

# Purim



Purim is the holiday that commemorates Queen Esther's actions to save the Jews of Persia from death. Purim is an unusual holiday in many respects. It is celebrated with a public reading— usually in the synagogue—of the Book of Esther (*Megillah Esther*), which tells the story of the holiday. Under the rule of King Ahashverosh, Haman, the king's prime minister, plots to exterminate all of the Jews of Persia. His plan is foiled by Queen Esther and her cousin Mordechai, who ultimately save the Jews of Persia from destruction. The reading of the *megillah* typically is a rowdy affair, punctuated by booing and noise-making when Haman's name is read aloud.



Esther is the only biblical book in which God is not mentioned. Purim, like Hanukkah, traditionally is viewed as a minor festival, but elevated to a major holiday as a result of the Jewish historical experience. Over the centuries, Haman became the embodiment of every anti-Semite in every land where Jews were oppressed. The significance of Purim lies not so much in how it began, but in what it has become: a thankful and joyous affirmation of Jewish survival against all odds.

It has been taught that when the Messianic Age comes, the entire Bible, with the

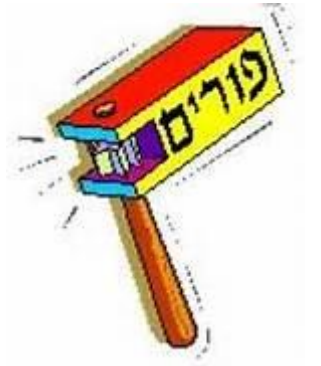
exception of this book (some argue the torah and this book) will no longer be needed.

## Purim Traditions

### Grager

Alternate Spelling:

*Grogger* "Noisemaker" (Hebrew); used to drown out Haman's name during the Megillah reading on Purim.



### Purim Baskets (Mishloach manot)



Baskets of sweets and other foods exchanged among friends on Purim. MRT Sisterhood has an annual Purim Basket fund raiser.

### Hamantaschen

Hamantaschen are three-cornered pastries filled with poppy seeds (*mohn* in Yiddish), fruit preserves, chocolate, or other ingredients that are traditionally eaten on Purim. MRT religious school students and Sisterhood bake Hamantaschen to fill the Mishloach Manot baskets.



## Costumes



As part of the carnival-like atmosphere of Purim, many children and adults wear costumes. Some attribute this tradition to the fact that Esther initially “masked” her Jewish identity. Now a vibrant and widely practiced custom, some choose to dress as characters from the Purim story, while others select Jewish heroes from throughout history.

## Purimspiel

A Purim-spiel (pronounced SHPEEL, rhymes with "reel") is a humorous skit presented as part of the celebration of Purim. Most parody the story of the Book of Esther, but it also is common for participants to take the opportunity to poke some gentle fun at themselves and their idiosyncrasies. MRT has an annual Purimspiel.



## Matanot l'evyonim (gifts to the poor)

Gifts are given at this season to those in need so that they, too, can celebrate Purim with a special meal. Many families have committed to participating in this important social justice aspect of the holiday.

