

“...to mark the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day thereof, every year, as the days when the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month that was reversed for them from grief to joy and from mourning to a festive day-to make them days of feasting and joy, and sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.” (*Megillat Esther* 9:21-22)

Shabbat Zachor, the “Shabbat of Remembrance;” immediately precedes Purim. It takes its name from the additional Torah portion (Devarim/Deuteronomy 25:17-19) which is read that Shabbat and which begins with the word *Zachor* (remember). This passage recalls the wicked nation of *Amaleik* that attacked the fledgling Israelite nation without cause for provocation and from whom Haman is described as having descended.

God’s name appears ZERO times in the book of Esther. It was the choice of the Jewish people to see God behind the scenes rather than ascribe circumstances to chance which gave the holiday its staying power. In fact, when the Talmud records a challenge to the notion of commandment resulting from the covenant of Sinai due to the duress of revelation, it is Purim which stands as the counterpoint and the ultimate anchor for religious obligation as the covenant we humans initiated out of choice.

## Fun Facts

# All about Purim

## A Holiday of Post Rivalry Revelry

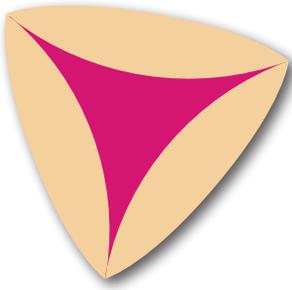
Night of **February 28–March 1** / Day of **Adar 14**



They Tried to Kill Us.  
We Survived. Let’s Eat!



# The Backstory



The Persian Empire of the 4th century BCE sprawled over 127 diverse lands including every place Jews called home. The events begin when at the end of a six-month party Persia's King

Achashveirosh, at his adviser's suggestion, had his Queen, Vashti, executed for failing to follow his orders. In need of a new queen, a Jewish girl, Esther, was chosen from all the bachelorettes in the Kingdom, but her Jewish identity was kept secret at her relative, Mordechai's, request.

Following a failed coup, during which Mordechai's intervention was instrumental to saving the king, a new antagonist, Haman, was elevated to the king's lead advisor, making him more powerful than all but the king himself. Haman enraged after Mordechai refuses to bow for him, manipulates the king into issuing a decree allowing the extermination of all Jews on the 13th day of the Hebrew month of Adar, a randomly chosen date by Haman. (The holiday of Purim gets its name from this lottery drawing - 'Purim' means 'lots').

## How We Celebrate

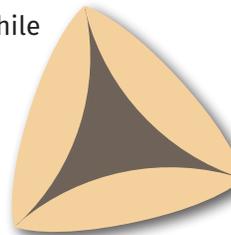
**Megillah:** *Megillat Esther* – the biblical book of Esther – is read twice on Purim (ideally communally), once at night, and once in the morning. It contains the firsthand account of the events surrounding the fear, faith and triumph of the Purim saga as recorded by heroes, Mordechai and Esther.

**Matanot La'Evyonim:** Gifts to the poor. Purim's immense joy cannot be complete until all are included in it. A critical component of the day is the traditional gifts made to those less fortunate whose financial resources preclude them from participating in the festivities of the day. The Mitzvah specifies that on the day of Purim itself, one should give charity to at least two people in need.

**Mishloach Manot:** Distribution of food portions. – When Haman approached King Achashveirosh to request royal sanction to exterminate the Jewish people he stated the Jews were a "scattered and separate" people. The *Mishloach Manot* sent to our families, friends and acquaintances yearly are a bold statement of our communal unity in defiance of Haman's characterization. The Mitzvah specifies one should send at least two diverse food items to at least one other Jewish person on Purim as a show of *Chevrashaft* – our genuine compassion and generosity toward fellow members of our Jewish community.

Mordechai and Esther want to save their people, but Esther is afraid of placing herself at risk. Confronted with an opportunity to be an Upstander, Esther, with Mordechai's encouragement, faces her fear. After requesting that all Jews repent, fast and pray to God for three days, Esther asked the king and Haman to join her for a feast. It is only at a follow up feast that Esther revealed her Jewish identity to the king while decrying Haman's plan to exterminate her alongside her people.

Haman was hung from the very tree intended for Mordechai, while Mordechai was ultimately appointed prime minister in his place. As a king's decree is irrevocable, a new decree was issued granting the Jewish people the right to self-defense against any that would attack them. On the 13th of Adar, the Jewish people were successful in fending off those would be attackers, and on the 14th of Adar, they rested and celebrated. In the walled capital city of Shushan this process of self-defense took an additional day. As such, to this day Jews celebrate Purim on the 14th day of Adar in most cities, while celebrating Shushan Purim on the 15th of Adar in any city which was walled in the time of Joshua's conquest (like in Jerusalem).



**Seudah:** A joyous feast. The traditional markers on holidays include wine and feasting, on Purim we commemorate the salvation through a festive meal infused with singing, stories and words of Torah. *Shtick*, the Yiddish word for gimmicky funny performances, routines and activities, enhance the fun of this meal.

**Al HaNisim:** An expression of gratitude for the holiday miracles is inserted into the daily prayers and grace after meals.

**Other Customs:** Beyond the formal Mitzvot (commandments) above, certain things have become customary as part of Purim's festivities. These include: Dressing in costume, making noise with a *Grogger* (noisemaker) at every mention of Haman's name; eating *Hamantaschen* - the triangular filled cookies said to resemble Haman's hat or ears; and performing in (or watching) a *Purim Shpiel* – which can range from a production of the Megillah reading of Purim through live acting/puppetry to a series of comedic sketches often roasting participants or the community.

