

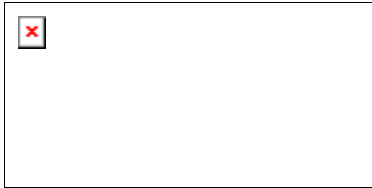
Linda Kann

From: Gil English Newsletter [gil-english@GIL.CH]
Sent: 16 March 2008 12:54
To: GIL English
Subject: Purium - GIL English news letter

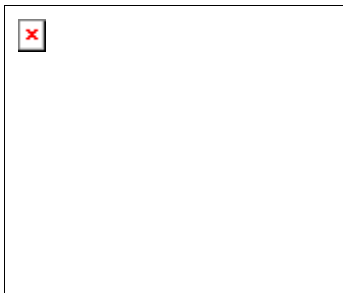
PURIUM

**A
FUN
HOLIDAY**

Purim, our most fun filled holiday, occurs on the 14th day of *Adar*. This year, 5768 (2008), *Purim* begins sundown Thursday, March 20th, and goes to Friday evening, March 21st.



You are invited to come and celebrate Purium with us at the GIL. Come at 18:30 on Thursday for the Purim service and the ABGs Megilah reading.



In certain walled cities like *Yerushalayim*, *Purim* is celebrated on the 15th day of *Adar*, called "Shushan Purim," but more about that later.

We celebrate *Purim* by:

- Reading *Megillat Esther*, (Scroll of Esther),
- *Mishloach Manot* - Sending food to friends,
- *Matanot L'evyonim* - Giving gifts to the poor, and
- Enjoying a *Purim Seuda* (meal).

We also celebrate *Purim* by poking fun at ourselves and our Jewish institutions, throwing synagogue decorum out the window and dressing in costumes. The entire month of *Adar*, and not just *Purim* itself, is a time for silliness and humor - "...*Mishenichnat Adar Marbim Besimcha*" - "...When *Adar* arrives, we increase our happiness." (*Ta'anit* 29a). *Purim*, a wild and crazy

holiday, is the holiday that proves Judaism has a sense of humor. Cross-dressing, prohibited in the *Torah*, is practiced by some on *Purim*. Many will be borrowing their spouse's clothes on *Purim*.

Purim is an important holiday. Jews throughout the world, surrounded by anti-semitism, take great joy in a holiday that reminds them, that even though throughout the course of Jewish History there have been too many real-life "Hamans," in the end *Hashem (God)* never lets the our enemies win.

*Wishing you a happy Purium,
David Bernstein, editor of the GIL English news letter
(To receive this newsletter send your e-mail address to
gil-english@gil.ch)*

THE STORY

(short version - you can hear
the long version on Purium)

The events that led to the holiday of *Purim* can be found in *Megillat Esther*.

Megillat Esther is the only book in the Scriptures that never mentions *Hashem's* name even once. The miracle of *Purim* is a hidden one, (with the hand of *God* only revealed through the incredible events).

The story relates the downfall of the vicious anti-semite Haman, a descendent of Amalek, the traditional enemy of the Jews. As Prime Minister of ancient Persia, around 2300 years ago, he sought to murder all the Jews of that land.

It is customary that when reading the *Megillat*, that each time that the name Haman is mentioned to drown out his name with noise. This noise can come from graggers or other sources.

Events happen such that Haman, himself plays a crucial role in the coronation of Queen Esther, after the beheading of the former Queen Vashti. However, no one realizes that Esther is Jewish.

Haman who has become a powerful man in the kingdom, is upset that Mordechai does not bow down to him. He succeeds in getting the King to authorize a royal decree to annihilate an unspecified nation he claims is an enemy

of the King. Initially, he does not identify the nation so that the King can later claim that he did not know that the decree was against the Jews.

Haman casts lots (called PUR from which we have the name of the holiday, Purim) to determine the day this was to happen.

Esther invites the King and Haman to join her for dinner, and in response to the king's offer of "half my kingdom for your wishes," all she asks is they come again tomorrow to another dinner "and I'll tell you then." (she'll reveal the reason for her invitation). We then find Haman working through the night to construct a gallows upon which to hang Mordechai. At daybreak, he will appear before the King to denounce Mordechai.

Unknown to Haman, the King had not slept the night before, suspecting a coup led by Haman. In desperation to get some sleep, he had asked his servants to read from the Royal Chronicles. The Book opens to a long forgotten story of how Mordechai discovered an assassination plot by two royal servants against the King.

At the exact moment the King is inquiring whether Mordechai was rewarded for his loyalty, who should appear, but Haman. Before getting a chance to make his request to hang Mordechai, Haman is ordered by the King to parade Mordechai through the capital city in royal garments on a royal horse while proclaiming "This is what is done to the man the King wishes to honor."

Immediately afterwards, a crestfallen Haman is whisked to the second Royal dinner, hosted by Esther. At the dinner she reveals to the King that she is Jewish and that Haman is an enemy of the King because he seeks to destroy the Jewish people.

The embarrassed and angry King storms out of the room. Haman pleads to Esther for his life. He "somehow" loses his balance and falls on the couch where Esther is reclining. (We are told by the Midrash that the *Malach* (Angel) Gavriel pushed him.) The King

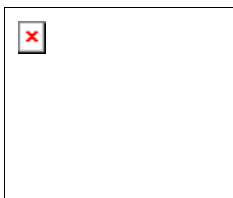
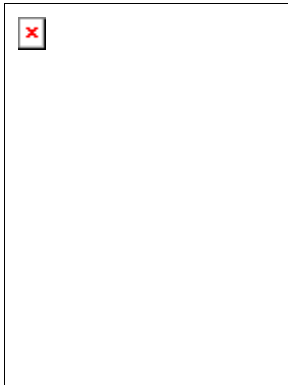
comes back at just this moment. Of course, he is extremely upset at Haman.

On the spot, Charvona, a royal minister tells the King about the gallows Haman constructed for Mordechai, who saved the King's life. The King orders Haman to be hanged on the gallows intended for Mordechai.

The King elevates Mordechai to Haman's recently vacated position. Mordechai issues orders, with the King's permission, allowing the Jews to fight against their enemies. On the thirteenth and fourteenth days of *Adar* the Jews won tremendous victories and were saved from the threat of total annihilation.

Since that time, we celebrate *Purim*.

HOW WE CELEBRATE



READING THE MEGILLAH

The service for *Purim* is most unusual. Dressing in silly costumes is encouraged. At no time of the Jewish year is the synagogue as "wild" as during the *Megillah* reading.

Interrupting the reading with noise-making devices at the mention of Haman's name is encouraged. Fifty-four times Haman's name is read in the *Megillah*, and fifty-four times the congregation erupts in a deafening chorus of "*graggers*," clanging pots, cap-guns and sirens.

Some write Haman's name on the soles of their shoes; the congregants then stamp their feet at every mention of Haman. Others write his name in wax and melt it!

The *gragger* (Yiddish for rattle), is more widely used than the custom of feet stamping. (The Hebrew word for this noisemaker is *ra'ashan*, from the word *ra'ash*, meaning noise.) The custom of the Purim "*gragger*," was obviously introduced to amuse the children, and so keep up their interest in the reading, as children (over 6) are also required to hear the *Megillah*.

So that Haman's ten sons should not feel left out, the congregation again interrupts the *Megillah* reading with resounding noise, when the ten names are read.

Decorum is out, inanity is in. During the service, (once on *Purim* evening and a second time at the morning service on the day following), the entire *Megillat* Esther is read from a handwritten scroll called a "*megillah*." (Could this be where the expression "the whole *megillah*" comes from?)

"The *Megillah*," is read in a special tune to suit the narration of the *Purim* story. When the verse on the hanging of Haman's ten sons is recited, the passage is read in one breath, "because," the *Talmud* says, "their ghosts were given up all together." It has also been suggested that the custom is due to the desire of avoiding the appearance of gloating over their deserved fate - a characteristic expression of Judaism's attitude to the fall of an enemy.

The scroll is unrolled completely and the *Megillah* is so folded as to give it the form of a letter or dispatch. The reading of the *Megillah* is considered by our sages of such importance that even women are obligated to hear it, especially as they played an important part in the miraculous delivery. Women must also perform the other *Purim mitzvot*, - sending food to friends, giving gifts to the poor, and eating the *Purim* meal. As mentioned above, children (over 6) are also required to hear the *Megillah*. A whole tractate of the *Talmud*, called *Megillah*, (what else?) is devoted to the laws of *Purim*.

MISHLOACH MANOT - SENDING FOODS TO FRIENDS

The tradition of sending gifts consisting of two types of food to our friends on *Purim* is called *Mishloach Manot* and is prescribed in *Megillat* Esther (9:22). On *Purim* day, (and only during the day), men and women, young people and children, many "in disguise," scurry thru the streets, bearing plates, baskets and trays filled with the choicest *Purim* goodies such as fruits,

wine and baked goods.

The obligation is to send a friend at least one food parcel containing two kinds of food or drink which are ready to eat without further preparation. Anything beyond that is extra-credit (or extra-expense, depending on how you look at it). It is customary, however, to encourage joy and friendship by sending parcels to many friends. Nevertheless, it is of greater merit to distribute gifts generously to the poor than to distribute food to friends.

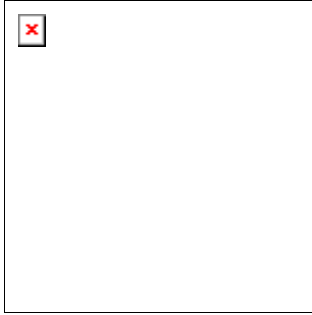
It is also customary to send *Mishloach Manot* through a third person messenger, since the word *Mishloach* is related to the word for messenger, *Sh'liach*.

MATANOT L'EVYONIM - GIVING GIFTS TO THE POOR

The practice of men and women giving gifts to the poor on *Purim* - *Matanot L'evyonim* is also prescribed in *Megillat Esther* (ibid). The gifts must be given to the poor on *Purim* day, usually after the reading of the *Megillah*. The minimum requirement is to give two gifts, which may be food, to at least two poor persons. (One gift to each). Even a poor person who gets charity is required to perform this *mitzvah*.

Of course, Judaism demands doing *tzedakah* [charity] year-round, but we make a particular point of doing so on *Purim* with the special *mitzvah* of *Matanot L'evyonim*, which should NOT be included in the amount of money a person sets aside for charity during the rest of the year.

Rambam (Maimonides) said in relation to *Purim*: "It is better for a man to increase gifts to the poor than to enlarge his feast and to increase gifts to his friends. For there is no greater and more wonderful joy than to make happy the hearts of the poor..." (*Hilchot Megillah* Chap. 2). By the way, the money collected and distributed on *Purim* to the poor is often used to fund *Passover*, a VERY expensive holiday, which is right around the corner.



ENJOYING A PURIM SEUDA (Meal).

There is an old joke about summing up a Jewish Holiday: "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat."

Like all Jewish Holidays, (except Yom Kippur of course), it is a *mitzvah* to have a great big meal on *Purim*, including meat and wine. The *Purim* feast must be held during the day, usually after *Mincha* (Afternoon prayers).

If the meal extends into the evening, as it usually does, *Al Hanisim*, a special prayer recounting the miracle of the day, is still added to the *Birchat Hamazon*, the "Grace after meals."

This *Purim* meal is different, in that not only do we eat, and eat and eat... But we also drink and drink and drink ... (and drunk?).

Because the miracle of *Purim* came thru wine, - Vashti's downfall and Haman's downfall came as a result of a wine feast, the Rabbis of the *Talmud*, usually a quite sober group, said:

"On *Purim*, one should drink - *Ahd D'lo Yoda Bain Arur Haman L' Boruch Mordechai*" - "Until he can no longer tell the difference between 'Cursed be Haman' and 'Blessed be Mordechai.' " (Tractate *Megilah* 7b).

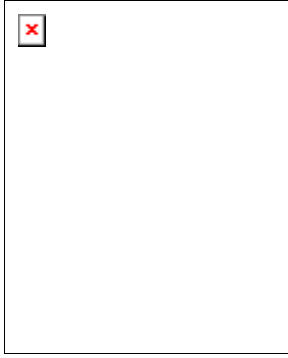
What they were trying to suggest is a high level of inane behavior on *Purim*. As long as it is not abusive or destructive, *Purim* is a time when almost anything is permitted.

A person who can't or won't drink may fulfill the "*Ahd D'lo Yoda*" requirement by sleeping, because one who sleeps also doesn't know the difference between a curse and a blessing.

OTHER things

Machatzit Hashekel (The Half-Shekel)

On *Purim* night, it is customary to give *Machatzit Hashekel*, (half a *shekel*) - three half-dollar coins (or their equivalent in local currency), as charity to the



poor, before the reading of the *Megillah*. This symbolizes the half-*shekel* which every Jew used to give as dues to the *Bait Hamikdash* in *Yerushalayim* (*Shmot Parshat Ki Sisa* 30:11-16). The reason we give three half-*shekels* is because the term *terumah* (contribution) is mentioned three times in the account of the *mitzvah* of the half-*shekel*.

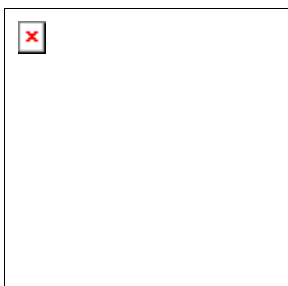
But why does the *Torah* specify a half-*shekel* instead of a whole? The half *shekel* is a reminder to all of us (you and me) that "*kol Yisroel areivim zeh lazeh*" - "All of *Bnei Yisroel* are responsible for one another." No one person is a whole. Each of us is like half a body, which is completed when we take responsibility for the actions of one another.

Al Hanisim

A special prayer, *Al Hanisim*, recounting the miracle of the day, is recited in the *Amidah* - *Shemoneh Esreh* and in *Birchat Hamazon*, the "Grace after meals."

During the morning service we read a special portion of the *Torah* referring to the war with Israel's archenemy, Amalek.

HAMAN TASCHEN



No discourse on *Purim* could be considered complete without mentioning THE *Purim* delicacy, the *hamantash* or *hamantaschen*. The *hamantash* is a triangular cookie, with a poppy seed or fruit filling. At some point, someone got the idea of altering the German name of these cookies, "*mohn taschen*" ["poppy-seed pockets"], to "*haman taschen*," and invented the story that it represents Haman's hat. (Of course, three-pointed hats were all the rage in ancient Persia.) Another view is that *Hamantaschen* means that Haman's force was exhausted ("*tash Cocho*") when he came to harm the Jews, and it is inferred that this will be the fate of all those who try

Hamantashen recipe



to do us harm.

The most popular Purim treat is a triangular shaped pastry called Hamantashan. It is most traditional to fill the pastry with poppy seed filling. The source of the pastry was poppy seed treats called "Mantashen". The name was intentionally distorted to "Hamantashan" which means "Haman's pockets" in Yiddish. Some say that Haman wore a three-cornered hat, and that is why the pocket of dough is triangular. In Hebrew, the pastry is called "Oznei Haman" which means Haman's ears. This name may have come from the midrash which says that when Haman entered the King's treasury, he was bent over with shame and humiliation (literally with clipped ears).

* [The ingredients for this recipe come from Faye Levy's International Jewish Cookbook \(Warner Books, 1991\).](#)

Ingredients

1 large egg
 1 large egg yolk
 3 3/4 cups flour
 1 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
 1/4 tsp. salt
 1 cup plus 5 Tbsp. of cold, unsalted margarine or butter, cut into small pieces
 2 1/2 tsp. grated orange rind
 1-2 Tbsp. orange juice (optional)

Instructions

Beat egg and yolk. Combine flour, confectioners' sugar, baking powder and salt. Mix in butter or margarine just enough to resemble coarse meal. Sprinkle grated rind and pour egg mixture over mixture. Mix just until dough comes together in a ball. If crumbs are dry, sprinkle with orange juice and mix briefly. Knead dough to blend. Transfer dough to plastic wrap. Shape dough into a flat disc. Refrigerate at least 3 hours or up to 3 days.

Roll out dough and use the end of a glass to cut out circular shapes. Fill circles with a bit of anything (poppy seed filling, any pie pilling, I have even seen peanut butter and chocolate chips used by a friend). Fold up 3 sides of the circle to form a triangle. Pinch

edges to seal. Place cookies on greased cookie sheet and refrigerate at least 1 hour. Bake at 375 for 12-15 minutes or until they are a light golden color.

Recipe for Kids' Hamantashan

This is a simple Hamantashan recipe which you can make with your children. Cooking holiday treats with your children is a great way to create special holiday memories which they will carry on with them.

Ingredients

2/3 cup margarine, room temperature
 1/2 cup sugar
 1/4 cup orange juice
 1 cup white flour
 1 cup wheat flour
 Pie Filling

Instructions

1. Blend butter and sugar thoroughly.
2. Add flour and orange juice, alternating.
3. Refrigerate batter for a few hours.
4. Roll out dough as thin as you can.
5. Cut out 3-4 inch circles
6. Put a tablespoon of filling in the middle of each circle.
7. Fold up 3 sides to form a triangle (Overlap the sides so only a little filling shows through the middle)
8. Bake at 375 degrees for about 10-15 minutes (bake until golden brown, but take out before the filling boils over)

OTHER PURIM FOODS

Now that we've discussed those triangle hamantashen filled with (you fill in your favorite filling), there are some other goodies that also have a connection to *Purim*:

Kreplach

Kreplach is ground meat wrapped in dough, also folded into a triangle. (What's this obsession with triangular food?)

"*Kreplach*" is Yiddish and is derived from the Hebrew names of holidays on which this food is eaten: *Yom Kippur* (K), (not on, silly, but before and after, of course), *Hoshana Raba* (R), and *Purim* (P). These three holidays are also connected to each other because they involve some sort of beating or striking:

Yom Kippur - we beat our heart during prayer:

Hoshana Raba - we strike the *Aravot* (willow branches); and

Purim - we beat (and blast and cream and clobber) Haman during the reading of the *Megillah*.

Another reason (and this is not *PURIM TORAH*), is based on the verse in the book of *Devarim*, *Parshat Re'eh* (13:16): "*Hakeh takeh et yoshvei ha-ir*" (you will surely smite the inhabitants of that city"), again we're beating and striking:

HAKEH - The letters "*Hay, Kaf, Hay*" in the first word represent *Hoshana Rabba, Kippur, Haman* -

TAKEH - The second set of letters "*Taf, Kaf, Hay*" represent "*Tochlu Kreplach Harbeh*" (You will eat a lot of *Kreplach*!!!).

Purim Challah - A special, very large *challah* with raisins is baked for the *Purim* meal. Cakes are also baked, that have been kneaded with oil and butter, smeared with egg yolk and decorated with chocolate ***and sweets***.

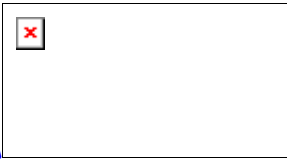
Purim fish - Fish are not prepared on *Purim* in the same way as for the other festivals. They are usually cooked in vinegar, raisins and spices.

Seeds, Beans, Legumes - Some have the custom of eating different kinds of seeds -- pumpkin, sunflower, nuts, etc. This is in memory of Esther, who ate no

forbidden foods while she lived in King Achashverosh's palace. All she ate was seeds (the first documented Jewish vegetarian). Others eat beans, legumes or cereals for the same reason. Esther adopted this vegetarian lifestyle while she was queen in order to ensure her observance of the kashrut laws. This is also another source of the custom of filling the Hamantashen with poppy seeds.

CURIOSITIES OF

PURIM



- *Megillat Esther* is the only book in the scriptures which does not mention *Hashem's* name.

- *Megillat Esther* is unique in that it contains words which appear nowhere else in the Bible.

These include:

Tevet: the tenth Hebrew month.

Kasher: fit.

Patshegen: a copy of the (written) text

Ahashdarpenim: Persian word for the King's officers

Pur: Persian word meaning "lot."

Karpas: Persian word for cotton.

- All the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in *Megillat Esther*, ch. 3, v. 13.

- The Hebrew word *Mishteh*, meaning banquet, occurs 20 times in *Megillat Esther* (which is equal to the total of ALL the other times it is found in the rest of the Bible).

- The longest verse in the Bible appears in *Megillat Esther*. It has 43 words in Hebrew (and approximately 90 words in the English translation). It appears in ch. 8, v. 9.

"Then were the king's scribes called at that time, in the third month, that is the month *Sivan*, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordechai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces, which are from India unto

Ethiopia, a hundred and twenty seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing and according to their language."

- The Talmud instructs that on *Purim* one should drink until he knows not the difference between "Blessed be Mordecai" and "Cursed be Haman." Interestingly, the numerical value of the Hebrew letters in each of the phrases (and) amounts in each case to a total of 502.

- In Missouri and Louisiana in the US there are towns called Esther.

- There is a "Queen Esther" Street in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv, Israel.

- "Hadassah" was founded on *Purim*, in 1912. Hadassah is Esther's Hebrew name.

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