

Celebrating Purim

Jewish Family Living – Holiday Celebrations at Home
Congregation Beth El ♦ Bethesda, MD



The Holiday of Masks and Miracles

When the Jewish month of Adar arrives, many recite the following Talmudic phrase:

מְשֻׁנְכָּנֶס אֶדָר מְרַבִּים בְּשִׂמְחָה!

Mi'shenichnas Adar marbim b'simcha!

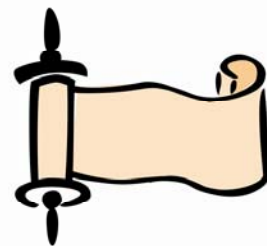
When Adar comes, joy is increased!

Purim is a fun, merry holiday falling on the 14th day of the month of Adar. This holiday is such a time of joy and festivity, that the entire month of Adar is filled with merriment. Purim, also called the Feast of Lots, recounts the saving of Jews of Persia from a threatened massacre somewhere around 539-330 BCE. The story of Purim is found in the Book of Esther (*Megillat Esther* - found in the *Ketuvim*, or Writings, the third section of the Tanakh), whose eponymous heroine, a young Jewish woman who happens to become queen, plays a leading role in saving her people.

There are a number of traditions associated with the holiday, including going to synagogue to hear the *megillah* read, using noisemakers (*graggers*) to drown out Haman's name during the reading, giving gifts to the poor (*matanot l'evyonim*), preparing costumes and masks for young and old, and giving gifts (*mishloach manot*) to friends and family.

Quick Purim Facts!

- ✧ Purim is a Rabbinic holiday, not a *Yom Tov* because it is post-biblical. What does this mean? There are no work restrictions during Purim (like you have on Shabbat and other special festival days). Additionally, we are not commanded to light candles on Purim.
- ✧ Purim is meant to be a joyous holiday, and we are commanded to be happy on this day in celebration of the Jewish victory over Haman's evil plot.
- ✧ The day before Purim is called *Ta'anit Esther*, the Fast of Esther, and is a minor fast day. This fast is held to commemorate the bravery of Queen Esther, who fasted before approaching her husband the king with news of Haman's plot. When Purim begins on a Saturday evening (like it does in 2010), *Ta'anit Esther* is held on Thursday – we are not to fast on Shabbat, nor can we fast on Friday, when we are preparing for Shabbat.



- ✧ There are four central *mitzvot* surrounding Purim: *Seudat Mitzvah*, the Purim feast; *Matanot L'evyonim*, gifts for the needy; *Megillah*, the reading of the Book of Esther; and *Mishloach Manot*, sending special gifts of food and goodies to friends and family.
- ✧ The word "God," nor any of the many names for God, is not mentioned once in the entire Book of Esther (pay attention when you hear the Megillah read Purim evening!).

Home Guide for Celebrating Purim

While other holidays throughout the Jewish year have strong home-based practices, nearly all Purim rituals and traditions occur in communal space – usually in a synagogue or congregational setting. Despite this, there are a number of activities that can be done in the home, especially to prepare for this fun-filled holiday. This guide will help explain some of these holiday traditions, as well as identify some resources for making this Purim a festive holiday for your family.



Mishloach Manot

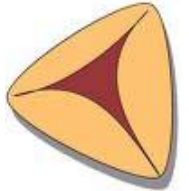
Mishloach Manot (you might sometimes hear it shortened to *Shlach Manot*) is a custom that is found first in the Scroll of Esther, *Megillat Esther*. When recording the events that led to the deliverance of the Jews of Persia, Mordechai wrote that the 14th and 15th days of the Hebrew month of Adar were to be observed "... as days of feasting and merrymaking and as an occasion of sending gifts to one another and gifts to the poor (Esther 9:22). These gifts, which can take all shapes and sizes, are a fun way of extending the joy and happiness of Adar and Purim to your friends and family. Usually the gifts contain Purim delicacies, such as homemade *hamantashen*, nuts, wine or juice, fruit, or other food items. Some ideas for making your own *Mishloach Manot*:

- Get small paper gift bags (you can find them at any craft store or Target-type establishment, sometimes in bulk quantities), perhaps even in a variety of colors. Decorating the bag adds an easy embellishment - if you have children, they can decorate the bags with images from the Purim story, Jewish symbols, or anything else that they like. Stickers are another possibility.
- Another option - use large, sturdy paper plates - if you choose blank ones, they can also be illustrated with scenes from Purim. Brainstorm as a family some of the important scenes from the holiday story - the banishment of Vashti, the beauty pageant that lands Esther her regal gig, Haman plotting against the Jews, etc. An easy wrapping idea: choose some colored cellophane wrap and top off your gift with some curling ribbon!
- Once you've decided upon the vehicle for your gifts, brainstorm ideas of what can be placed inside - will you make *hamantashen* together (and, more importantly, which fillings will you use!?), any candy, nuts, hot chocolate/tea/coffee mixes? What would help YOU enjoy the holiday of Purim – use this to help guide the discussion.
- Don't forget to attach a card to let your recipient know who has given them the *mishloach manot*!



Matanot L'evyonim

Another Purim tradition, found in the same verse above, is to give gifts to the needy. This can be done in a variety of ways - perhaps go through your pantry to find those canned and non-perishable items that can be donated to a food bank, or perhaps you send baskets of food to those who are sick or needy to help them enjoy the holiday. Some synagogues sell and deliver *mishloach manot* as a fundraiser, the proceeds of which are given to a worthwhile organization.



Hamantashen

These triangular cookies, originally called *mohn taschen*, a German term meaning "poppy seed pockets," are one of the quintessential treats for Purim. Triangular shaped in honor of Haman's hat, these cookies now wrap around a wide variety of fruit and sweet fillings - some favorites among children are cherry, chocolate chip, raspberry, and sometimes even a Reese's Peanut Butter cup (mini, of course!) Some great recipes on the web are [The Best Ever Cherry Hamantashen](#) (which, of course, can be filled with ingredients other than cherry if you so desire) and Joan Nathan's [famous recipe](#) from her [The Jewish Holiday Kitchen](#).

Other Possible Activities



- For younger children, make sock puppets for each of the characters in the Purim story. They can act out all or parts of the story using their puppets.
- Make your own *graggers* that you can bring with you to the Megillah reading at your local synagogue - they can be made out of anything, including a paper plate folded in half and stapled shut to contain dried beans or something similar that will rattle about when shaken. Something similar can be achieved (and using recycled materials!) with left over plastic bottles and canisters. All can be decorated with ribbon, marker, or anything else to heighten the festivity of your noisemaker.
- Make masks! These can be done in a variety of ways with a variety of media - from something simple as from a paper plate to a more sophisticated paper maché mask. [Here](#) are three from holidays.net that can be printed onto sturdy paper and colored by your artist. [Here is a mask](#) that is a little more involved from Babaganewz.
- Read a book about Purim! Some great ones are:
 - [It's Purim Time](#) by Latifa Berry Kropf, illustrated by Tod Cohen (for ages 2-6)
 - [Make Your Own Megillah](#) by Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler, illustrated by Katherine Janus Kahn (for ages 4-9)
 - [Sammy Spider's First Purim](#), by Sylvia Rouss, illustrated by Katherine Janus Kahn (for ages 3-8)
 - [The Purim Surprise](#), by Lesley Simpson, illustrated by Peter Church (for ages 3-8)
 - [When It's Purim](#) by Edie Stoltz Zolkower, illustrated by Barb Bjornson (board book – for toddlers)

This guide was prepared by Elisha Rothschild Frumkin, Family Education Director at Congregation Beth El, with help from: www.myjewishlearning.com and [Teaching Jewish Holidays](#) by Roberta Goodman.