



THE BETTER-THAN-BEST PURIM

Written & Illustrated by Naomi Howland

Soon it will be Purim, and it's time for a little old lady to bake her better-than-best hamantashen. Her pets are all too busy to help her with the baking, but chances are they'll have time to taste the results of her work. Sound familiar?

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Purim

Jewish people rejoice on the fourteenth of Adar, celebrating the bravery of Queen Esther, whose courage saved her people from a tyrant – Haman, an advisor of her husband, the king. The word Purim comes from “*pur*,” the lots that were thrown to determine when the Jews of Persia would be killed. The story of Purim is recounted in the *megillah* (the scroll of Esther), which is read in the synagogue with enthusiasm and a great deal of loud participation from the costumed revelers. The holiday is associated with *simchah* (joy and merriment) in celebration of the ancient victory over oppression. The Talmud states, “*With the advent of Adar, joy is increased*” (Talmud, Ta’anit 29).

Tzedakah

According to Jewish thought, every act of celebration should include *tzedakah* (from the Hebrew word meaning “righteousness,” acts of help to those in need). The great 12th century scholar Maimonides taught that providing *matanot l’evyonim* (gifts to the poor) is the most important of the *mitzvot* associated with Purim.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Introduce Queen Esther to your children as a person who acted with bravery and stood up for what she believed. Talk with your children about how difficult this can be. Encourage family discussion how each person can be brave in his/her own way. Record these ideas in a scroll and call it your “Family Megillah.”

An essential component of Purim is participating in *mitzvot*. Commonly called “good deeds,” *mitzvot* (the plural of *mitzvah*) are commandments. As the animals in this story prepare “baskets of goodies,” they are taking part in a *mitzvah* associated with Purim: giving *mishloach manot* (Purim goodie baskets) to friends and neighbors.

Consider a family visit to your local senior center or nursing home, where your children can make Purim come alive for elders there. Take along some *hamantashen* – tri-cornered, fruit-filled Purim pastries -- to share and make it an experience everyone will treasure!