

Congregation Anshei Israel

Experiencing Purim

Our Purim celebration begins in the synagogue where the Megillah, the story of Esther, is read to young and old alike. At no other time during the Jewish year is the synagogue this lively or noisy. Full of melodrama and a plot that twists and turns, Purim is all about masks, hidden layers, and double meanings. On the surface the tale represents good overcoming evil. More deeply, it highlights standing up for who you are, fighting against hatred and feeling proud of being Jewish.

Purim tells the story of Esther and Haman, and begins with a feast in the kingdom of Persia, hosted by King Ahashverosh. The king was flaunting his riches and treasures for all to see, and decided that his beautiful wife, Queen Vashti, should also be displayed. But when the king sent for Vashti, she refused to appear before him. In anger, he threw Vashti out of the palace.

In search of a new wife, the king chose Esther, a young and very beautiful Jewish woman. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, cautioned her not to tell the king that she was a Jew.

King Ahashverosh bestowed a special honor on Haman, his power-hungry assistant, telling all the people in his kingdom to bow down to Haman. As a Jew, Mordecai refused. Haman became enraged and devised a plan to kill all the Jews. He even bribed the king into signing the declaration.

To determine the date the Jews were to be attacked, Haman drew lots ("purim" in Hebrew). Mordecai, however, discovered Haman's evil scheme and revealed it to Esther. Esther decided she must tell Ahashverosh, even if it meant her life.

King Ahashverosh was horrified to learn that his beautiful wife and her people were in danger. Haman was condemned to be hanged on the gallows and Mordecai was elevated to the position of Prime Minister. The Jews were safe once again, and Esther and Mordecai proclaimed the day to be one of feasting and merrymaking.



Hear the Megillah in its entirety!
... The **WHOLE** Megillah.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

with Ma'ariv

6:36pm in the Sanctuary

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

with Minyan

7:00am in the Epstein Chapel

Today, when the Megillah is read, a great noise erupts every time Haman's name is read out loud. Young and old use groggers (noisemakers) to make as much noise as possible. It is a day of magic for everyone, not just a dress-up holiday for children. Adults are given permission and even commanded to drop heavy responsibilities, and lighten their loads and spirits. Put on a wig or outrageous make-up, or wear silly clothes and embrace the child within. Allow fantasy to transform reality for a day of utter enjoyment.



*Living (y)our
Judaism
together*

Congregation Anshei Israel

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The Fast of Esther

The Fast of Esther is held on the 13th of Adar; this year, **Wednesday, March 20**.

The Fast of Esther is observed in commemoration of the Fast observed by Mordecai and Esther and all Israel. On that very day, the enemies of the Jews had planned to subjugate and destroy them. The opposite, however, occurred and the Jews ruled over their enemies.

The acceptance of this Fast on the part of Israel for later generations is alluded to in the Scroll of Esther: 'And as they accepted upon themselves and upon their children, the matters of their fastings and their cry' (Esther 9).

The Fast is called by the name of Esther because it was she who first requested the observance of a fast, of Mordecai: 'Go and gather all the Jews who are found in Shushan and fast over me, and do not eat and do not drink three days, night and day; and I and my maidens will also fast thus.' (Ibid. 4)

As a "Minor Fast" it is observed from sunrise to sundown.

What is Purim?

More than 23 centuries ago, when the Persian Empire dominated the civilized world, an evil chamberlain, Haman, devised a diabolic plot to annihilate the Jewish people. But on the 13th day of the month of Adar, our people were delivered from the wicked Haman's decree. Each year on Purim, we celebrate our victory amid feasting and merriment. Purim is not only our most joyous festival, it is also a day of great significance — a day whose lessons remain relevant for all times.

At first reading, the Megillah (Scroll of Esther) which recounts the miracle of Purim, seems more like an epic tale of espionage and suspense than Sacred Scripture. In fact, throughout this carefully woven story of evil ambition and palace intrigue, we do not find the name of God mentioned, even once! Yet, within the intricate details of the Megillah, we can detect the unmistakable hand of Divine Providence. The closer we look into the events of man, the more we discover that every "coincidence," every seemingly insignificant event, is precisely arranged by the hand of the Almighty.

When Haman denounced the Jewish people to King Ahashuerus, he argued that "there is one people, dispersed, and divided among the nations . . . and their laws are different from those of any other people." What Haman did not realize, however, was that his very "accusation" held the key to our redemption and ultimate victory over his evil plan. We are "the people" and by strengthening our unity and adhering to the Torah and mitzvot, we survive and flourish. Enemies may arise in every generation to attack and destroy us, but when we affirm our unique heritage and hold fast to our essential character as Jews, we will always prevail.

Mordecai, the Jewish leader of his time, succeeded in uniting his people to defeat Haman. The Megillah tells us that he "did not bend his knee, nor bow down." He refused to compromise the eternal values of the Torah, even at the risk of his life. The lesson to us is clear: Only through closer adherence to our sacred heritage can we ensure our own survival. Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, or in the case of a leap year, the 14th day of Adar II. This year, Purim falls on the evening of **Wednesday, March 20 - Thursday, March 21**.

PURIM MITZVAH LIST

| WHAT | WHEN | WHY |
|---|--|--|
| Fast of Esther | Mar. 20, 2019 | To commemorate the three days Esther and the Jewish people fasted before she approached the King without permission. The original fast occurred on Pesah and since we may not fast on a holiday such as Pesah, we commemorate the fast on a day when the Jews fought their enemies - a day of battle on which they surely also fasted. |
| Listening to the reading of the entire Megillah , including the three brochos preceding it. | Once on Wednesday evening, Mar. 20 and again the next day, Mar. 21 (14 Adar) | To commemorate the great Purim miracle in accordance with the mitzvah of Chachamim (wise rabbis). The shehechianu brochoh recited during the day also refers to the mitzvos of Mishlo'ach manos , matonos lo'evyonim and the Purim fast (see below). |
| Sending two types of ready-to-eat food to at least one friend. These gifts should be sent by a messenger. | During the day Thur., Mar. 21 | To symbolize the spirit of unity which kept the Jewish people together in the face of the threat from Haman and his cohorts. |
| Giving a gift to each of at least two poor people. | During the morning, preferably after the reading of the Megillah . | These gifts are a special mitzvah , not to be included in the amount of money a person may set aside for charity during the rest of the year. The custom on this day is to give unquestioningly to any and all who ask for aid. |
| Eating a feast to celebrate the holiday. | Purim Day, when we are no longer busy with Mishloach Manot. | To commemorate the parties Esther made for Haman and Achashveros. We also drink ad-d'lo-yodah until we can't tell between Haman and Mordechai, because Esther served drinks at these parties. |
| Reciting the special prayer of thanks Al Hanissim. | In the bentching and in the Amidah on Purim (Wed., Mar. 20 in the evening, and morning and afternoon Thur., Mar. 21) itself. | We express gratitude to Him Who controls our destinies and guards our lives. |