

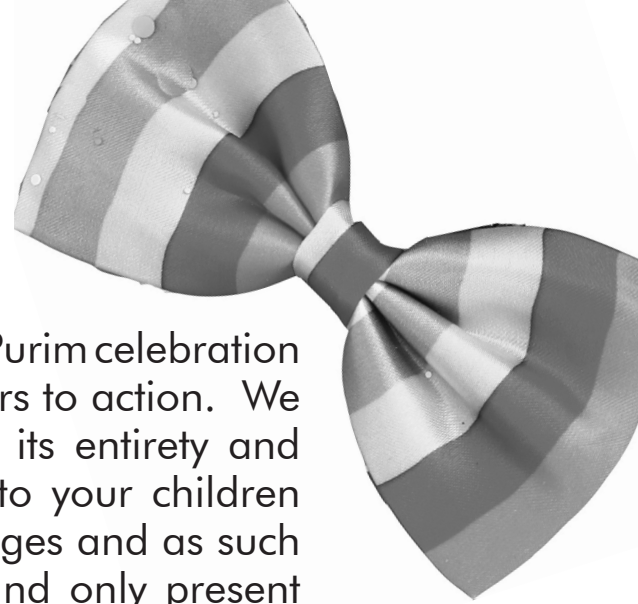


★ ★ ★ Areyvut

# PURIM 2021

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION  
& REFLECTION  
AND ACTIVITIES





This booklet is designed to help you enhance your Purim celebration and educate, engage, motivate and inspire others to action. We strongly encourage you to read the booklet in its entirety and determine in advance which topics to present to your children and students. Not all topics are suitable for all ages and as such we recommend that you prepare in advance and only present content suited to your target audience.

Too often Purim is purely religious or relegated to the youngest. There are four mitzvot associated with this festival (post Torah holiday). First, everyone is assembled to hear the story of Esther in the Megillah. Everyone. This is the story, by chapter.

**CHAPTER 1** - The story opens in the midst of the 180-day lavish banquet thrown by King Achashveirosh (Xerxes) of Persia, He is said to have ruled "from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty province, in approximately 357 BCE, detailing his extraordinary wealth and power. When Queen Vashti refuses to attend, Achashveirosh has her banished.

**CHAPTER 2** - The king begins a world-wide search for a new queen. After introducing Mordechai and his niece Esther, the Megillah recounts how the king's officers bring Esther to the palace to participate in the lengthy beauty pageant through which the new queen will be selected. Achashveirosh chooses Esther to be his queen. As per Mordechai's orders, she does not inform the king of her Jewish heritage. In the meantime, Mordechai overhears a plot to assassinate the king. The conspirators, Bigtan and Teresh, are killed, and his heroic deed is recorded in the king's Book of Chronicles.

**CHAPTER 3** - Achashveirosh appoints Haman to be his viceroy and all of the citizens of Shushan are ordered to bow before him. Mordechai, however, refuses to bow to Haman, inciting his anger towards all the Jewish people. Haman casts lots and determines that the 13th day of the month of Adar would be the day to kill Mordechai and his people. After securing the king's permission, Haman sends edicts out to all 127 provinces in Achashveirosh's kingdom, informing them of the new decree.

**CHAPTER 4** - A great sense of mourning descends upon the Jewish people. Mordechai asks Esther to get involved, and she agrees to risk her life by going before the king unsummoned.

**CHAPTER 5** - After fasting for three days, Esther goes before the king. She invites both Achashveirosh and Haman to a feast, laying a trap for the wicked Haman. At the banquet, Esther invites the two men to a second banquet to be held the next day. In the meantime, Haman constructs gallows fifty-cubits high upon which he plans to hang Mordechai.

**CHAPTER 6** - That night the king could not sleep, so he ordered that his Book of Chronicles be read to him. The king learns of Mordechai's heroic deed, and that he never rewarded him for foiling the assassination attempt. Haman, who had been in the outer courtyard of the palace preparing to ask the

king's permission to hang Mordechai, is brought before the king. The king asks Haman what should be done for a man whom the king wants to honor? Thinking that Achashveirosh meant to honor him, Haman describes a royal reward where this man would ride around town in royal garments and upon one of the king's horses. Achashveirosh commands Haman to personally reward Mordechai in this fashion.

**CHAPTER 7** - At the second banquet, Esther informs the king that Haman wants to destroy her people. Achashveirosh is outraged and orders that Haman be hanged on the very gallows which he had erected for Mordechai.

**CHAPTER 8** - Mordechai is appointed the new viceroy to replace Haman. Esther begs Achashveirosh to retract Haman's decree against the Jews. The king grants permission that on the day that the Jews were to be killed, they will be permitted to defend themselves and destroy their enemies. The city of Shushan and its Jewish inhabitants rejoice.

**CHAPTER 9** - On the 13th day of Adar, the Jewish people defeat their adversaries and hang the ten sons of Haman. The Jewish community of Shushan is granted a second day to destroy their enemies. Mordechai records these events and establishes the festival of Purim. He starts the Purim traditions -- consisting of a festive meal, the exchange of gifts of food, and the giving of monetary gifts to the poor.

**CHAPTER 10** - Mordechai is recognized as a hero of his people.



# TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

1. "From India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty province"
  - a. See Google maps. Is this big?
2. Now it came to pass in the days of Ahashverosh -this is Ahashverosh who reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces" 1:1
  - a. Imagine what it would be like if there were no place else for the Jews to go and get away from.
3. "For this deed of the queen will come abroad unto all women, to make their husbands contemptible in their eyes, when it will be said: The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. "(1:17)

Vashti (Chapter 1) is historically deemed a bad person. Traditionally, she has been described as evil or having a tail.

  - a. In 2021, is Vashti a hero, standing up for women's rights?
  - b. Is saying no to being objectified at a men's-only party good or bad?
4. Assimilation:
  - a. How do we explain that Esther (Hadassah is her Hebrew name) has the name of a pagan God?
  - b. How should we feel and what should we learn that Esther does not acknowledge and identify with being a Jew? How does this reflect our feelings of intermarriage?
5. Pikuach Nefesh: is it more important for Mordecai to risk the safety of all the Jews for the sake of not bowing down to a dictator? (Chapter 3)
6. Is it troubling that the decree to kill the Queen and all the Jews could not be revoked? (Chapter 8)
7. Complete the following sentences to discuss:
  - a. This year when I heard the Megillah I realized that...
  - b. One thing that surprised me in the Megillah was...
  - c. I noticed for the first time that...
  - d. I was really glad to learn that...
  - e. It made me sad to think that...
  - f. I would like to know more about...
  - g. One thing I decided after studying Purim this year was that...
  - h. Something about my own life that I realized after this exercise is that...
  - i. I celebrate Purim with my family and community...
  - j. Identity: I feel Jewish when...
  - k. My favorite Purim costume was when I dressed as...

8. There are the four Mitzvot of Purim. Of the four mitzvot of Purim, which is the most meaningful to you? Why?

1. Reading the Megillah. On Purim, the Megillah is read aloud in synagogues all over the world. Traditionally, we make loud noises when Haman's name is read.
2. Giving Gifts to Friends
3. Eating a Special Meal
4. Giving to the Needy

9. Of all the characters in the Purim Megillah, who is your hero and why?

## 10. Discuss Substance Abuse

- Discuss the rabbinic saying in the Talmud that one should revel on Purim by drinking “until one no longer knows” (Aramaic: *ad de-lo yada*) the difference between “blessed be Mordechai” and “cursed be Haman”. What does it mean to you?
- Does it make a difference one’s age and setting?
- What should one do if they are concerned about a friend or colleague?

## 11. Discuss Sexual Abuse

- Why did Mordecai encourage his niece to enter a beauty contest? (Chapter 2) How do we negotiate this story line and tzniut or modesty?
- Can we assume Vashti stood up for her rights?
- How do we explain Esther's actions?

**12.** If the sons of Haman are already dead, why were they hung? What is the connection between Purim and the Nazis? (Chapter 9)

Note: On October 16, 1946, ten of the highest-ranking Nazi officers of Hitler's Germany were put to death. Three more were given life sentences (Rudolf Hess, the last surviving relic of the trials, died in Spandau Prison in 1987 at the age of 93), four were imprisoned for up to twenty years, and three were acquitted.

When King Ahasuerus, then the most powerful man on earth, offered to grant Queen Esther whatever she desired for having saved his life, she replied, "If it please the king, let it tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do according to the law of this day, and let the 10 sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows."

וַאֲתָנָה Esther 9:7

פרשנדא ואת

דלפון נאם

**Figure 1**




פּוּרְתָא וואָ

אדליא ואת

**אֲרִידָתָא:** וְאֵת

נאם      נ-נרפ

אֲרֵנִי וְנָא

אֶת־כָּל־הַיָּמִים  
וְאֶת־כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה

זיכרון

TT:-

This is a remarkable request since Haman's 10 sons had already been killed by the sword in the citadel of Susa (Esther 9:6-14). Nevertheless, in accordance with Esther's wishes their 10 dead bodies were hanged. In the Apocryphal Greek version of Esther, chapter 9 verses 13-14 reads: And Esther said to the king, "Let the Jews be allowed to do the same tomorrow. Also, hang up the bodies of Haman's 10 sons." So he permitted this to be done, and handed over to the Jews of the city the bodies of Haman's sons to hang up.

When the Megillah Esther was written, the names of the 10 sons of Haman who were hanged are enumerated. In the Hebrew text, the letters of the names are several times larger than the regular text. Yet, in the second, eighth and eleventh entry in the list, there are three letters; Tav, Shin and Zayn which are only one-half the size of the regular text. This mysterious order has been followed every since. The numerical value of the three diminished letters equals 707.

The Nuremberg Trials ended on October 1, 1946, which corresponded with the Jewish year of 5706. However, the due process of law meant the sentences of the convicted men could not be passed down until after appeals for clemency, of which there were many, had been heard. Finally, the sentences were pronounced. The Jewish New Year had arrived in the interim - it was 5707.

Twelve Nazis were meant to hang - although the method of execution might equally as well have been the firing squad - but Martin Bormann had escaped at the end of the war and was sentenced to death in absentia, and Herman Goering committed suicide two hours before his destined execution, leaving 10 condemned men.

In the early hours of October 16, 1946 during a 90 minute period, these 10 top Nazis went to their death on the gallows. The guards, with precise, ruthless efficiency brought them in one by one to deliver their last words and die. Only Julius Streicher went without dignity. His appearance happened at 2:11 a.m. He had to be pushed across the floor, wild-eyed and screaming, "Heil Hitler!" Mounting the steps, he cried out: "and now I go to God." He was pushed the last two steps to the mortal spot beneath the hangman's rope. Streicher swung around to face the witnesses and glared at them. Suddenly he screamed "Purim Fest 1946!" Then he was hanged.

Esther had predicted that just as these 10 sons, descendants of Amalek and enemies of the Jews, were hanged, so again in the year 5707 (1946) would 10 other children of Haman be hanged.

The day of the early morning executions the front page headlines of the October 16, 1946 Late City Edition of The New York Times broke the story of what had just happened. In another strange twist, this was the day of Hoshana Raba.

"...On the seventh day of the Succot Holiday (Hoshana Raba), the judgement of the nations of the world is finalized. Sentences are issued from the residence of the King. Judgements are aroused and executed on that day." Zohar Vayikra 31b



# ACTIVITIES

## READING THE MEGILLAH

On Purim, the Megillah is read aloud in synagogues all over the world. Traditionally, we make loud noises when Haman's name is read.

### 1. Story Time:

- a. Cut the story into sections.
- b. Working in pairs or small teams, put the story strips in order.
- c. Retell the Purim story in cartoons. (Comic strip apps make it easy.)

### 2. Shpiel:

- a. Using the chapter outlines, create a Purim Shpiel and present it on video to share with families and friends during the pandemic.

## GIVING TO THE NEEDY

### 1. Create cards wishing elderly or home-bound community members a Purim Sameach (Happy Purim)

### 2. Matanot L'evyonim - Gifts to the Poor

- a. Decorate tzedakah boxes
  - i. Use mod podge with magazine pictures or give students paint or sharpie markers to decorate them.
  - ii. Decorate the box with images of where they would like their money to go.
- b. Contact a local soup kitchen or food bank and ask if they would take sandwiches or other prepared food.
  - i. Make a sandwich-a-thon, bagged lunches, or other food offerings for the needy.
- c. Mod podge pasta – use as a noise maker – donate to a food bank
- d. Make posters or videos advocating for giving to the needy on Purim. Teach about giving to the poor on Purim. Provide them with silly props and texts from the Use a smartphone or tablet to record the promos and send them out to your community.

## GIVING GIFTS TO FRIENDS

During the late 1500s, German Jews dubbed the traditional Purim cookies, Hamantaschen, or "Haman's pockets." The play on words likely references the rumor that the evil Haman's pockets were filled with bribe money. Plus, mohn sounds like Ha - man. It's a long-held belief that the three corners of the triangle-shaped hamantaschen represent Haman's favorite three-cornered hat. The belief is that taking a bite out of the cookie is in defiance of bowing down to Haman and preventing him from carrying out his evil plan.

Incorrectly, many people assume that Haman's ears, or oznei haman, are the same pastry treat. They are not. This Purim sweet are modeled after Haman's anatomy and they consist of fried strips of dough that have been shaped into the form of an ear and subsequently dusted with confectioner's sugar or cinnamon sugar. This traditional fritter-like treat are thought to have originated in Spain or Italy, and the first written record of the term Oznei Haman was found in an Italian Jewish comedy called Tzachut Bedichuta de-Kiddushin (An Eloquent Marriage Farce) in 1550. This is the oldest recorded Jewish play and was produced for a Purim carnival. Later, people explained that Haman's ears were cut off after he was hung. However, according to foodie Gil Marks in his Encyclopedia of Jewish Food, this was a

misinterpretation that came from a similar medieval Italian practice of cutting off a criminal's ear before their execution. Rather, it more likely means "twisted ears," meaning "someone wrenched [Haman's] ears or they were deformed or twisted or triangular in shape, like those of a donkey."

Consuming pastries in the shape of a piece of Haman's clothing or anatomy follows from the Jewish custom of saying the phrase y'mahk shemo meaning "May his name be erased" in Hebrew, when faced with an evil person such as Haman. Thus, eating such a pastry is another way of erasing Haman's name on Purim. So grab a Haman's ear and join in this custom!

To perform the mitzvah of mishloach manot, bake hamantaschen or oznei Haman and bag/box for friends.

During the pandemic, doorside drop off gifts will be welcome deliveries.