

## **Purim at West London Synagogue**

### **Prepared by Associate Rabbi Danny Burkeman**

The source of Purim comes from *Megillat Esther* (The Scroll of Esther), which is included in the *TaNaCh* (Bible) as part of *Ketuvim* (Writings).

Purim falls on 14 Adar; except for in cities which had a wall at the time of Joshua (such as Jerusalem), where the festival is celebrated on 15 Adar, on a day called Shushan Purim.

Below you will find a few articles, from a variety of Jewish websites, about Purim, its rituals, customs and celebrations.

There is also a bonus page that lets you listen to the Megillah. For each article you will find a brief overview of its content and a couple of critical questions for you to consider when reading the website.

- **AN INTRODUCTION TO PURIM**

<http://www.templeсанjose.org/JudaismInfo/time/purim.htm>

This page gives a basic introduction to the festival of Purim, with a number of the key facts, rituals and a recipe for hamentaschen. Be aware that the secular dates of Purim are for previous years.

Critical question: Why do you think Purim is celebrated with a carnival type atmosphere? What do you think is the significance of the Purim story today for Jews living in the Diaspora? (Note: Temple Emanu-el San Jose is a Reform synagogue in California, and is a member of the Union for Reform Judaism).

- **THE OBSERVANCES OF PURIM**

[http://www.uscj.org/Purim\\_Observances\\_\\_T6621.html](http://www.uscj.org/Purim_Observances__T6621.html)

This article gives an overview of the eight primary ways in which the festival of Purim is celebrated. This includes listening to the Megillah, giving gifts to the poor and sending food to friends.

Critical questions: Why do you think that there is a specific commandment to listen to every word of the Megillah on Purim? What other reasons may there be for giving gifts to the poor and friends on Purim? (Note: The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is the association of Conservative congregations in North America).

- **DRINKING ON PURIM**

[http://myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish\\_Holidays/Purim/At\\_Home/Meal/Drinking\\_on\\_Purim.shtml](http://myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Purim/At_Home/Meal/Drinking_on_Purim.shtml)

One of the unique features of Purim is the instruction to drink so much that you cannot tell the difference between 'cursed is Haman' and 'blessed is Mordechai'. This article looks in detail at what it means to drink on Purim. (As Reform Jews we can appreciate the tradition of drinking on Purim, but there is NO obligation to be drunk).

Critical questions: What is the significance of not knowing the difference between Haman and Mordechai? In what other ways may we fulfil this Purim instruction? (Note: MyJewishLearning is a trans-denominational Jewish website).

- **THE JEWISH PARENTS PURIM PAGE**

[http://urj.org/\\_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item\\_id=17263&destination=ShowItem](http://urj.org/_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=17263&destination=ShowItem)

This is an online magazine which provides a variety of creative ways for parents to engage their children with Purim. It includes a recipe for burekas, and an article about the Purim celebrations at the Reform Congregation in Haifa.

Critical questions: How can we recreate the carnival atmosphere of Purim in our home and synagogue? Who might your children dress up as on Purim to give their costume added significance and meaning? (Note: The Jewish Parent Page is a publication of the Union for Reform Judaism, and is therefore targeted primarily at Reform Jews in North

America).

- **WOMEN AND PURIM**

<http://www.ritualwell.org/holidays/purim/primaryobject.2005-06-28.1464370738>

The story of Esther includes within it two prominent women: Vashti and Esther. This article looks at a new custom of waving flags for the two queens, and the underlying message of the actions of the women in the Megillah.

Critical questions: How do we relate to Vashti and Esther as heroines? Why do you think women have such a central role in the story of Purim? (Note: Ritualwell is a project of Kolot: The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College).

- **ANTISEMITISM AND THE STORY OF PURIM**

<http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Compelling+Content/Jewish+Time/Festivals+and+Memorial+Days/Purim/The+Scroll+of+Esther+and+Anti+Semitism.htm>

When one reads deeply into the story of Esther the Jews engage in some less than admirable practices. This article looks at the way that antisemites have used Megillat Esther to challenge the Jews.

Critical question: How do you feel about the way that the story of Megillat Esther ends? Why is a story of Jews massacring their enemies preserved in our TaNaCh? (Note: from the Jewish Agency website - the Jewish Agency for Israel works to connect the Jewish community to the heritage, people and homeland of Israel).

- **PURIM IN VARIOUS JEWISH TEXTS**

[http://wujs.org.il/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=244&Itemid=51](http://wujs.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=244&Itemid=51)

This page includes a number of Jewish texts about Purim from across the generations.

Critical questions: (H.L. Ginsberg) Why do you think God's name is not included in the Megillah? (Rambam) Why will the Book of Esther be kept after the Messiah? (Note: WUJS is the World Union of Jewish Students, and is a pluralist organisation representing Jewish students around the world).

- **BONUS: LISTEN TO THE MEGILLAH ONLINE**

[http://www.kolel.org/pages/holidays/Purim\\_megillah.html](http://www.kolel.org/pages/holidays/Purim_megillah.html)

This website includes the blessings recited before listening to the Megillah, and offers you the chance to listen to the Megillah if you can't make it to WLS. (Note: Kolel is an egalitarian and pluralistic Jewish educational institution seeking to provide courses and programs for adults. They are located in Toronto, Canada).