

# PURIM

## Home Companion



**Purim 5781**  
**Feb. 25-26, 2021**

how-to • insights • story to read and discuss  
recipes • facts and myths

***Dear Friend,***

Purim 2021 marks a full year on the Jewish calendar since the covid lockdowns began in the West, and life as we know it was upended.

This holiday, typically marked by communal celebrations and big get-togethers, seems particularly challenging to celebrate alone or with a small group of family members.

But if the past year has taught us anything, it's that when there's a will, there's a way. And since G-d certainly wills it, it's up to us to find that way.

And as we've spent so much time at home, especially during holidays, we've experienced first hand how our homes are sacred spaces, where we connect to G-d, our Jewish selves, and our loved ones.

To help you celebrate Purim at home, we've aggregated some wonderful and uplifting reading material, for you to read as you enjoy your Purim feast (abbreviated out of deference for Shabbat) or during your Purim-influenced Shabbat meal that night.

***With wishes for a happy (and healthy!) Purim,  
Your Friends @ Chabad.org***

# 10 TIPS FOR AN AMAZING PURIM @ HOME

## 1. HEAR THE MEGILLAH (IN PERSON)

On Purim eve and again during the day (this year, Thursday night and Friday respectively), it is a mitzvah to hear the Megillah read aloud from a parchment scroll. If you can safely and legally make it to synagogue, then great. And if you have a Megillah scroll and know how to read Hebrew, you are also in good shape.

If you have a scroll, but are not much of a Hebrew reader, you may want to have someone stand with you carefully reading along in a printed text, which has vowels, to help you through the rough patches.

If you do not have a scroll and/or cannot do all that Hebrew reading yourself, contact your closest Chabad rabbi ASAP to make arrangements for a safe megillah reading, which can take place outdoors or through an open door or window.

Visit: [www.chabad.org/centers](http://www.chabad.org/centers)

## 2. GIVE CHARITY TO THE POOR

If there was ever a time when people were in need of handouts, this is it! On the day of Purim it is a mitzvah to give charity to at least two fellow Jews in financial need. You do not need to leave your house to do this one. Send some cash to your rabbi and ask him to pass it on, or give directly to one of the many worthy causes who guarantee all money coming in on Purim day to families or individuals in need. For those unable to give locally, we have partnered with Colel Chabad to have your Purim funds distributed among the needy of Israel on Purim day.

Visit: [www.chabad.org/purimcharity](http://www.chabad.org/purimcharity)

## 3. SEND FOOD PARCELS

Here too, the mitzvah can be done contact-free. Every female should send a minimum of two food items to a female friend, and every male does

the same for a male friend. There need not be in-person handing off of the item, so sending through a delivery service or just dropping off a nice surprise at your friend's doorstep are perfectly acceptable ways to do this mitzvah. In fact, you do not need to ever handle the item yourself. Asking someone else to purchase and deliver the gift on your behalf is just fine.

## 4. HAVE A FESTIVE MEAL

Sit down with whoever is in your pod (or yourself) to a nicely set table, and enjoy a Purim feast fit for royalty. Since Purim is Friday, things are a bit different from usual. Ideally we do not eat a full meal in close proximity to Shabbat, to ensure that we approach the Shabbat table with a hardy appetite. So the best thing is to have a big brunch, starting before halachic midday.

Calculate: [www.chabad.org/zmanim](http://www.chabad.org/zmanim)

## 5. DRESS UP

A time-honored favorite Purim tradition is to masquerade. During this topsy turvy era, where everything has been turned upside down and inside out, dressing up like a clown or Queen Esther even if you are going to spend the day alone doesn't seem so crazy anymore. So dig up that old costume from the basement, or order something online, and give yourself some extra Purim sparkle.

## 6. ZOOM AND CALL

As we've all discovered over the past year, friends and loved ones are only a mouse-click away. Planning to have your meal alone, or know someone else who is? Arrange to have your feasts at the same time over live-stream.

Beyond mealtime, make sure to call as many friends as possible (especially those who are isolating or who have recently lost loved ones) and wish them

a joyous Purim. Not only will you make them happy, but you'll become more joyous as a result too.

## 7. MAKE KREPLACH AND HAMANTASCHEN

When planning your Purim menu, remember the two classics, both of which comprise dough wrapped around a filling: hamantaschen (baked sweets shaped as triangles) and kreplach (dumplings that contain ground meat).

*(See recipes included later on pages 6–7)*

## 8. READ LOTS OF PURIM ARTICLES

The best way to keep the Purim spirit pulsating within you is to binge on Purim study, inspiration, and more. In addition to this booklet, we've got boatloads for you to read and watch.

*Visit: [www.chabad.org/purim](http://www.chabad.org/purim)*

## 9. DECORATE THE HOUSE

Even if you will not have many revelers tramping in, Purim is still Purim. The amount and style of decorations is entirely up to you. If you're the type to go all out, you can pick a theme, make online orders, and give your house an extreme Purim makeover. You can also print and decorate coloring sheets to hang up around the house. Even hanging up a nice sign or a few streamers can be enough to give the place a festive feel and remind you that today is not just another Friday—it's Purim!

*Print: [www.chabad.org/purimcolor](http://www.chabad.org/purimcolor)*

## 10. DON'T FORGET ABOUT SHABBAT

On the subject of Friday, it's important not to forget about Shabbat. So between all the activities you've just scheduled for yourself, be sure to leave time for bathing, cooking, cleaning, and everything else normally done to honor the Shabbat!

*Visit: [www.chabad.org/shabbat](http://www.chabad.org/shabbat)*





## A Purim Message From the Rebbe

7 Adar 5712  
Brooklyn 13, N.Y.

Shalom u'Brocho:  
(Peace and Blessing)

In connection with the forthcoming days of Purim, I wish to call the attention of my fellow Jews to a significant event connected with the Miracle of Purim, an event which has a profound and timely message for all of us.

Our Sages relate that when the terrible degree of annihilation of the Jews, planned by Haman, became known, Mordechai went out into the streets and gathered 22,000 children, whom he taught the Torah and with whom he prayed for G-d's mercy. He imbued them with the spirit of self-sacrifice, so that they declared unanimously, "In life or in death we will not part from thee." By this action the Heavenly decree for the Jews was rescinded and reversed from death to life, and from mourning to gladness—physically, as well as spiritually.

Let us remember that Mordechai was one of the heads of the Sanhedrin, the greatest Jew of his time, "like Moses in his generation." Nevertheless, he went out in person to teach the holy Torah, with piety and Mesiras Nefesh, to small children.

The lesson for everyone of us is clear: No matter what one's station in life, or how important one's activities seem to be, one must first and foremost, dedicate at least some part of his time and efforts to the most important of all causes—saving our young generation by implanting into them devotion to all that has been holy to us ever since our ancestors received the Torah at Mount Sinai and we became a "Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation", devotion to the

point of self-sacrifice. Only in this way can we make sure that the young generation will be ours, and, as a matter of course, ensure the existence of our people. And great is the merit of this work, for herein lies our strength against all Hamans and our security under G-d's protection.

It is well to bear in mind that the education of the young is very much like the planting of a seed. A slight defect in the seed, the like of which in the grown tree may be of little or no consequence, assumes major proportions in respect of the whole growth that is to come from the seed, to the extent of crippling it. Similarly must the utmost care be taken to ensure the proper education and upbringing of our children, boys and girls. A slight deflection from Torah-true education may have a crippling effect, G-d forbid, upon the whole future of the child and generation to come.

May G-d grant you success in redoubling your work for kosher Jewish education, and especially in increasing manifold the number of children under your care, and may He bless you to enjoy "the good attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, which come in abundance, fruitfulness and multitude" (Midrash R., end of Megillath Esther).

With Purim greetings and blessing,

**Menachem M. Schneerson**

*Throughout the year, often in conjunction with Jewish festivals, the Rebbe would issue public letters, known as "michtavim klaliim." Addressed to "the sons and daughters of Israel wherever they may be," the Rebbe would use these letters to convey thoughts and blessings to the Jewish nation.*

*From To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel, Everywhere - Letters by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the Jewish Festivals, published and copyright by Kehot Publication Society.*

# PURIM RECIPES

## Bake Some Classic Poppy Hamantaschen

### Basic Tips and Information

You'll need to make the filling and let it cool before using it in the hamantaschen. The filling recipe may seem intimidating when you first read it, but read it carefully a second time and you'll find it's not as difficult as it sounds. While it's cooling, you can make the dough.

This dough is quick to make and easy to work with. If you don't like poppy seed filling, or if you'd like some variety, you can use other fillings as well. Strawberry and apricot jam have become very traditional. Prune lekvar is also traditional. Some people also like to fill them with chocolate or peanut butter. Get creative and have fun—there's a whole world of hamantaschen out there!

One of the most common questions I get asked this time of year is how to make sure the hamantaschen don't open up while baking. So, some tips:

- Keep the dough on the thinner side.
- Do not overfill the hamantaschen.
- Work patiently and consistently. Don't rush through. Take the extra 15 seconds to make sure the edges are tightly pinched.
- Close the hamantaschen up more than you think you need to. See mine—I left a pretty small opening.
- Be careful not to add too much flour to the dough, because that will make the dough drier and harder to seal.

### Filling Ingredients

*Note: Very closely based on Tori Avey's recipe*

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup poppy seeds
- 2 tbsp. coconut oil or margarine (butter for dairy - but make sure to tell people they are dairy!)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup coconut milk
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 6 tbsp. sugar
- 1 egg

### Filling Directions

- Beat the egg in a bowl and set aside.
- Melt the coconut oil/butter/margarine in a small saucepan. Whisk in the coconut milk, sugar, and

honey, and simmer over a low flame until the sugar is melted.

- Pour half the mixture into a cup or small bowl.
- Very slowly drizzle the hot mixture from the cup/ bowl into the beaten egg, whisking constantly.
- Now slowly pour the egg mixture back into remaining hot mixture in the saucepan, whisking constantly.
- Simmer the mixture for 3-4 minutes until it thickens. Remove from fire.
- Whisk in the poppy seeds and refrigerate until fully cooled before using.

### Dough Ingredients

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 2- $2\frac{1}{2}$  cups flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder

### Dough Directions

Mix the eggs, sugar, oil and vanilla.

Add 1 cup of flour and the baking powder. Mix.

Add the remaining flour until the dough forms a soft, but not sticky ball.

Roll out the dough and cut out circles.

Put a teaspoon of filling in the center of each circle.

Gently fold the sides and pinch shut tightly.

Bake for 10-12 minutes on 350°F.

**Yields:** 20  
**hamantaschen**

By *Miriam Szokovski*



# Traditional Kreplach for Your Chicken Soup

## Dough Ingredients

- 3 cups flour
- 2 tsp kosher salt
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/3 cup oil
- 1 ¼ cups warm water

## Filling Ingredients

- ½ lb. (225 grams) ground beef
- 1 small onion
- Salt
- Pepper
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp matzah meal or unflavored breadcrumbs

## Directions

To make the dough, place the flour, salt, and baking powder in the bowl of your food processor (can also be made in certain blenders; I used a mini Ninja). Pulse a couple of times. Add the oil and warm water and process until the dough starts to come together. Tip it out onto a piece of parchment paper, form into a disk, wrap well, and set aside to rest for two hours.

To make the filling, dice the onion as finely as possible (alternatively, cut it into quarters and throw into the food processor/blender and chop until almost but not quite pureed). Heat a wide skillet over medium-high heat. Wait for the pan to get hot. Add the meat and brown well, breaking it down into small pieces with your spatula/spoon as you go. After a couple of minutes, add in the onion, mix around, and continue cooking over high heat for another few minutes, then reduce the heat to medium-low and cook until you see no more red in the meat and the onion doesn't taste raw. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Let the meat mixture cool for 10-15 minutes, then drain well and

transfer to a food processor/blender. Pulse very quickly a couple of times. Add the egg and breadcrumbs and pulse again. You are not looking for a mousse-like texture, more like fine, sandy crumbs. NOTE: You can skip this step entirely and just mix the egg and breadcrumbs into the meat in a bowl, no blitzing required.

Once the dough has rested, divide it into two pieces. Roll the first piece out, keep the second piece wrapped in the meantime. I like to roll the dough directly on a large piece of parchment paper to prevent it from sticking, but you can do it directly on the counter, or on a board, etc. Roll it approximately ⅛ inch thick (3mm). This dough is pretty forgiving, but too thin and it will tear, but too thick won't get you great results either.

Take a knife and cut away the rough edges so that you have a large square or rectangle of dough in front of you. Now cut that dough into relatively evenly-sized squares. Place a spoonful of filling in the center of each square, then pull the edges together and gently seal it in a triangle shape.

Heat a pot of water. Add a couple of tablespoons of salt. When the water is boiling rapidly, drop in a group of kreplach. Don't overcrowd the pot, they need some space, so do it in batches. The kreplach will rise to the top after a minute or two. At that point reduce the heat and cook for another 2-3 minutes. Remove and repeat until all the kreplach have been cooked.

Serve in steaming, golden chicken soup.

## How to store:

If you'll be using them in the next few days, store in the fridge. Add to the soup about 20-30 minutes before you'll be serving, to give them time to warm up without disintegrating.

You can also freeze them. Freeze on a parchment-paper lined baking sheet. Once they are frozen solid, transfer to a ziploc bag (this will prevent them from sticking together). No need to defrost; add directly to the soup an hour or more before serving.

You can also freeze them after they're assembled, before you cook them in the boiling water, if that works better for you. Then drop them frozen into the boiling water and cook for longer.

## Yields: 20+ kreplach

By Miriam Szokovski (dough recipe by Pam Reiss on KosherEye)



## STORY: WHEN THE PURIM JESTER WAS SAD

Everyone in Aleksander, Poland, knew and loved Reb Yerachmiel, the learned *shochet* of Kinov who always had a smile on his face. A devoted chassid, he often came to Aleksander to bask in the sanctity of his rebbe, Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak Dancyger (1853–1910). Reb Yerachmiel held a special position in the Rebbe's court, serving as a jester of sorts, tasked with bringing joy and levity to communal gatherings.

Purim saw Reb Yerachmiel in his element—joking, singing, and entertaining.

One year, just before Purim, two calamities befell Reb Yerachmiel: His wife passed away and his daughter disappeared. Grief enveloped the poor man, and he seemed to drag his feet wherever he went. Fellow chassidim observed him with pity and concern. Despite their best efforts to lift his spirits, he remained melancholy and despondent. They wondered whether he'd attend the Purim celebration that year. What would Purim in Aleksander be without Reb Yerachmiel's joyful antics?

Megillah reading on Purim night revealed no sign of Reb Yerachmiel. The next morning, shortly before the reading, he appeared in shul, face marred by a frown. Old friends attempted to make conversation, but Reb Yerachmiel ignored them as though deaf.

The Rebbe's shul swelled with an enormous crowd for the Purim feast. Chassidim gathered around a beautifully set table bedecked with wine, pastries, and fruit. With craned necks, they anticipated the moment the Rebbe would enter the room. When the Rebbe took his seat at the head of the table, the room erupted into festivity. Platters of food, helped by eager hands, made their way through the crowd, and the wizened beadles took turns bellowing invitations to respected guests to sip some of the Rebbe's wine.

Suddenly, the beadle announced, "Yerachmiel Kinover!"

Usually, this was the cue for Reb Yerachmiel to come forth and amuse the crowd. But the call went unanswered. Yerachmiel continued to stand listlessly against the wall, unbothered by the attention.

When the feast had reached its end, the Rebbe made his way to his room, escorted by close students. Reb Yerachmiel followed from behind and managed to squeeze in before the door was shut. The Rebbe, noticing the extra visitor, immediately addressed him.

"Oh, Yerachmiel, this is what you call Chassidus and its lessons? Is this what I taught you? Where's the joy?"

Silence blanketed the room as Reb Yerachmiel paused before responding.

"There is a story," he began, "of two Jews, who were neighbors in a village. One was a chassid and one was a *mitnaged*, an opponent of Chassidism. For the longest of times, the chassid tried mightily to influence his neighbor to taste the depth and joy of Chassidism. Finally, after numerous debates, the chassid succeeded, and the *mitnaged* agreed to learn more about Chassidism. Immediately, the chassid stood up and began preaching the foundations of Chassidism, lingering especially on the significance of joy. Happiness, he preached, meant sustaining unequivocal joy in the face of life's challenges, without a stutter of despair.

The chassid asked his neighbor if he'd like to join him on his next visit to visit his Rebbe, and the two set out on foot. As the journey progressed and their provisions depleted, their stomachs began to moan with hunger. Though the chassid managed to ignore his hunger, his companion failed to overcome his pangs and bemoaned the lack of bread.



"Don't worry, my friend," clucked the chassid sympathetically, 'we'll make our way through a field, scrounge for some edible greens, and regain our strength.'

"The two scurried into a field and found some beans still hanging in their pods. They were so hungry they didn't realize the field's owner had appeared out of nowhere, looking none too pleased at the sight. Without warning, the owner of the field lunged at the *mitnaged* and started beating him. In pain, the erstwhile *mitnaged* cried out. The chassid, ever the teacher, rushed to admonish him.

"Didn't I say that the foundation of Chassidic life is joy? What's with all the crying?"

"It's true," replied the *mitnaged*. 'But not when you're being beaten like this.'"

Reb Yerachmiel finished his story and exited the Rebbe's room, only to return minutes later dressed

as a Polish woodchopper. In one hand he held an axe, and in the other, a stout log.

"Will the Rebbe look at the wood on my shoulders?" asked Reb Yerachmiel, speaking in Polish. "I'm trying—with every fiber of my being—to split it. I swing again and again, but nothing splinters. I'm struggling to find a reason. Is the wood unbreakable? Is the axe too blunt? Or, perhaps, it's just me, too lazy to exert myself any further?"

The Rebbe's fierce gaze transitioned into one of fatherly concern. When the Rebbe replied, he too used Polish. "You continue to try again and again until it finally splits."

Reb Yerachmiel found solace in the Rebbe's words. Eventually, he recovered from his grief and learned to find joy in his life once again.

*Adapted from Me'oran Shel Yisrael by Asharon Baltazar*



# PURIM IS NOT NORMAL: AN ESSAY FOR OUR TIME

Purim is nuts. A rational person cannot celebrate Purim, nor can those who believe they know who they are. Because the joy of Purim means leaving all reason and sense of self behind.

Purim is the ultimate joy, and the only way to experience that joy is to break out of yourself. Not by making yourself happy, not by doing those things you enjoy, not by sticking to your life, your friends, your family and remaining the person you are so comfortable being.

No. By playing the clown, by taking the risk of making yourself look like a total idiot, acting insane, or better put: allowing the insanity within you to burst out—in a way that brings smiles to strangers on the street, uplifting all around, even those who had lost all hope for joy.

The light of Purim knows no bounds.

## What, Me Jewish?

Why Purim? What happened in Shushan on this day that is cause for such madness?

What happened is that the Jewish people took ownership of their Jewishness. And they did that at a time when it was utter madness to do so.

That's the subtext to the Megillah, often ignored. We're told that Haman's decree of total annihilation was upon the "Yehudim"—the Jews. The implication is that any Jew could easily slip out of this predicament.

Any Jew could just say, "What, me Jewish? I speak Farsi. I dress Farsi. I eat Farsi food. I celebrate Farsi celebrations. I'm just another Farsi like you."—and be totally clear of danger.

*And that would be the sensible thing to do.* You've lost your land. Your Temple lies in ruins. The prophet Jeremiah promised the exile would last seventy years. The elders have counted, and the seventy years, by their accounting, is up.

Work on a second Temple had begun, there had been a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel—and then, it was shut down, the light cruelly snuffed out.

So what gives you a right to exist? What sense does it make to have "laws that are different from all other people" while you are "scattered among the nations?" G-d has abandoned you, for heaven's sakes. Why identify with your people, with your practices and beliefs, when that identity means only persecution and hatred?

If so, what the Jews did was absurd. They said, "We are Jews. We were born Jews. We will die Jews." And they fasted and prayed, and then fought for their lives.

## Purim as Marriage

Purim is the day we became married to G-d, and to each other.

Until the days of King Achashverosh, the Talmud tells us, the Jewish people had never really accepted the Torah. They were coerced. "G-d held Mount Sinai over their heads," the Talmud tells us. Rabbi Yehudah Loewe of Prague explains that as a figurative reference to the abundance of love He showed them, until they had no other choice.

The person of your dreams takes you out in a flashy Lamborghini, treats you to a lavish feast at the finest restaurant, showers you with jewelry and poetry of love, and then suggests marriage. Do you have a choice?

So too, G-d swept us out of slavery on eagles' wings, drowned our oppressors in the sea, fed us manna from heaven, and then whispered in our ears sweet words, "I want you to be Mine."

We were coerced. A deal made under coercion is not a deal. At any point, the Talmud tells us, we had the right to step out of the whole thing.

Until the days of Achashverosh. Because then, there were no eagle's wings, no bread from heaven, no signs or wonders—and nevertheless, we stood with our Beloved.

Why? There is no explanation.

But we are still here. Absurdly.

## Purim and Insanity

Let me get this straight: If religion and G-d is an answer to all questions, and an answer to all questions is all that's needed so I can have meaning in life—then I'm out. Then our entire history doesn't work. Our attitude towards life, our arguments with G-d, with His Torah, with each other, the sanctity we attribute to tomes of holy disputes, most of them unresolved—these have no place. There can be no Jewish people.

Yes, we are an educated and intelligent people. But true intellect is that which is forever escaping its bounds, seeking something beyond, something entirely transcendent, and discovering that transcendence in every artifact of existence. True intellect knows that which it cannot know.

And true intellect is forced to admit that no being can ever discover its meaning on its own. It simply does not have the context to do so. And true intellect is forced to acknowledge that the true reality is not simply beyond the grasp of the three pounds of meat that constitute the human brain: True reality is beyond any grasp whatsoever.

If so, how have we held tight for almost four millennia to that which cannot be grasped? How have we found meaning in a marriage to a G-d we call the Unknowable, Infinite Light?

The same as any marriage is sustained.

Any proper marriage, after all, is a case of sustained insanity. No one walks under the chuppah and commits to a lifetime with another person with a cold, calculated deportment of mind.

We call it "falling in love," but truly it is a form of temporary insanity. And then the entire labor of marriage is to sustain that madness, reinvigorating it whenever it loses steam, allowing two selves to lose their minds over one another again and again.

## Purim and the Post-Holocaust Revival

I identify with that. In a certain way, it happened again with my generation.

I am a child of the post-Holocaust. My generation are those who were bred on the image of the Jew as a skeleton behind the barbed wire of Auschwitz.

If there was a Holocaust documentary on TV, I had to watch it. When I went to the local JCC lounge to hang out with friends, the entire back wall was a mural of those deathly figures. If I was schlepped to the synagogue for whatever occasion, I doubt the rabbi ever managed to give a sermon without mentioning the six million.

The message was drilled, pounded, hard-wired and welded relentlessly into our little minds, until it became an essential part of our neural circuits: We are the people they hate. We are the people that are persecuted. If someone is looking for a people to persecute, to blame, to despise, to obliterate from the face of the earth, here we are.

As for G-d and our religion, there was only one conclusion a sensible person could come to: G-d had abandoned us and the deal was off.

Why, please tell me why, would any kid, normal or otherwise, want to stay in this club?

And then something so crazy happened. Barely a quarter century had passed since the implementation of the Final Solution, and a Jewish renewal began to flourish. We returned, perhaps not in droves, but with pride, with chutzpah, with love, madly embracing that which our parents and grandparents had quite reasonably dropped by the wayside.

Why? I don't know. We are a crazy people. We can't let go of our G-d.

The marriage ceremony never ends.

We are a miracle. An absurd miracle. A miracle of insane love.

In the Babylonian Talmud, Rava says, "On Purim, you must get drunk until you don't know the difference between 'Cursed is Haman' and 'Blessed is Mordechai.'"

We are drunk with wine, a deep, rich wine, aged over millennia. The wine of a love that can never be lost, a marriage that can never be broken.

*By Tzvi Freeman*

# 9 COMMON PURIM MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

## 1. Myth: Mordechai Was Esther's Uncle

The Jewish holiday of Purim was established during the Persian exile, after the Jews had been saved from the genocidal scheming of Haman, advisor to King Achashverosh. The main heroes are Esther, the Jewish wife of the king, and her relative Mordechai. In many books and audio retellings of the Purim story, Mordechai is presented as Esther's uncle, who had raised her after her parents' passing.

### Fact: Mordechai Was Esther's Cousin

It is true that Mordechai raised Esther. However, the Megillah (Scroll of Esther) clearly states that he was her cousin, not uncle (Esther 2:7). Interestingly, the sages tell us that Esther was not just Mordechai's cousin—she was also his wife!



## 2. Myth: Haman Had a Three-Cornered Hat and Pointy Ears

On Purim, it is customary to eat a three-cornered pastry often filled with poppy seeds (fruit jams are also common), known as *hamantaschen* ("Haman pockets") in Yiddish, and *oznei haman* ("Haman ears") in Hebrew.

Urban legend (as supported by many illustrated editions of the Megillah) is that the cookies' shape commemorates the three-cornered hat Haman wore. Another legend, especially popular in Israel, is that the tasty treats reflect the shape of Haman's ears.

### Fact: We Know Nothing About Haman's Wardrobe or Auricles

There is no evidence whatsoever suggesting that Haman's hat had three corners, nor is there any credible tradition about his ears.

In fact, the pastry's most important feature is not its shape, but its traditional seed filling, called *mon* in Yiddish. Eating seeds on Purim recalls the devotion of Daniel (and later, Esther) who subsisted on seeds while living in royal surroundings to avoid eating anything non-kosher (Code of Jewish Law, Orech Chaim 695:2, quoting Kol Bo).

*Mon* (poppy) is preferred because it is homonymous with the *manot* ("portions"), which we send each other as part of the Purim celebration.

So why are the hamantaschen sometimes called "ears"? Well, "*oznayim*" (ears) can sometimes refer to non-Purim pastries. In describing the manna which fell from heaven while the Jews were in the desert, both Rabbi Yosef ibn Kaspi (1279–1340) and Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (1437–1508) describe a pastry called *oznayim*, with no mention of Haman or Purim at all. (And in many Eastern European cultures, there are stuffed dumplings referred to as "little ears.")



## 3. Myth: Haman's Sons Were Hanged on the Gallows He Had Prepared for Mordechai

A major focal point of the Megillah is the part where we read of Haman and his ten sons being strung up on the gallows ("tree" in Hebrew) that he had prepared

for Mordechai. When asked how Haman's sons died, many people would probably answer "hanging."

#### Fact: They Were Already Dead

A careful reading of chapters 8 and 9 of Esther tells us that the king ordered (Esther 8:7) Haman to be strung up on the tree he had prepared for Mordechai immediately after the plot was discovered (on Passover eve). His sons' deaths, however, took place nearly a year later on Adar 13, when they were killed by sword among all other enemies in the city of Shushan (Esther 9:5-10). Only after they were dead, did the king give permission to have their bodies hung on the gallows (Esther 9:14). Haman's sons were thus hung but not hanged.



#### 4. Myth: You Need to Give "Two Blessings"

One of the four Purim mitzvahs (along with listening to the Megillah, giving gifts to the poor, and feasting) is to give *mishloach manot*: (at least two) portions of food. The source for *mishloach manot* is in the Megillah. "Mordechai... enjoined the [Jews] to make the fourteenth day of the month of Adar... feasting and joy, and sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor (Esther 9:19)."

A common misconception, propagated by preschool teachers and others, is that the two portions must warrant distinct blessings (*brachot*). Thus, an orange (over which we say "*ha'eitz*") can be combined with a candy bar (over which we say "*shehakol*"), but pasta salad and a danish would be problematic, since they are both "*mezonot*."

#### Fact: The Blessing Is Not Relevant

The halachah is that one must send two food portions, but they can be of the same blessing. In fact, the

example given in the Code of Jewish Law is "two portions of meat." Now, the blessing on all meat is "*shehakol*," so there is surely no requirement for the two food items to have different blessings.



#### 5. Myth: Everyone Needs to Get Drunk

The sages say that a person should drink on Purim to the point that they "don't discern between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed is Mordechai.'" Some take this quite literally and drink so much wine that they lose awareness of their surroundings. In some communities (especially among the young), people may feel pressure to drink so much that they act inappropriately and even harm themselves and others.

#### Fact: Maintaining Your Mental and Physical Health Takes Primary Importance

For someone battling addiction, even the smallest sip can be life-threatening. Drinking, according to the sages of the Talmud, can heighten the joy and excitement of Purim, so they declared it an actual mitzvah—as long as you are confident that your behavior will remain at the high standard expected by the Torah. If you are planning to drive, or you know that drinking can otherwise get you in trouble, then alcohol might as well be pork juice.



## 6. Myth: One Megillah Reading Is Enough

One of the four Purim mitzvahs is to listen to the Megillah being read in Hebrew from a handwritten parchment scroll. The other three mitzvahs (sending food portions, giving gifts to the poor, and enjoying a feast) are all done only on Purim day. The Megillah, however, is read once at night and then again the next day. There is a popular misconception that hearing it once is enough.

### Fact: You Need to Hear It at Night and Again During the Day

The sages of the Talmud (Megillah 4a) tell us that we need to hear the Megillah twice.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi taught that this is a reflection of the verse (Psalms 22:3), "O my G-d, I call in the daytime . . . and in the night I am not silent," which is part of a chapter that the sages of the Talmud (Yoma 29a) associate with Queen Esther. As the threat of genocide loomed, the distressed Jews of the Purim story cried out to G-d during the day and night. As such, we recall His kindness on the eve of Purim and then again the following day.

Rabbi Chelbo would quote Ula of Biri, who associated this practice with the verse (Psalms 30:13), "So that my soul will sing praises to You and not be silent . . . I will thank You forever." Reading the Megillah twice is thus an expression of thanksgiving to G-d, as well as a testament to His everlasting kindness.



## 7. Myth: You Do Not Need to Hear Haman's Name

A beloved Purim tradition is to twirl graggers (ratchets), bang, shout, stamp our feet and generally make a ruckus when Haman's name is mentioned in the course of the Megillah reading.

Some people are so overzealous in "stamping out Haman" that they don't hear his name chanted aloud by the reader.

### Fact: You Need to Hear Every Word of the Megillah

We are required to hear every word of the Megillah, even those that refer to unsavory folk. In many communities, the reader will pause after saying Haman's name to give everyone a chance to make noise before repeating it once again and continuing the reading. It is important not to make any noise during this repetition. After all, if someone misses even one word, they need to hear the entire reading again!



## 8. Myth: Purim Is the Jewish Halloween

A beloved Purim custom is to don masks and dress up in costume. This has led many to erroneously label it the "Jewish Halloween."

### Fact: Halloween Doesn't Hold a Candle to Purim

The custom to dress up on Purim was recorded as many as 500 years ago—long before the modern holiday of Halloween took shape.

But the difference runs far deeper than that. What do Jewish kids do when they put on their costumes? They give out treats to their friends and hand coins to beggars. Quite the polar opposite of Halloween, when children are taught to cause mischief and beg for treats.



## 9. Myth: Purim Is a Minor Holiday

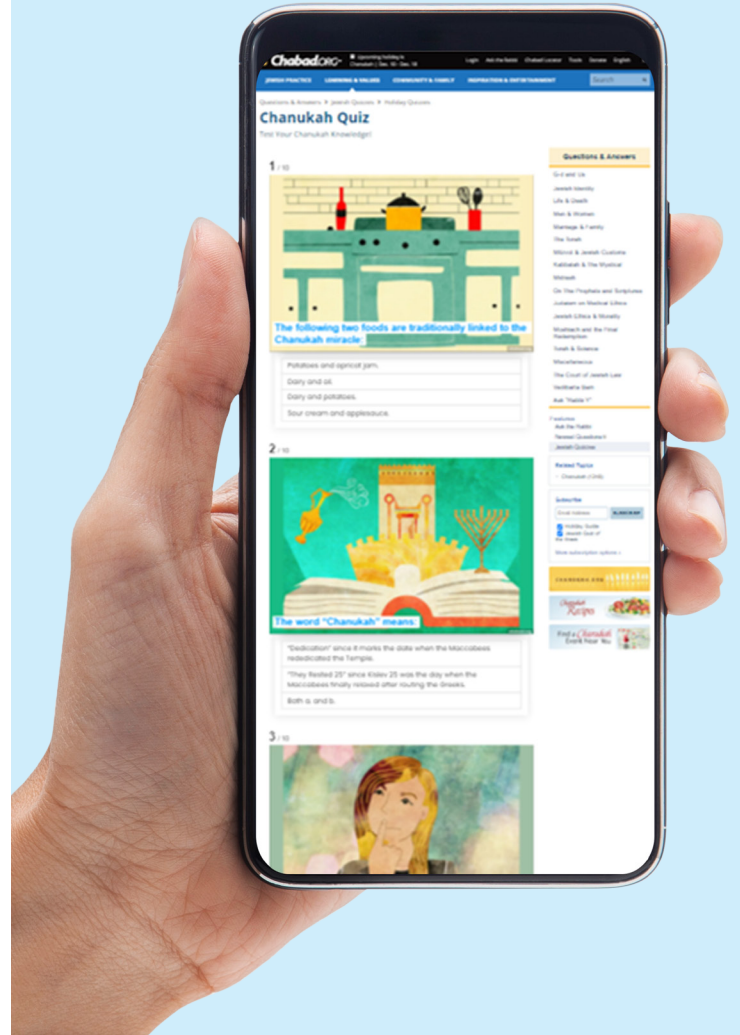
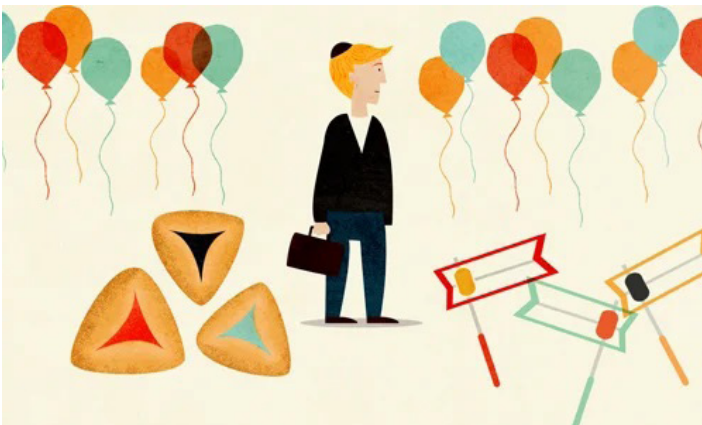
Along with Chanukah, Purim is often dismissively referred to as a minor holiday, since it was instituted hundreds of years after Moses communicated G-d's command to keep Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot. This can send the (not so subtle) message that its observance is not terribly important.

### Fact: Purim Is Mandated in the Bible and Its Message Is Vital

Similar to Chanukah, work is permitted on Purim, and it is counted among the seven "rabbinic" mitzvahs. Yet, the Book of Esther is part of the Biblical canon, and the observance of the holiday is clearly spelled out there in chapter 9.

In a sense, Purim has a relevance and urgency to us, above all other holidays. Purim developed bottom up, the product of the faith and prayers of the Jewish nation then living outside of Israel, under a foreign power. They had every reason to abandon Judaism to save their lives, but they chose to proudly maintain their commitment, even though it put them squarely in Haman's crosshairs.

*By Menachem Posner*



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# PURIM

## Home Companion



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