



HISTORY

Purim, the Feast of Lots, is based on the Book (*Megillah*) of Esther, and celebrates the profound reversal of fortune when the Jewish community of Persia was rescued by the heroism of Queen Esther and Mordechai in the fifth century B.C.E. Haman, chief adviser to King Achashverosh, planned to exterminate the Jews of Persia. He ordered that lots be drawn to determine on which day the massacre should take place, and it fell on the 13th day of the Hebrew month Adar.

The plan was foiled by the great courage of Queen Esther and Mordechai. The king ordered that Haman be hanged and issued a decree allowing the Jewish people to defend themselves from their enemies. The Jews were victorious on the 13th day of Adar and celebrated on the 14th day. In Shushan, the Persian capital, the battle continued for one more day. Purim today is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, and in Jerusalem, on the 15th day.

MEANINGS

Purim is a celebration of the survival of Jewish people. It is a story of two Jewish heroes, Esther and Mordechai, who taught us the meaning of taking action on behalf of the Jewish community when it is endangered.

It is also significant that G-d's name is not mentioned in the *Megillah*. One interpretation of this unusual fact is that even though G-d's presence is not always obvious through open miracles, G-d is very much present in our everyday lives through subtle miracles.



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TRADITIONS

▶ **Listening to the Megillah**

To relive the miraculous events of Purim, we listen to the reading of the *Megillah* (Scroll of Esther) on the night of Purim, as well as on the following morning.

▶ **Eating a festive meal**

The celebration of the holiday includes a special, festive meal on Purim day. Many people also dress in costumes. The delicacy of the day is *hamantaschen*, a delicious pastry.

▶ **Giving gifts of food**

On Purim, we emphasize the importance of Jewish unity by sending gifts of food via a messenger to friends – at least two kinds of ready-to-eat foods to at least one friend on Purim day.

▶ **Giving gifts to people in need**

Although giving *tzedakah* (charity) is a responsibility throughout the year, it is a special *mitzvah* (commandment) on Purim day to remember people in need; we do this by giving *tzedakah* to at least two poor people (or setting aside money for worthy causes that help the poor).



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