



# THE STORY OF QUEEN ESTHER

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*The king may have married Queen Esther because she was beautiful – but she was smart and brave, too, which is why she was able to save her people.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Purim is a holiday for celebrating freedom, courage, the triumph of good over evil, and the ability of an individual to make a difference – and it’s also a lot of fun. Purim falls on the 14th of the Jewish month of Adar, and in many communities the entire month takes on the feel of a carnival.

There are multiple ways to take part in Purim. Many Jews attend synagogue to hear the ancient story of Esther read from a *megillah* (scroll). Whenever the reader mentions wicked Haman, congregants make enough noise to drown out his name. It’s common to spin or shake a noisemaker (called a *grogger* in Yiddish) to make as much of a din as possible. Children – and many adults – dress up in costumes. It’s also traditional to put on a play (called a *spiel* in Yiddish) about the story of Esther – the funnier the play, the better. Many families exchange *mishloach manot*, goodie baskets, which often include *hamantaschen* (classic Purim treats, three-cornered cookies). And as on every Jewish holiday, it’s customary to remember those less fortunate with *matanot l'evyonim* (literally, gifts to the poor). Donating items to a food bank or delivering plants to an assisted living home are great ways to fulfill this *mitzvah* (literally “commandment,” but understood as a good deed). Best of all, children can participate in just about every Purim activity. *Chag Purim Sameach* (Happy Purim)!

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Many elements of the story of Esther make for interesting conversations with children. Here are some ideas to discuss with yours:

Esther gathered her courage to approach her husband, the king, and save her family and the Jewish community. Sometimes standing up for what we believe is not easy. How can we embody Esther’s bravery when we encounter social injustice or see a sibling or friend treated unfairly?

In preparation for meeting the king, Esther ignores offers of golden robes and jewels. She chooses a simple white dress and allows her inner beauty to shine through. This fits with a saying from the Talmud (a collection of rabbinic writings): “Do not look at the jug, but rather at what is in it” (*Pirke Avot* 1:6). Do you think true worth is measured by the things you wear or own, or by who you are on the inside?

Some more questions to consider:

- Why do you think Haman hates Mordecai?
- Esther listens to her cousin’s advice. Who do you go to for advice? Why?
- Why do you think Esther waits so long before asking her husband, the king, for help?