
3. The wine feast of Esther led to the downfall of Haman. Of course, one must not drink to excess which would lead him to disparage others or act improperly. Rather, the goal is reach an exalted state that frees one from his normal inhibitions and allows him to more easily strive to reach an elevated spiritual state. Those who cannot tolerate wine can fulfill this obligation by taking a nap which is another means of being in an undiscerning state.



The Hebrew word for wine is *Yayin* and its numerical equivalence is 70, the same number of years that occasioned the feast of Achashverosh who thought that the Holy Temple would never be rebuilt again. This, of course, was based on a miscalculation and led to the events of Purim.

Our sages teach that when leveling accusations against the Jews, Haman accused them of "sleeping" through their performance of Mitzvot. They were disinterested and performed them by rote, he claimed, and therefore were not worthy of their lofty status. The act of drinking or sleeping until one reaches a state of unawares, as a means of performing a Mitzvah, is our way of demonstrating that even when we are asleep, we can still perform Mitzvot.

"Although it is a Rabbinic precept to feast on Purim, it is even more preferable for one to dispense charity to the poor for there is no greater happiness than to rejoice the hearts of the poor, the orphaned, the widowed, and strangers. One who gladdens the hearts of these unfortunates is likened to the Divine Presence about which it is said, 'He enlivens the spirit of the lowly, and restores the heart of the downtrodden'"
Maimonides

From the Chassidic Masters

Purim is even greater than Yom Kippurim because on Yom Kippur we are instructed to "afflict our souls," which is achieved by abstaining from food and drink. On Purim, however, we are expected to go one step further; we are asked to drink until we reach a state of uncertainty. Can there be a greater affliction of the soul than not to be in possession of one's faculties?

R' Simchah Bunim of Peshischa

From the Chassidic Masters

"Then went Haman forth that day joyful and glad of heart..." [Esther 5:9]
"Woe, Woe," cried Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. "Do you know why Haman succeeded temporarily in enacting his frightful decree against the Jewish people? Because he reached a very high level of joy, while Mordechai was in a state of sadness and mourning. Through reaching a high level of joy, one can accomplish almost anything."

From the Mystics

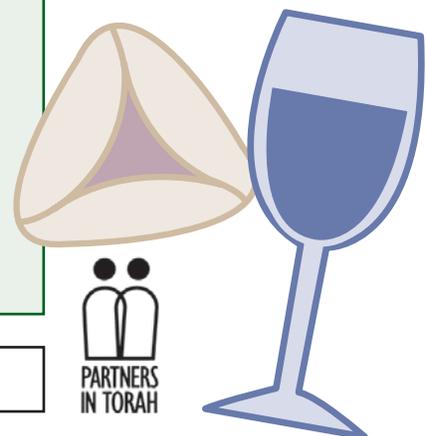
The salvation of the Jewish people from the hands of Haman was not due to their merits, but to the fact that the Almighty responds when we look to Him for deliverance. This serves as a great comfort as we trek through the long exile secure in the knowledge that by placing our faith in Him, we will merit deliverance even when we are not particularly meritorious. This is why one must drink to oblivion for the message is that salvation does not come as a result of our smarts or superior intelligence, for we are "know-nothings." Rather, it is only thanks to the Almighty's intervention that we lived to see another day.

Sfas Emes

From The Mystics

Through the wine and delicacies served up at the Purim Feast, the soul can reach a lofty state of spiritual elevation, even more so than throughout the rest of the year. What can be accomplished on Yom Kippur through bodily affliction, can be achieved on Purim through food and drink.

Zohar



Ideally, these food gifts should be sent via a third party, rather than delivered personally in keeping with the literal text of the verse, 'Mishloach Manot' – the sending of portions. Nevertheless, if one delivers his Mishloach Manot personally, he still fulfills his obligation.

The goal of these food parcels is not to create unity for unity's sake. Rather, when there is peace and brotherhood among Jews, even the iniquitous are inspired to raise their level and act righteously.

From the Mystics

Our sages explain that Purim is comparable to Shavuot in that just as we accepted the Torah on Shavuot, we did so a second time on Purim. Regarding the Revelation at Sinai, Scripture writes that the Jewish people were thoroughly united and there existed no division among them for this was a prerequisite to proper acceptance of Torah. In order to accept the Torah a second time on Purim, we must achieve a similar state of unity. Mishloach Manot which promote goodwill and love among our brethren are the vehicle through which we achieve that perfect harmony.

Aside from the obligation to distribute Matanot L'evyonim, it is customary to dispense charity liberally on this day. Our sages wrote, "One who stretches out his hand, we give to him," and do not insist that he prove his worthiness as a recipient of charity funds.

From the Mystics

One who experiences joy over the performance of the Mitzvot of Purim will merit to cleave to the Almighty and access the distinctive level of wisdom available only to those that do. One should also bear in mind that on this day, he is re-accepting the Torah and his rejoicing should reflect Simchat HaTorah; joy over the gift of Torah. *Shelah HaKadosh*

MISHLOACH MANOT: DISTRIBUTING FOOD PARCELS

In order to recall the goodwill which Mordechai and Esther inspired among all Jews, it is obligatory for all adult men and women to send a gift which consists of at least two portions of food to another person. The food must be edible without further preparation and it may be any variety or combination of food and drink that one desires. Many people have a custom to send items that can be used for the Purim feast. Special "theme" Mishloach Manot, while certainly a highlight among the creative and talented among us, are not at all required in order to fulfill the Mitzvah. Although technically one need not send more than one set of portions in order to fulfill the mitzvah, it is praiseworthy to send portions to as many friends as possible so long as it is not at the expense of giving gifts to the destitute which takes precedence. This mitzvah must be performed on Purim day and Mishloach Manot sent on days pre or post-Purim are not a fulfillment of the Mitzvah.

MATANOT L'EVYONIM: GIFTS TO THE DESTITUTE

In order to ensure that all are able to properly rejoice on the holiday of Purim, the Prophets mandated that all adults, male and female, should give charity to a minimum of two impoverished people on Purim. This contribution need not be specifically money, as food, drink, or clothing can suffice as well. However, the value of the gift should at least enable the recipient to purchase a basic meal.

In order to ensure that these gifts can theoretically assist the recipients on Purim, these gifts must be given by day following the reading of the Megillah and while it is important to ensure that the recipient is truly impoverished, this must be accomplished with great care and sensitivity. There are many organizations that have verified lists of such individuals and money can be donated to them with the specific request that it be distributed only on Purim day.

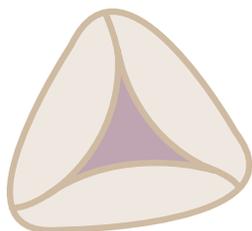


From the Mystics

"And Haman said to King Achashverosh: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are different from those of every people; nor do they keep the king's laws; therefore there is no reason for the king to suffer them.'" [Esther 3:8]

Haman's point to Achashverosh was that the Jewish nation is built on a platform of unity and kindness, but among themselves, they don't even practice that. Moreover, they refuse to interact with the non-Jewish population, reasoning that they must worry about one another, something they fail to act upon. They're self-serving and don't deserve to be part of your kingdom. In order to overcome these terrible allegations, we must devote ourselves to promoting peace and harmony among Jews and care for the needs of our indigent.

Devarim Achadim of Chidah



WHO'S THAT MASKED MAN

The custom in many communities is to wear a mask [or an even more elaborate costume] that conceals one's true identity. It is uncertain how far back this custom goes and just what the source for it is, but there are many possibilities. Here are two:

1. The Talmud [Megillah 12a] records a dialogue between Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his students who wondered why the Jewish nation of that generation was subject to a decree of annihilation. His students suggested that it was because they participated in the feast of Achashverosh. Rabbi Shimon dismissed this suggestion [although he did not condone this action at all] reasoning that if that were the case, only the Jews in Shushan should have been subject to this decree for only they participated. Instead, explained Rabbi Shimon, it was because they had bowed to the idol during the times of Nevuchadnezzar [an event that had occurred only recently.] 'If they were indeed guilty of this,' inquired his students, 'how did they merit having this decree rescinded?' Rabbi Shimon explained that they behaved this way outwardly, but inwardly they did not for one moment believe that this idol was worth deifying. Therefore, the Almighty created a situation which also appeared wholly frightful, but in reality, nothing would come of it.

To symbolize that the nature of their sin and the resulting events was only external, not internal, we don masks that present a false external front and conceal our true inner selves. Jewish tradition teaches that even when a Jew sins, he is not expressing his internal nature. Rather, his soul abhors sin, but he is nevertheless drawn to it for superficial and external reasons. Inwardly, however, he remains pure and untainted.

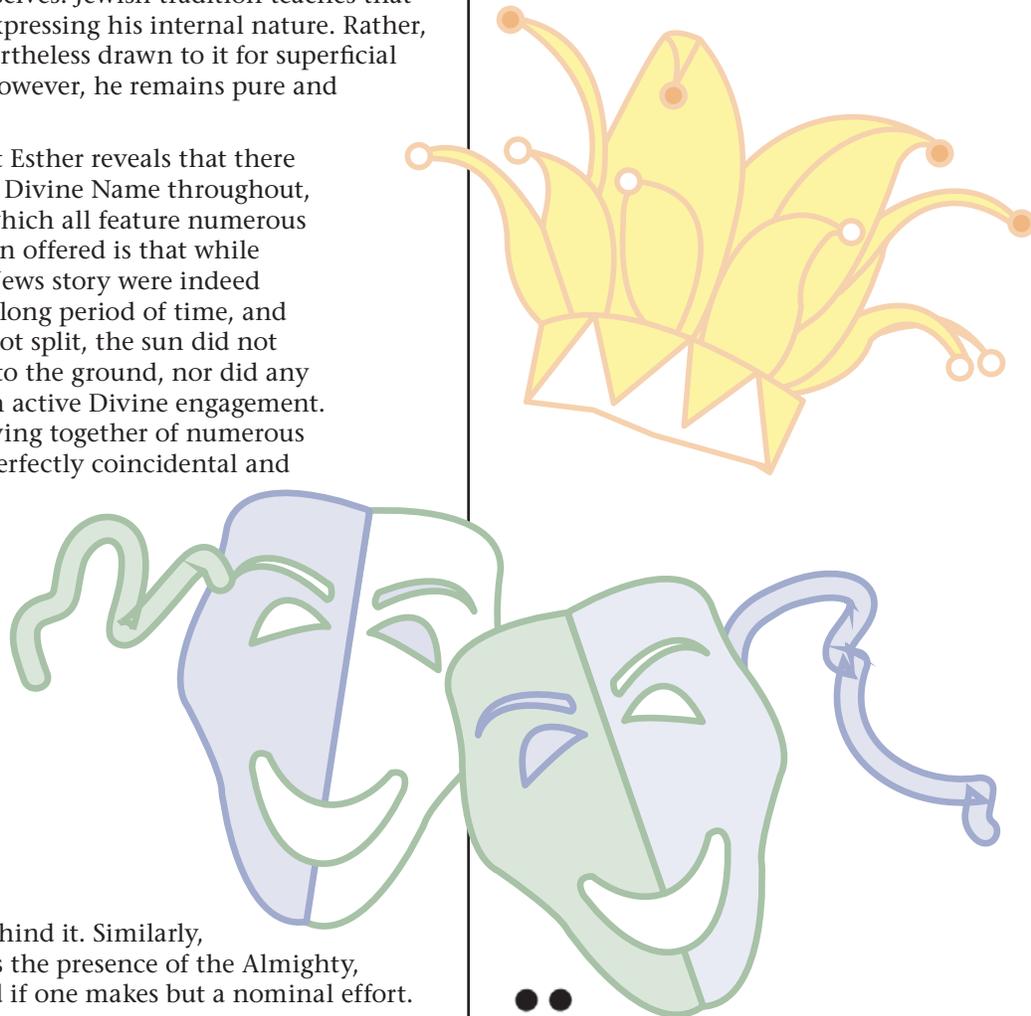
2. A careful examination of Megillat Esther reveals that there isn't even a single mention of the Divine Name throughout, an anomaly among holy scrolls which all feature numerous mentions of such. The explanation offered is that while the events that transpired in the Jews' story were indeed miraculous, they occurred over a long period of time, and were not overtly so. The sea did not split, the sun did not remain aloft, Manna did not fall to the ground, nor did any single occurrence loudly proclaim active Divine engagement. Instead, it required a skillful weaving together of numerous events, each of which appeared perfectly coincidental and natural in its own right, in order to recognize the magnitude of the miracle of salvation that occurred. Thus, the Divine Name does not appear in the Megillah, as if to highlight the need to perceive the Divine even when His presence is not immediately obvious.

To symbolize the need to explore beneath the surface in order to perceive the Hand of G-d as it manipulates events in our lives, we don a mask, which everyone knows is just a concealment of the real individual who stands behind it. Similarly, nature is but a mask that conceals the presence of the Almighty, which can be easily distinguished if one makes but a nominal effort.

From the Mystics

Purim is named after the "Pur," the lottery cast by Haman to determine the most auspicious time to destroy the Jews. Why is that the title by which to refer to the entire episode? Shabbat assumes its sanctity via Heavenly sanctification, whereas Holidays depend upon the sanctification of the new moon, performed by the Jewish people. Purim is unique in that it was designated by neither of the above, but by a lottery which gives the appearance of being totally random. Believing Jews, however, know that "random" events are also controlled by G-d and it is precisely in this that we diverge from the attitude of Amalek, who believed that all things are random. There is no happenstance and we therefore highlight the lottery to demonstrate that even where it appears there is, G-d is still managing the situation.

Resisei Laila



One year, in the beginning of the month of Adar, my grandfather noticed that the bakeries were not selling Hamantaschen. When he inquired as to why this was so, he discovered that there was a shortage of flour. He promptly went ahead and gave the largest bakers in the city a significant sum of money to enable them to buy flour to bake Hamantaschen.

Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein
(1860-1941), Mekor Baruch

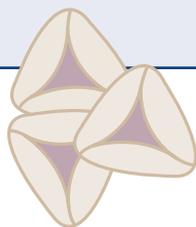
Why are poppy seeds the traditional filling for Hamantaschen? Perhaps the answer can be traced to a statement in the Torah, *“Even the empty one’s among you [Jews] are full of Mitzvot like a pomegranate,”* [Tractate Berachot 57a.] The filling of the Hamantasch is concealed and represents the hidden inner core of the simple Jew who appears so simple and unaccomplished, but in reality, he is full of Mitzvot. Poppies are miniscule and hundreds can fill the small inside of the Hamantasch.

“Like a rose among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.” [Song of Songs 2:2] This verse speaks of the love that G-d feels toward His children, Jews. The thorns threaten us, but He sees only the rose and spares us the pain that they would inflict upon us even if we have been disloyal to Him. The Purim story is an excellent portrayal of that special protection that He affords us, even after we have sinned toward Him.

From the Chassidic Masters

“The rose of Jacob” – Why is Jacob, of the three patriarchs, referenced in this refrain? Our Sages write that the Jewish people were more than worthy of annihilation at that time, and were only spared because they drew upon the merits of the Patriarchs. The three-day Fast ordained by Mordechai and Esther was in the merit of the three Patriarchs, the third day being in the merit of Jacob, whose trait was “mercy.” In his merit, Esther approached Achasverosh and merited mercy, which led to our salvation.

Imrei Emes



AL HANISSIM

Unlike major holidays which feature a special version of the *Amidah*, on Purim, the weekday version is recited with a small insert known as *Al HaNissim*. This short paragraph recounts in brief, the hidden miracle that occurred in the story of Purim.

“In the Days of Mordechai and Esther, in the capital city Shushan, when Haman, the evil one, rose up against them and sought to annihilate, to slay, and to exterminate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, on the same day. On the thirteenth [day] of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. But You, in Your abundant mercy, spoiled his counsel and frustrated his intention and returned his devious plot upon his own head and they hanged him and his sons on the gallows.”

This paragraph is also added to *Birchat HaMazon* [Grace after Meals] when it is recited on Purim. If forgotten, one need not repeat either *Birchat HaMazon* or the *Amidah* a second time.

HAMANTASCHEN

One of the most beloved customs of Purim is eating the tri-cornered Hamantaschen that are traditionally filled with poppy, prune jam, or any other filling one desires. Their origin is unclear although proof of their existence dates back many hundreds of years. Some have suggested that they resemble a three-corner hat that Haman wore, but there is no proof of that having been the case, nor is there necessarily a good reason to emulate his hat fashion. Others maintain that they were originally called *Oznai Haman* [ears of Jews] because they are shaped like an ear and legend has it that Haman was deaf.

Yet others maintain that their name refers to Haman’s downfall, for Hamantasch can be broken into two words, Haman — *tasch*, which means *“weakened.”* Yet another possibility is that their unique shape which conceals their filling recalls the “hidden” nature of the miracle that occurred.

Regardless of their origin, they have become an integral part of the Purim celebration, adorning Mishloach Manot and Purim feasts alike.

SHOSHANAS YAAKOV

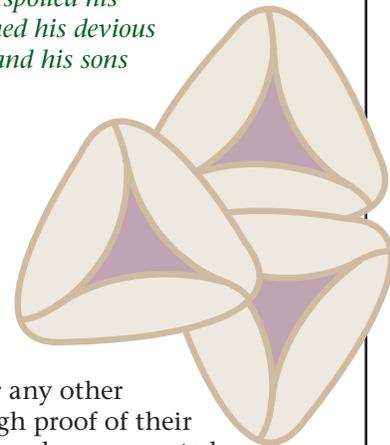
The city of Shushan figures prominently into the Purim story. In Song of Songs, the Jewish nation is compared to a rose known in Hebrew as a Shoshanah. The similarity recalls the verse in Megillat Esther, *“The city of Shushan celebrated and rejoiced”* (8:15) and explains the opening lines of this special song which customarily follows the reading of the Megillah.

The “rose of Jacob” [i.e. the city of Shushan] elated with joy and exulted when they beheld Mordechai garbed in royal blue.

You [G-d] have always been their salvation, their hope in every generation, to make known that all who place hope in You shall not be put to shame, nor shall all those who trust in You be disgraced forever.

Cursed be Haman who sought to annihilate me; blessed be Mordechai the Yehudi. Cursed be Zeresh, the wife of he who terrified me; blessed be Esther who [interceded] on my behalf.

Cursed be all the wicked; blessed be all the righteous; and may Charvonah also be remembered approvingly.



Essentially Shoshanat Yaakov is a reiteration of the central theme of the story of Purim which demonstrates that G-d orchestrates all events and should be relied upon to save us when danger threatens even if His hand is not always visible.

Sinai All Over Again

“The Jews fulfilled, and accepted [upon themselves,] and upon their offspring, and upon all who joined themselves to them, so as it should not fail, that they would observe these two days according to the writing thereof, and according to the appointed time thereof, every year.”
[Esther 9:27]

“They fulfilled what they had earlier accepted.”
[Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 88a]

Through the events of Purim, when the path adopted by the masses to stray from the Torah’s path and seek to appease the Persians failed so miserably, only to be saved via Mordechai and Esther’s dedication to Torah, the Jews attained a new appreciation for the Torah. So much so, that they reaffirmed their commitment to it in a way that they had not done earlier. Although by and large, their decision to accept the Torah at Sinai was an enthusiastic expression of love for G-d and His Torah, there were still some elements of Torah that they had trouble coming to terms with. Rabbinic authority was one such element and it was only when Mordechai’s counter-intuitive advice proved superior to their rational thought, that they understood that they needed to embrace this aspect of Torah as well. The holiday of Purim, wholly a product of Rabbinical authority, is a celebration of this new awareness and embrace of all aspects of Torah, even those that defy logical thought.



From the Chassidic Masters

“For if you will remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish; and who knows whether you have not come to royal estate for such a time as this?”
Esther 4:14

R’ Yisroel of Rhuzin zt”l dedicated his life to easing the unbearable situation that Russian Jews suffered at the hands of Czar Nikolai. One time he raised his eyes heavenward and cried out, “Master of the Universe, if You will not deliver the Jews from the hands of this evil Czar, ‘relief and deliverance will arise to the Jews,’ but I fear that it will emanate ‘from another place,’ i.e. a place that You will not find pleasing. Rather than remain loyal to You, they’ll seek to adopt the ways of the gentile and cast off the yoke of Torah in favor of enlightenment and greater acceptance among the nations. Should this occur, ‘You and your father’s house will perish,’ i.e. Torah study and Prayer will become a thing of the past. They’ll be lost forever and efforts to return them to You will prove futile.

From the Mystics

When King Achashverosh granted respite to the Jewish people and Mordechai emerged from the palace bedecked in royal garments, *“The city of Shushan exulted and rejoiced.”* [Esther 8:15] They exulted over the permission granted them to defend themselves and they rejoiced over the cancellation of the plan to force them to abandon their faith. For this had been an integral part of Achashverosh’s intent in inviting them to his feast.
Chidah, Nachal Eshkol

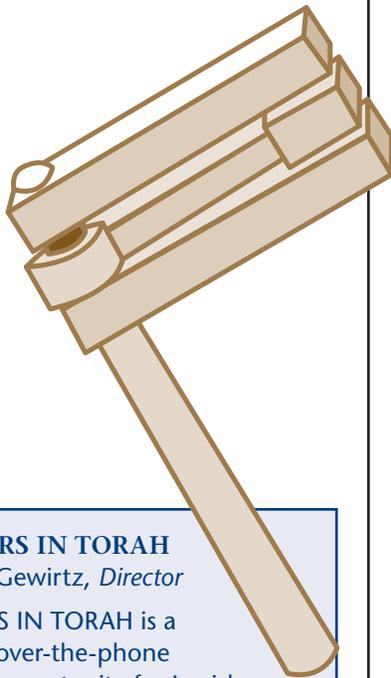
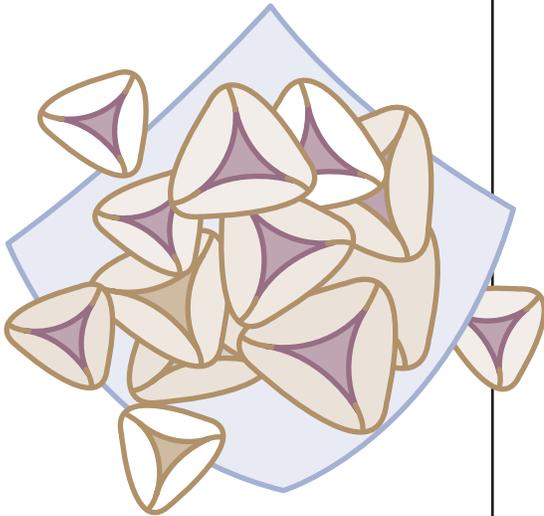
From the Mystics

There mere fact that the Jews rededicated themselves to Torah is reason enough to establish this day as a day reserved for conducting oneself with great sanctity and piety for in this sense, it is no less than the holiday of Shavuot. Add to that the wondrous miracle of salvation performed on our behalf which spared us from a certain death and we must surely celebrate the kindness of the Almighty. This point is even more salient when considering the fact that we were not only spared death at the hands of our enemies, but they were also wiped out in the process! All these reasons are sufficient to validate the custom that pious people have to work extra diligently to attain lofty levels of piety during these sacred days. It is also a justification of the custom that pious people have to fast a full three days prior to Purim just as the Jewish people fasted three days prior to the Revelation at Sinai.
Chemdas Yamim

From the Chassidic Masters

A gentleman once entered the study of the famed Ahavas Yisroel and requested a blessing that his ailing wife merit to be healed. The Ahavas Yisroel told him that Purim was an auspicious time for Jews to be healed because following the miracle of salvation, they reaccepted and rededicated themselves to Torah. As such, it was akin to the time when the Torah was given to us on Mt. Sinai. At that time, all ailing Jews were miraculously cured. Similarly, on Purim, when we rededicate ourselves to Torah, our illnesses fade away.

Rather than being an independent song, Shoshanas Yaakov is actually a continuation of the blessing recited upon the conclusion of the Megillah, “*Asher Heini*” whose verses are in the order of the Aleph Bet. The two verses of Shoshanas Yaakov form the Shin and Taf [Shoshanas and Teshuassam] and complete the sequence. This entire selection was composed by the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* [Men of the Great Assembly]
Likutei Mahariach



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Purim Facts

- According to our sages, prior to rising to the throne, Achashverosh was a simple stable boy. Ben Yehoyada explains that he wasn't actually a stable boy since he was of royal origins, but his behavior and status was that of a stable boy.
- The duration of time from when Haman rose to power until he was hanged was only 70 days.
- Vashti disobeyed Achashverosh and was killed on Shabbat. This was especially fitting because she wittingly forced her Jewish maidens to violate the Shabbat.
- In order to observe the Shabbat, Esther obtained seven maidens and named each one after the day of the week. When Friday left and Shabbat arrived, she knew that it was time to observe the Holy Shabbat.
- Our Sages debate whether Esther was 40, 75, or 80 years old when she was brought before Achashverosh.
- The three-day fast that the Jews observed commenced on the first day of Passover.
- Esther fasted for a total of 70 hours before approaching Achashverosh with her request to attend her feast.
- When Achashverosh learned of Haman's plan to decimate Esther's nation, he grew angry and stalked out of the feast. Upon his return to the Palace garden he saw Haman sitting on the couch with Esther and grew even more infuriated. He recalled that Vashti had been executed in this very garden thanks to Haman's advice and feared that he intended a similar consequence for Esther.
- Haman was hanged not on Purim, but on Pesach. His body remained on the gallows until almost a year later. Only then was he joined by his ten sons.
- Charvonah, formerly a collaborator of Haman, turned on him once he realized that he was in trouble and convinced Achashverosh to hang him before he could plead for mercy.
- King Achashverosh hated the Jews even more than Haman did. This hatred developed in him because his stargazers told him that a Jew would take over his throne.
- This prediction came to fruition when his own son, Darius, whom he bore with Esther assumed the throne following his death.
- Achashverosh killed his first wife because of his friend and later killed his friend because of his second wife.
- Achashverosh did not agree to rescind his permission to slay the Jews. He only agreed to allow the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies.
- Although dominant in their victory over their enemies, the victorious Jews did not help themselves to the spoils of their enemies and left them untouched.
- Although Mordechai eventually donned royal garments, he always wore linen shrouds that are customarily wrapped around a deceased person to ensure that he never forgot who he really was.

Points to Ponder

- Would you have sided with Mordechai and refrained from attending the feast or with those who believed that they must attend?
- Why was it necessary for Esther to conceal her faith from Achashverosh?
- What does Amalek represent that is so anathema to Judaism?
- Is it really that difficult to invite the less fortunate to share the Purim feast with us?
- If there's one lesson to derive from the Purim miracle, what would it be?
- What can you do to increase joy in your own life?