

A Teacher's Guide to Judaism

Purim

Purim is a minor festival celebrated in spring, on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar corresponding to the months of February/March. It is a joyous festival celebrating the continued survival of the Jewish people. Jewish people traditionally wear fancy dress costumes and listen to the Book of Esther.

Meaning:

Purim means 'lottery' or 'chance' – Prime Minister Haman cast lots to choose a day on which he planned to kill Mordechai and all the Jewish people.

Traditional activities:

- Reading the Book of Esther (Megillat Esther)
- Wearing fancy dress
- Shaking a gregger to drown out Haman's name when listening to the Book of Esther
- Eating hamentaschen: triangular pastry parcels with a poppy seed filling
- Giving gifts: mishloach manot, at least 2 different kinds of food to friends and neighbours
- Giving charity

Biblical reading:

The Book of Esther:

In Persia, Haman (one of King Ahasuerus' ministers) wanted to destroy the Jewish people in revenge for being snubbed by Mordecai, who refused to bow down to him. Haman fed the king the traditional anti-Semitic slur: "There is a certain nation whose people live in all parts of your kingdom. Their laws are different from our laws. They do not obey your laws. It will not benefit you to allow them to stay". With the king's authority, Haman drew lots to determine the day he would kill Mordechai and all the Jewish people.

Learning of this, Mordecai approached the new queen, his cousin Esther. Mordechai's told Esther not to tell the King she was Jewish. She needed to do so to make the king realise that Haman's plot was judging all people as one. She told the king that Haman was planning to kill all the Jewish people, which would include her. The King realised he had been foolish to let Haman persuade him, but he couldn't go back on his word. Instead he let the Jewish people defend themselves, and hanged Haman on the gallows originally planned for Mordechai.

Biblical source:

"In the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on its thirteenth day ... on the day that the enemies of the Jewish people were expected to prevail over them, it was turned about: the Jewish people prevailed over their adversaries". - Esther 9:1

Greeting: "Purim sameach" – a happy Purim

DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY

Prime Minister Haman – was an evil Prime Minister during Esther's time. When Haman's name is read out aloud during the public chanting of the Book of Esther (Megillat Esther) in the synagogue, the congregation makes a noise to blot out his name.

The Book of Esther - Also known in Hebrew as "the Scroll" (Megillah), is a book in the third section of the Jewish Tanach (the Hebrew Bible). It is one of the five Scrolls (Megillot) in the Hebrew Bible. It relates the story of a Jewish woman in Persia, born as Hadassah but known as Esther, who becomes queen of Persia and stopped a massacre of her people. The story forms the core of the Jewish festival of Purim, during which it is read aloud twice: once in the evening and again the following morning. The books of Esther and Song of Songs are the only books in the Hebrew Bible that do not mention God.

Megillah Scroll



Gregger

A noisemaker/rattle used to make noise when we hear the name of Haman during the Purim story



These resources describe practices that are common in the UK, but there is a wide range of Jewish traditions and observance, and different Jewish people have different levels of observance. When interacting with Jewish pupils and their parents, teachers should be aware that it is always best to ask about their own preferences.

Hamantaschen - triangular filled-pocket biscuit, eaten during the Jewish holiday of Purim. The name refers to Haman, the villain in the Purim story. In Hebrew, oznei-haman literally translates to 'Haman's ears'.



Mishloach manot

Means the "sending of portions". Gifts of food or drink given to family and friends on Purim. The mitzvah (good deed) of giving Mishloach Manot derives from the Book of Esther, ensuring that everyone has enough food for the Purim feast held later in the day, and to increase love and friendship among Jewish people and their neighbours.



Jewish months (lunar calendar)

Nisan (March-April)

Iyyar (April-May)

Sivan (May-June)

Tammuz (June-July)

Av (July-August)

Elul (August-September)

Tishrei (September-October)

Cheshvan (October-November)

Kislev (November-December)

Tevet (December-January)

Shevat (January-February)

Adar (February-March)