



Family-Friendly Ideas for Celebrating Purim

Purim is the kind of holiday that little kids dream of, with lots of food, fun and family. It is also a holiday that lends itself to unlimited creativity! For Purim, just about anything that fits within the limits of good taste and biblical standards is acceptable, and there are also many ways to approach the traditional activities. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Devotional Study: It is a good idea to preface the feast with a family reading of the book of Esther. This can take place during Purim, but it is often better to do it during the days preceding the feast, so that there is time to discuss it together. If everybody in the family knows the story well, the devotional studies and the fun activities will have more meaning for everyone. To aid in this process, there are several good books that are interesting for both children and adults (see the Resources section on page 8). For some suggested Bible studies to use during the days of the Purim holiday itself, see page 39.

Food: The traditional foods of Purim are fairly labor intensive. However, preparation can become a fun family activity if you start early enough. One thing to consider in your preparation is whether or not you plan to make up Purim baskets for family and friends. *Mishlo'ach manot* are always more fun if they contain homemade treats that the kids helped to make. Delivery of these baskets on the afternoon of Purim can be the most fun of all. If you have no friends or relatives that celebrate Purim, you can still drive your costumed kids around to deliver food treats to any friends or relatives that might appreciate the fun your children are having! Be sure to take a camera and/or video camera to record the experience.

Charity: One great Purim tradition that deserves attention is the giving of charity to those in need. In order to make

this tradition meaningful to your kids, it needs to be done in a way that includes them. One possibility is to set up a tzedaka box in your house a month or so before Purim. Any loose change that is found in anyone's pockets, or any unclaimed change, goes in the box, as well as any other contributions guests or family members choose to make. Just before Purim, have a family meeting to decide what to do with the money that has been collected. The most acceptable gifts, in Jewish tradition, are the ones that are given anonymously, so it is preferable to give the money in such a way that the recipient does not know who you are. Charity organizations are one way to accomplish this, but certainly not the only way.

Costumes: Costumes can be anything, but characters from the story of Esther are most appropriate. Interesting twists and interpretations are always acceptable, though. How about Haman as a wild west gun-slinger dressed in black? Or Ahasuarus as an Indian chief or Esther as a medieval queen? The possibilities are endless.

Plays: A Purim party has to include a play, but there are no rules as to how it must be done. The best Purim play, of course, is a version of the story of Esther with humorous touches, but it doesn't have to be faithful to the real facts, necessarily, as long as it gets the point across—the good guys win with the help of God and the bad guys lose!

There are several possible approaches to this: a puppet show, a "TV" program (video taped in advance), a TV news report, a narrated mime, or a funny skit, all dramatizing some portion of the Purim story. Another possibility is an armchair drama, where the actors read their parts while sitting in chairs, which limits the need for both extensive props and memorized lines. Try putting the story in a different setting (the Middle

Ages, for example), including a humorous mixture of ancient Persian customs, Middle Ages culture, and modern terminology. If you don't have time to write your own, see page 15 in this issue for a hilarious armchair drama re-telling the story of Esther as an old western.

If a celebration includes many people who want to participate, plan a "paper bag dramatics" activity. Divide the participants up into teams and provide each team with a bag of 5-6 props at least several hours (or days) ahead of time. Each team is then responsible to plan a skit using the props in their bag. The resulting skits must be taken from events in the book of Esther and must use all of the props in the bag (and no others). Props might include a huge safety pin, a toy pan, a really big spoon, a wig, a plastic toy animal or stuffed animal, a pen, pretend glasses with noses and mustaches, an odd sock, a toothbrush, a toy telephone or car, a paper airplane, one glove or boot, a stick horse, a rolling pin, a huge bowl or a dog collar and leash.

The Feast: While it is fun to have special foods on Purim, it is even more fun if the meal is more than just a time to eat and drink. Use the time to have a lively discussion on the topics you have studied in the days leading up to the festival or come up with some trivia questions on the story of Esther. Right answers get a piece of candy or an extra cookie.

Add a little extra interest by hiding things in the food or on the table. Obviously, such hidden items cannot be cooked in the food or placed in really messy dishes. Items are best hidden in dry hiding places, like in the bread basket among the rolls, or wrapped up in the napkins. Things to hide could be party favors, stickers, party noisemakers, etc. Hidden items must be large enough that they won't be swallowed by accident, and you must be sure that there are no small parts or finishes that could come off in the food. One way to avoid this problem is to enclose smaller items in the mini zipper seal bags such as those purchased at craft stores. Although it is finders keepers in this situation, you might need to monitor to be sure that one child doesn't find everything, leaving nothing for anyone else to find. In any case, the rule has to be that no one is allowed to paw through the food!

A variation on this idea is to include an unusual piece of food in each dish. For example, include a large piece of dried apple or pineapple in the challah, a piece of broccoli in the kreplach, or an M&M buried in the hamentaschen filling. The person who discovers the hidden food on his plate must answer a Purim trivia question.

Activities: One popular activity during Purim is a pinata because the treats are hidden inside (another reference to the theme of hiddenness). If you don't want your kids to overdose on sugar, fill the pinata with party favors instead. See page 11 in this issue for ideas on making your own.

Another activity for your Purim party (or for Purim morning) is a treasure hunt. Clues can include parts of the story of Esther or not. For ideas on treasure hunts, see *The Treasure Hunt Book*, by the Editors of Klutz Press. For a treasure hunt designed specifically for Purim, see page 20 of this issue. Whatever kind of treasure hunt you use, ask the children ahead of time to tell you why we hide things on Purim. This will help them to make the connection between the meaning of the festival and the fun of the hunt. The "treasure" can be party favors, stickers, hamentaschen, dried fruit, or a fun gift for the whole family, such as a book or game.

During the second day of Purim, kids can begin to drag with boredom if you have nothing planned for them. There is a bit of a letdown after the fun of the night before and they start to ask if there is anything else we are going to do. Be sure to plan ahead for this situation. One possibility is to keep a costume box with all the old Purim costumes from previous years as well as any funny clothes you come across during the year. During Purim, the kids can pull out the box and have fun making up silly skits (this only works as a fun Purim activity if they are not allowed to get into the box at other times). Another fun activity for the daytime of Purim is to watch videos of the Esther story. This could be videos of plays from previous years of celebrating Purim or it could be commercial videos. Check the Christian bookstore or the internet for possibilities.



Purim and Jewish Tradition

Jewish literature includes many midrashim and traditional details to fill in the Biblical story of Mordechai and Queen Esther. Some traditions sound strange and some are logical, but all of them are fascinating. Here are a few:

Esther's Complexion: Did you know that Queen Esther had a complexion the color of teal green? Tradition says that she was endowed with a supernatural beauty that shone even through green skin.

Sweet, but not young: Like Sarah, Esther is remembered as an aging beauty. Ancient Jewish writings assign her the age of 75 at the time she was crowned queen.

Royal Blood: Vashti was the granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar, according to Jewish commentators. They say this explains her prideful attitude toward her husband, the king, who was really just a commoner, and not of royal blood.

A Counterfeit: The throne of Ahasuerus, as the story goes, was a copy of the actual throne of Solomon, which was taken by Nebuchadnezzar when he defeated Jerusalem. Ahasuerus was afraid to sit on the real throne of Solomon because the carved lions on either side of the throne would bite the legs of any king daring enough to sit there without an anointing from God.

The Prophet Daniel: In the Jewish version of the story, Daniel makes an appearance as Hasach, the messenger who acted as a go-between for Esther and Mordechai. The prophet's death, not recorded in the Bible, was at the hand of Haman.

Seven Maids: Queen Esther had seven maids, one for each day of the week. Since the maid for Shabbat came only once a week, she did not know that Esther's behavior on that day was any different than on any other day, and so Esther's secret identity as a Jew could be hidden.

Kosher Palace Food: Some say that Esther ate nothing but lentils so that she would avoid unkosher food. Others say she had her own kosher kitchen.