

Observances/ Customs

In the synagogue, the **Megillah** (Scroll) of Esther is read aloud evening and morning. Each time Haman’s name comes up, young and old alike make a clamorous noise to blot it out. A popular noisemaker is the “grogger,” a ratcheting noisemaker twirled round and round.

Customs embraced by celebrants over the years include masquerading, performing **Purimshpiel** parodies, sending food parcels to one another and the poor (**Mishloach Manot**), and preparing three-cornered pastries filled with prunes, fruit or a poppy seed mix, called **Hamantaschen**.



Grogger and a plate of hamantaschen



Adloyadah

The Tel Aviv Purim celebration features a grand procession of festive, original floats. In Israel, the carnival is known as **Adloyadah** recalling the Talmudic permission to drink wine on Purim “until one does not know (Ad-lo-yadah) the difference between ‘Blessed be Mordecai’ and ‘Cursed be Haman.’”

Excessive drinking was allowed because of Purim’s Biblical status as a **mishteh**—a feast at which drinking is allowed. However, going beyond the limit of “Adloyadah” to abusive or destructive levels of intoxication is clearly prohibited.



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A Guide to Purim



Festival of Lots

“The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor.” (Esther: 8.16)

In these words, the Book of Esther expresses the mood of celebration and revelry that has characterized Purim—the Festival of Lots—for more than 2,500 years.

The story of Purim began 25 centuries ago with the selection of a queen and the appointment of a viceroy by **King Ahasuerus** (Xerxes) of Persia. With these successive actions, the seeds of a great conflict were sown.

First, from among the beautiful women presented to him in his search for a successor to his deposed **Queen Vashti**, the King chooses **Esther**: a cousin of **Mordecai**, leader of the Jewish community in the capital of Shushan. Then, he elevates a courtier, **Haman**, to the position of grand vizier and orders all in the kingdom to bow down in Haman’s presence.

When Mordecai refuses to do so, the furious Haman bribes King Ahasuerus to issue a decree condemning all the Jews of Persia to be destroyed, because “Their laws are diverse from all people; neither do they keep the king’s laws.” He casts lots (purim) to determine the genocidal date, and Adar 13 is chosen.



Mordecai puts on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of mourning and tells Esther of the fate that awaits her as well as all of the Jews.

Planning to petition Ahasuerus on behalf of her people, Esther invites the King and Haman to two successive banquets at her private apartment in the palace. At the same time, Haman persuades the King to let him erect a gallows “50 cubits high” for the execution of Mordecai as an example to all.

At the second banquet, Ahasuerus offers Esther half of his kingdom. She pleads instead that “my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.”

Aware now of the extremity of Haman’s vengeful bloodlust, the angry King orders the Grand Vizier to be hanged on the gallows meant for Mordecai.

Allowed to defend themselves against the attacks unleashed against them on Adar 13 and 14, the Jews are victorious. Mordecai is appointed grand vizier in Haman’s place. He and Esther circulate letters to the Jews throughout the empire establishing Purim as a festival to be celebrated yearly.

Purim, a resounding tale of Jewish triumph over isolation, tyranny and genocide, has reverberated through the ages...

inspiring song and drama, parody and pranks, pageants and masquerades, bonfires and carnivals...buoying the spirits of generations of Jews who have had to confront and overcome the scourge of anti-Semitism.

Because of its promise of divine release from oppression, Purim became so dear to the Jewish heart that sages have declared:

“If even the Prophetic Books of the Bible were to be forgotten, the Book of Esther would be retained.”

“Purim is as great as the day on which the Torah was given.”