

# High Feasts & Holy Days

## Lesson 6: Purim

3.12.2017

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**Objectives:** Explore Purim, the story of Queen Esther, and its relation to genocide.

**Materials:** Flipchart, blank cards, lesson attachments, storybook “Queen Esther” by Tomie dePaola, groggers (noisemakers), *hamantaschen* (filled-pocket cookie/ pastry in the Ashkenazi Jewish cuisine, recognizable for its three-cornered shape), offering envelope.

**Time allotments** suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class**.

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### 1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
  - ▶ Who are some women leaders/heroines you admire?
  - ▶ Name as many women you know who appear in the Bible.
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

### 2. Silly Fun: Guess Who? (5 minutes max)

Give each youth 3 blank cards to write 3 little known facts about themselves (teachers included, too!) For example: I once fell asleep while eating lunch, I was born exactly at midnight, my favorite superhero is Wolverine. Teacher collects and mixes cards in a basket, then draws one card at a time and reads aloud for youth to guess who’s fact it is. (Please don’t guess aloud if it’s your own card!) See who can guess the most correctly.

### 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (from thinker and renowned Torah scholar, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook)

*“I don’t speak because I have the power to speak; I speak because I don’t have the power to remain silent.”*

### 4. Joys and Sorrows (10 minutes): Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a sorrow from the past week, as a way of meeting one

another with our lives and *sharing* in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation's Embracing Meditation will be made available to your class, so that stones can be put in for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

## 5. Introduction to Purim (20 minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** Purim is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people living in Persia during the reign of the Persian Empire (4 BCE), specifically from a court official named Haman and his plot to annihilate the Jews, as recorded in the Book of Esther. The word "purim" in Hebrew means "lottery." According to the story, Haman drew numbers from a lottery to determine the day to massacre the Jews.

Purim is celebrated annually according to the Hebrew calendar, on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar, the day immediately following the victory of the Jews over their enemies. In 2017, Purim falls on March 12. (*\*Note: As with all Jewish holidays, Purim begins at sundown on the previous day.\**)

Unlike most Jewish holidays, Purim is purely a celebration and none of the observances of the Sabbath apply on this day. Purim is characterized by public recitation of the *Book of Esther* from the Hebrew Bible, sharing gifts of food and drink, giving charity to the poor, and a celebratory meal. Other customs include drinking wine, wearing of masks and costumes, and public celebration.

It is customary to boo, hiss, stamp feet, and rattle *groggers* (noisemakers) whenever the name "Haman" is mentioned in the service. The purpose is to "blot out the name of Haman." This may also be the intention behind the *Talmud* (oral law) requiring Jews to drink until they cannot tell the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordecai" (one of the heroes in the story), though opinions differ as to exactly how drunk that is. But the whole point is to forget Haman.

### Questions for Discussion:

- Many Jewish holy days, like the Sabbath, forbid any form of work. (See attached list of 39 restrictions that are considered forbidden work.) Purim is **not** a Sabbath-type holiday. So what are some things on that list that, when **allowed** to do during Purim, would lend to a more festive celebration?
- Haman plotted to exterminate the Jews thousands of years ago. What has happened in history since then regarding genocide, "ethnic cleansing," and attempts to exterminate whole groups of people? (*Review attachment showing history of genocide.*)
- How does our history of genocide affect your perception of this celebration?

- We have memorials and days of remembrance that cry out “Never Again!” Yet genocides continue. What can holy days and observances do and not do? What can strengthen their significance and impact?

## 6. Reading from the Story of Esther: (15 minutes)

Teacher (or youth volunteer who reads well) reads story aloud from a children’s book *Queen Esther* by Tomie dePaola.

- Give each youth a “grogger” noisemaker (image on the grogger is of King Ahasuerus from the story).
- The youths’ job is to fulfill the Purim tradition of “blotting out the name of evil” by hissing and turning their groggers every time (and only when) the name of “Haman” is spoken during the story.

## 7. Enjoy Hamantaschen and Discuss (20 minutes)

Celebrate the joyous conclusion of the story by enjoying *hamantaschen* (see closet) – filled-pocket cookie or pastry in Ashkenazi Jewish cuisine, recognizable for its three-cornered shape. The word refers to Haman, and depending on traditions, the pastry is supposed to look like the hat, purse, or ears of Haman, the villain in the Purim story.

### Questions for Discussion:

- How is Esther the heroine of this story? (*Consider: Esther risks her own life by violating a law that was punishable by death, in order to save her people from annihilation. Civil disobedience? Nonviolent resistance?*)
- Does Esther remind you of anyone from other stories/histories?
- Have you faced moments when you risked stepping forth or standing out because of your integrity/values?
- What other religious or secular holidays celebrate women? (*Recall: St. Bridget’s Day, Candlemas and purification of the Virgin Mary, Mother’s Day*)
- How bad does a person have to be to deserve their name to be “blotted out” for the rest of history? What does our *Universalist* heritage – i.e. that redemption is extended to everyone – have to say about that?

## 8. Charitable Offering (5 minutes)

An important tradition on Purim is to give money to charity. Invite youth to offer any pocket change to go towards today’s church offering. (RE staff will pick up offering envelope.)

**9. Say goodbye until next time:** Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

*“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

**10. Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets