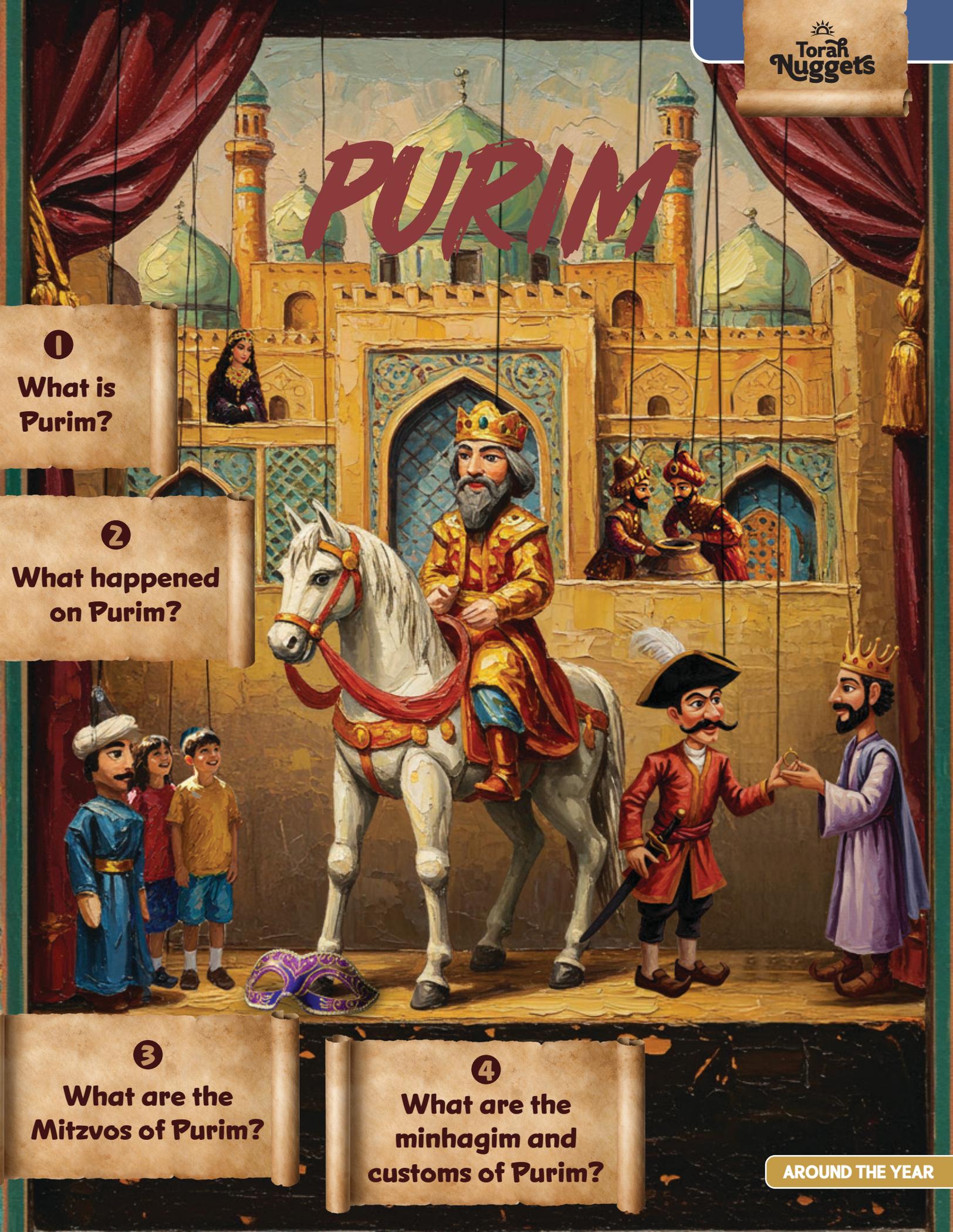


PURIM

The background illustration depicts a scene from the Purim story. A king with a grey beard and a crown, wearing a yellow and red robe, sits on a white horse. He is in a palace courtyard with ornate buildings and domes. In the background, a woman in a purple dress looks out from a balcony. To the right, two men in red robes are preparing a drink. In the foreground, a man in a red coat and black hat with a white feather is talking to a man in a purple robe who is holding a golden object. To the left, a man in a blue robe and turban stands with two children, a girl in a red shirt and a boy in a yellow shirt. A purple and gold masquerade mask lies on the ground near the horse's front legs.

1

What is Purim?

2

What happened on Purim?

3

What are the Mitzvos of Purim?

4

What are the minhagim and customs of Purim?

What is Purim?



In a Nutshell

Purim is the day that Hashem saved the Jews from complete destruction and instead destroyed our enemies. We celebrate and remember the timeless message that Hashem runs the world even when it doesn't look like it.

RELATIONSHIP RESET

Purim is probably the most exciting day of the year it's filled with Costumes, parties, *mishloach manos*, and nonstop fun! But beneath it all is a celebration of something huge: Hashem's love for us—then, now, and always. Back when Hashem took us out of *Mitzrayim* (Egypt), He revealed Himself in glorious, powerful and awesome open miracles like *Krias Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea), and *Matan Torah* (when we got the Torah). But generations later the open miracles stopped. The *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, prophecy was gone, and Jews began to wonder: Is Hashem still watching over us? Did our sins cause Him to give up on us? That's when the Purim story put their doubts to rest forever. Purim reminds us that even when things look like 'nature' or 'coincidence', Hashem is always there with us, pulling the strings from Above. We just need to look for Him, and we'll certainly see Him behind His mask.

WHY IS IT CALLED PURIM?

Purim means "lottery" in ancient Persian. The holiday was thus named since Haman had thrown lots to determine when he would carry out his diabolical scheme.



Spotlight

Learn to see through Hashem's "Mask"!



LONG STORY SHORT

The story of *Esther* and *Mordechai* looks totally natural: a king, a queen, some politics, a bad guy, and a wild plot twist. But it was one apparent "coincidence" (read: hidden miracle) after another that led to the Jews' salvation. Klal Yisrael was in serious danger: Haman had convinced the king to sign a law allowing everyone to kill every Jew on the 13th of Adar. It was a plan for the total destruction of the Jewish people. But behind the scenes, Hashem was arranging their salvation. Haman fell into his own trap, and the whole story turned upside down. The Jews were saved, and their enemies were defeated. That's the miracle of Purim: Hashem saved us without any open miracles, but when you look closely, it's clear—Hashem was guiding everything from behind the scenes. It was a new kind of miracle: a *neis nistar* - hidden in nature, but just as powerful as the open ones.



THE FOUR MITZVOS OF PURIM

Purim isn't just full of fun—it's full of mitzvos! There are four special mitzvos of Purim. We read *Megillas Esther* to recount, study and imbibe the message of the incredible Purim story. We give *Mishloach Manos*, two ready-to-eat foods to a fellow Jew. We also give *Matanos La'evyonim*, money to the poor, so everyone can celebrate with dignity. And finally, we enjoy a festive *Mishteh*, a joyful Purim *seudah* (meal) filled with gratitude and celebration.

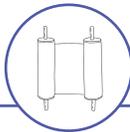


ZONIAK CHALLENGE

The Torah hints at Haman's and Esther's names.

- After Adam ate from the Eitz Hada'as, Hashem says:
 "הֲכֹרֵה עֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵבַלְתִּי אֲכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲכָלְתָּ?"
 "Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?"¹
- Hashem warns Bnei Yisrael what will happen if they sin:
 "וְאֶנְכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנָי"
 "I will surely hide My face..."²
 Find Haman and Esther's hidden names!

Bonus: Why is each posuk fitting for the person it hints to?"



Seeing Past the Mask



The name “Purim” means “lots,” referring to the lottery Haman used to pick the day to destroy the Jews.³ A lottery symbolizes randomness, events that seem disconnected or without logic. And yet, the very name of the holiday of Purim hints to its secret: what seems random is actually Hashem’s perfect plan. That’s the miracle of Purim. There were no seas splitting, no fire coming down from Heaven, just a series of seemingly ordinary events that joined together to reveal an extraordinary master plan. The queen is deposed. An orphaned Jewish girl becomes queen. A plot is overheard. The king can’t sleep. None of it looks miraculous—but that’s the point. Hashem was guiding everything, but from behind His mask of nature and random coincidence.

The Purim story occurred at a critical juncture in history – the era of prophecy and open miracles had just come to an end, and the Jews felt lost and alone in exile.⁴ This is why the message of Purim was so critical. Hashem showed *Klal Yisrael* that He was still with them and would always be. But now, they would have to learn how to recognize Him from behind the facade of nature. Perceiving Hashem in His open miracles took no effort at all. The Jews were almost forced to see Hashem’s hand. Now, in this new stage, the Jews had to choose to recognize Hashem. They had to search for Him and invest in their relationship with Him. This was definitely a much harder job, but also a much more rewarding one.

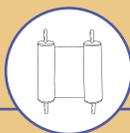
This brings us to one of the most noticeable features of *Megillas Esther*: Hashem’s name is not mentioned even once! The most common

word in the entire Megillah is *HaMelech*—“The King.” Chazal teach that whenever the Megillah says *HaMelech* without specifying *Achashverosh*, it is a hint to the King of all Kings, Hashem Himself.⁵ This idea is at the heart of Purim. *HaMelech* can be seen as either an earthly king or the hidden King of the universe. Every twist in history is the hand of Hashem, working from behind the curtain. On Purim, we train ourselves to see Him, not only when His presence is obvious, but when He hides Himself within nature, within politics, and within history.

Megillas Esther literally means *The Scroll of Esther*. But beneath the surface, both words carry a deeper message. The word *Megillah* comes from the same root as *legalos*, to reveal. The name Esther comes from the word *hester*, to hide.⁶ So *Megillas Esther* can also mean *Revealing the Hidden*⁷. And that is the essence and message of the Purim story. It is all about the revelation (*gilui*) of Hashem’s hand precisely when He seems most hidden⁸. Even our Purim costumes hint at this idea—we wear masks and disguises, just like Hashem “wears a mask,” as the Torah says, “*Vani hastir astair panai*” – I will surely hide My face.⁹ In this era, Hashem’s miracles come disguised as coincidence and the natural-looking flow of cause and effect.

Hashem no longer shows His hand openly, but He is still here, guiding history from behind the scenes. Purim teaches us that even when Hashem hides, we can still see Him if we know how to look.¹⁰

Where else do you find that when you choose to invest in something, the results are more meaningful than if you were forced into it?



Seeing through the Mask

Mordechai and Esther were able to “see through the mask” and recognize that Hashem was in control. Their actions often appeared counterintuitive at the time, but they ultimately saved the Jewish people.

✎ Mordechai’s refusal to bow to Haman appeared to have triggered Haman’s hatred, but Mordechai knew the Jews had already been judged in Heaven for bowing to Nevuchadnezar’s idol, and bowing again would only worsen the Heavenly decree against the Jews.¹¹

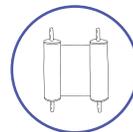
✎ After the decree, Mordechai didn’t run to

the palace to beg for mercy, although he had saved the king’s life and was respected at court. Instead, he first responded with teshuvah. He wore sackcloth, cried out in the streets, and called the Jewish people to repent.

✎ Esther fasted for three days before risking her life to approach Achashverosh uninvited. This was hardly a way to make herself look more appealing! However, she knew success wouldn’t come from her charm or appearance, but from tefillah and teshuvah.

The Story!

Jewish Year/Secular Year	Event
0/3760 BCE	Creation of the World
2448/ 1312 BCE	Hashem takes the Jews out of Egypt and gives them the Torah at Har Sinai
2928/832 BCE	Construction of first Beis Hamikdash
3338/423 BCE	Destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash (<i>Galus Bavel</i>)
3401/357 BCE	Esther becomes queen
3405/356 BCE	PURIM MIRACLE
3408/353 BCE	Rebuilding of second Beis Hamikdash
3622/164 BCE	Chanukah Miracle
3828/68 CE	Destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash (<i>Galus Edom</i>)
5785/2025	Modern day!



The Story of Purim

About 2,400 years ago, the Persian Empire ruled 127 countries, pretty much the entire civilized world.¹² At its head was King Achashverosh. Sitting on his throne, Achashverosh miscalculated a prophecy. The *nevi'im* had foretold that after 70 years of *galus*, the Jews would return to Eretz Yisroel and the *Beis HaMikdash* would be rebuilt. But according to his calculations, 70 years had passed and nothing had happened. So Achashverosh and his smug advisors drew a conclusion: Hashem must have rejected the Jews.¹³ To celebrate what he thought was the final chapter of Jewish history, Achashverosh threw a party—180 days of glory and indulgence. Then he threw a second party, seven days long, just for the people of Shushan.¹⁴ He even invited the Jews, hoping to win them over. Mordechai, the leader of Klal Yisrael, warned the Jews that it was forbidden to attend the party, but unfortunately, many disregarded him and went anyway. This sin, along with the fact that the Jews had previously bowed to Nevuchadnezzar's idol, caused a harsh decree to be written in Heaven against the Jews.

Achashverosh's party quickly became crude and vulgar. A drunken argument broke out of which country had the most beautiful women. To prove his point, Achashverosh ordered Queen Vashti to appear immodestly before the guests, a degrading and absurd request. Hashem caused the immoral and shameless Queen Vashti to suddenly get *tz'ra'as*, (a skin disease).¹⁵ Horrified at her appearance, she refused Achashverosh's command, humiliating the king in front of the entire kingdom. He turned to his advisors, but none dared speak, except one minor official, Haman.¹⁶ Hashem placed him there at just the right moment, and Haman, experiencing his own frustrations with his wife, advised the king to have Vashti executed.¹⁷

The king followed through, and Vashti was killed. But when the effects of the wine wore off, Achashverosh deeply regretted his rash decision. Surrounded by only low-level palace staff to advise him, he made another mistake and agreed to something unthinkable for royalty: a beauty contest to choose the next queen.¹⁸ Esther was taken to the palace, where she stood out from the other contestants. Mordechai had told her not to let anyone know her background. She was a mystery. She was no longer a young woman,¹⁹ hardly wore makeup, and did no self-promotion. All she possessed was a quiet grace.²⁰ And yet, she was chosen to be queen!

THE CAST



Achashverosh The king of the massive Persian Empire. He wasn't born into royalty; he started out as a stable boy, but married Vashti to gain power.²⁹ He was insecure and often made foolish or extreme decisions to prove himself.



Vashti The evil Queen of Persia. She was much like her cruel grandfather, Nevuchadnezzar, who destroyed the Beis Hamikdash. Vashti would humiliate Jewish girls and force them to work on Shabbos.



Mordechai HaYehudi The leader of the Jewish people. He refused to bow to Haman and inspired the Jews to do teshuvah. He was Esther's cousin³⁰ and raised her like a daughter. Chazal say that Mordechai married Esther.³¹



Esther HaMalka A Jewish orphan who became queen of Persia. Her real name was Hadassah³² but she followed Mordechai's instructions to hide her identity from Achashverosh, and so she is called Esther³³, which means hidden. Esther had royal lineage - she was a descendant of King Shaul. She was a *neviah* (prophetess)³⁴ and wrote the Megillah with Mordechai.³⁵



Haman The lowest advisor in the palace who rose in power to become second to the king. He was arrogant and filled with hate for the Jews, just like his ancestor and archenemy of Klal Yisrael, Amalek.

Mordechai stayed near the palace to keep an eye on Esther. As a member of the *Sanhedrin*, Mordechai knew all seventy²¹. He was therefore able to understand Bigsan and Seresh, two guards who were plotting to kill the king, even though they spoke in a foreign language. He quickly passed word to the king through Queen Esther, and their plot was foiled. Strangely, Mordechai got no reward for saving the king's life. Hashem was setting the stage for the Jews' salvation.

Soon after, Haman was promoted above all other officials. Achashverosh even handed him his royal signet ring, which gave him total power. Haman was on top of the world. But when he saw that Mordechai refused to bow to him, his joy turned to rage. A Jew defying him? Haman wanted revenge not just on Mordechai, but on *every single* Jew in the kingdom. He offered Achashverosh money to wipe them out entirely. The king agreed. A date was chosen by *pur* (lottery), the 13th of Adar. Letters were sent across the empire, giving people permission to slaughter Jews and take their property.

The decree was devastating. It looked like it was the end of the Jewish people. Mordechai put on sackcloth and ashes. He cried out in the streets. He begged his people to return to Hashem.

He then sent a message to Esther. Esther agreed to take on the life-threatening mission of showing up uninvited to speak to Achashverosh. She told Mordechai: "Gather all the Jews and don't eat or drink for three days." She did the same. It was *Nissan*, and that year, all the Jews fasted and did not have a *Pesach seder*.²² The nation joined together in *teshuvah*. They prayed and they wept.

With a prayer on her lips, Esther stepped toward the king's throne. Miraculously, Achashverosh welcomed her.²³ He promised to grant her anything, up to half his kingdom.²⁴ But Esther didn't rush. She invited him and Haman to a private banquet. At the party she invited them both to another one. Haman was elated. But when he saw Mordechai again, he was consumed by fury. He immediately went and built a gallows, 50 *amos* tall, and then rushed, in the middle of the night, to get the king's permission to hang him. But Hashem had already accepted the Jews' *teshuvah*, and arranged for Haman's downfall.

That night, the king couldn't sleep. He asked for his royal chronicles to be read. Hashem made the page fall to the story of how Mordechai saved the king's life.²⁵ Achashverosh realized that no reward had been given and decided he must repay Mordechai. Just that moment,

Haman arrived. Before he could ask permission to hang Mordechai, the king asked his most trusted advisor, "What should be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman, conceitedly assuming the king wanted to honor him, described an elaborate procession with the honoree being led on the king's horse, wearing royal clothes. The king loved the idea—and told him to do it for Mordechai!

Haman's humiliation was huge but not complete. Haman's own daughter, mistakenly thinking it was Mordechai leading Haman in honor, dumped garbage on her father's head from a window. When she realized the truth, she jumped to her death.²⁶ The tide was turning. Haman arrived home distraught and filthy. Before he could even change his clothing²⁷, he was summoned to Esther's second banquet. This time, Esther spoke up. She revealed that she was Jewish, and that Haman was plotting to kill her and her people.

Achashverosh was shocked and infuriated. Charvona, a palace servant, suggested hanging Haman on the very same gallows he had built for Mordechai. The king agreed.²⁸

The enemy was gone. But the threat of genocide remained. The decree allowing Jews to be attacked still stood, and Esther and Mordechai couldn't cancel it. Although Achashverosh gave them his signet ring, the law was that no decree sealed with the king's ring could be undone. So Esther and Mordechai issued a new decree: Jews were now allowed to defend themselves. When the 13th of Adar came, Hashem gave the Jews tremendous success. Not a single Jew was killed, and Hashem had confused and weakened their enemies, allowing the Jews to kill them. Even Haman's ten sons were killed. What had seemed like politics had clearly been *Hashgacha Pratis*, the Divine Hand orchestrating everything. Behind the mask of happenstance, Hashem was performing miracle after miracle, arranging the Jews' salvation.

The Jews understood. This wasn't just about rescue from death. It was about reconnection. They realized that even in exile, Hashem was with them. He had never left and never would. Yes, He no longer did open miracles, but the Jews had learned to see through what looked like coincidence and recognize Hashem's hand intimately guiding every detail. As one, the Jews reaccepted the Torah, this time not from fear or awe like at Har Sinai, but from pure love of Hashem.

What is the most miraculous part of the Purim story?



Mitzvos of the Day

MEGILLAH TIME

What? On most *Yomim Tovim*, we say *Hallel* to thank Hashem for the miracles He did. But on Purim, we do something different: we read the *Megillah* because telling the story is our *Hallel*.³⁶ As we read each twist and turn, we uncover Hashem's hidden hand behind every detail.

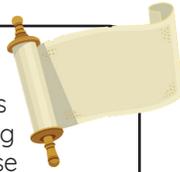
Who? Every man and woman over Bar- or Bas-Mitzvah is obligated to hear the *Megillah*.

When? Both at night and in the morning, just like the Jews davened night and day for their salvation.³⁷

How? From a *kosher Megillah*, written on parchment, like a *Sefer Torah*.³⁸ It also needs to be heard in person - over a microphone or Zoom doesn't count.³⁹ The *Megillah* must be read from the scroll, not by heart, and in the correct order. If you accidentally talk or miss a word, you can still catch up and fulfill the mitzvah.⁴⁰

Brachos of the Megillah Before reading the *Megillah*, the reader makes three *brachos*:⁴¹ *Al Mikra Megillah*, *She'asah Nisim la'Avoseinu* and *Shehechyanu* (Sephardim only say this at night.⁴²) When hearing *Shehechyanu* in the morning, have in mind that it applies to all the day's *mitzvos*.⁴³

Upgrade Your Mitzvah It is best to hear the *Megillah* with ten or more men, to make the miracle more public.⁴⁴



MATANOS LA'EVYONIM

What? On Purim day, there's a special mitzvah to give money to at least two poor people. The *tzedakah* can be given in the form of money or food.⁴⁵ Each poor person should receive enough to buy a simple meal.

Who? Men and women are obligated in this Mitzvah. A poor person who receives *Matanos La'evyonim* should also give *Matanos La'evyonim*, even if it is from the money he/she receives.⁴⁶

How Don't know who qualifies? Give to your local Orthodox Rabbi or a trusted *tzedakah* organization who will distribute the funds on Purim day.

More Tzedakah, More Mercy Purim is a time to give freely. All year long, we're careful with our *tzedakah*, checking if the cause is legitimate. But on Purim, the halacha is different: we give to anyone who asks, no questions asked⁴⁷. This generous spirit reflects the overflowing joy of the day. And something incredible happens in return: When we give without judgment, Hashem gives to us the same way, listening to our *tefillos* with mercy, answering with kindness, even if we might not "deserve" it⁴⁸. This is one reason Purim is such a powerful day for prayer!

Upgrade Your Mitzvah It's better to spend more on this mitzvah than on your Purim Seudah and Mishloach Manos!⁴⁹



MISHTEH: THE PARTY

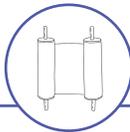
What? It is a mitzvah to have a festive meal on Purim. The meal should include delicious food, including bread,⁵⁰ meat⁵¹ and wine.⁵² Eat, drink, sing, and rejoice! We drink more than usual, so much so that we blur the line between "*blessed is Mordechai*" and "*cursed is Haman*."⁵³ There are many reasons given for this unusual requirement. It's about seeing how everything is from Hashem, the sweet and bitter alike. Another reason is to remind ourselves of the miracles of the Purim story which happened through wine parties, like Vashti's downfall and Esther's rise to royalty, and Haman's execution.⁵⁴ Additionally, when a person drinks, it lowers their guard and brings out parts of a person that are usually hidden inside. That's exactly what happened on Purim. Hashem's love and care for the Jewish people had been hidden during the Persian exile, but through the Purim story, it was all revealed.

We realized that even when Hashem seems hidden, He's still with us the whole time.⁵⁵

How? Eating the meal is pretty straightforward, but there are lots of opinions on how to fulfill the mitzvah of drinking. Some drink more, some just a little. Ask your local Orthodox Rabbi for guidance. But whichever way you go, make sure you don't forget the basics: wash your hands, make a *berachah*, and add *Al Ha'nisim* to your bentching.⁵⁶

Who? Both men and women alike take part in the Purim seudah, though women should not get drunk.

When? While it is also good to eat and be joyous on the night of Purim,⁵⁷ the mitzvah of *mishteh* is to celebrate with a festive meal during the day, after *mincha*. But let the joy spill over! The meal can continue into the night too.⁵⁸



Final Will and Testament

“*Nichnas yayin, yatzah sod,*” When wine enters, the secret comes out.⁵⁹ On Purim, this teaching becomes especially relevant. There is a requirement to drink *ad d’lo yada, until we don’t know* and can’t distinguish between “Blessed is Mordechai” and “Cursed is Haman.” But the goal is not to lose control. It’s to reveal. Alcohol takes down the barriers we usually put up. It reveals the deepest part of a person, shows what he really wants. As Jews, the truth that defines us is our innermost desire: *Retzoneinu la’asos retzoncha*, our will is to do Hashem’s will.⁶⁰ That’s the secret that emerges when the wine enters and the walls come down on Purim.

The *Chasam Sofer* writes that with the miracle of Purim, the Jewish people were transformed and our very *essence* shifted.⁶¹ We didn’t just escape Haman—we redefined who we were. We reaccepted the Torah—but this time, with love. This idea is rooted in the Gemara, which says that at *Matan Torah*, Hashem held Har Sinai over our heads like a barrel and declared: “If you accept the Torah—great. If not—here will be your burial.”⁶² If we were forced into accepting the Torah, maybe we aren’t fully bound by our acceptance. But the Gemara quickly resolved the ‘legal’ loophole by saying that even if that would be true, the Jews reaccepted the Torah in the days of Achashveirosh. In the times of Esther and Mordechai, all the Jews reaccepted the Torah, but

this time, it wasn’t under pressure, awe or fear. It was with deep love and joy. And that moment reshaped the Jewish soul forever. We became fully tied to Hashem and His Torah. With Purim, the essence of every Jew transformed into a pure desire to do Hashem’s will.

The *Rambam* teaches a halacha that gives insight into our psychological or spiritual makeup. Usually, if someone was forced to do something, the action is not considered valid. However, if someone is “forced” to do a mitzvah and ultimately says “I want to,” we consider it as if he did it willingly.⁶³ Why? Because deep down, *every Jew wants to do Hashem’s will*. This Jew is saying the truth - he really does want to do the mitzvah! Any refusal to do a mitzvah is due to an external cause. If we would take that cause away, a Jew would certainly want to do the mitzvah. When those outer layers are peeled away, what’s left is the *ratzon pnimi*, the inner will. On Purim, that will emerges. At Har Sinai, we accepted the Torah out of *awe*, even fear. On Purim, we accepted the Torah *out of love*. We wanted it. No one forced us. That second acceptance changed who we are and what we most deeply want.

This plays out in the halachos of Purim. Every *Yom Tov* is split—half for Hashem and half for us. That means that on *Yom Tov*, Hashem wants us to daven and learn Torah and focus on spiritual pursuits, but also eat a festive meal and enjoy ourselves physically.⁶⁴ However, two days are different: Purim and *Yom Kippur*. They seem like opposites—one seems all feasting and laughter, the other fasting and solemnity. But Purim and *Yom Kippur* are closer than you think. The name of *yom Kipper* can be read as “*Yom k’Pur*” - “a day like Purim.” In reality, Purim and *Yom Kippur* are not an exception to the rule of *chetzyo laHashem v’chetzyo lachem*. They are really one *Yom tov* split into two parts!⁶⁵ Both days achieve the same goal: they reveal our innermost essence by removing the external factors that normally block us from accessing it. On *Yom Kippur*, Hashem removes our *yetzer hara*. On Purim, He removes the pressure of the nations, as the *Megillah* says, “a fear of the Jews fell upon the nations.”⁶⁶ With both barriers lifted, our true will is free to emerge. That’s why drinking plays a special role on Purim. Drinking wine helps reveal our deepest, innermost desire, that quiet truth that we’re always carrying inside: “*Retzoneinu la’asos retzoncha*” - “our will is to do Your will!”

The Gemara teaches that a person’s character is discerned in three ways: b’Koso, b’Kiso u’v’Ka’aso,” his ‘cup’, his ‘wallet’ and his anger.”⁶⁷ What do you think these words are referring to, and why do they say so much about a person?

MISHLOACH MANOS



On Purim day, we send at least two ready-to-eat foods to at least one fellow Jew. We want to make sure everyone has enough food for the Purim *seudah* (meal) and spread friendship and unity. Haman saw that the Jews were divided and disconnected⁶⁸, which weakened Hashem’s protection and made them easier to destroy. So the Sages gave us a powerful mitzvah to help us reconnect: *Mishloach Manos*. It’s especially meaningful to send *Mishloach Manos* to someone you’ve had tension with or to someone new in your neighborhood who might feel alone. After all, Haman didn’t care who we were, he targeted every Jew. This mitzvah reminds us to go to the other extreme and to care for every Jew.⁶⁹

Upgrade Your Mitzvah Some say it’s ideal to send it through a third person, based on the wording “*mishloach manot*”—“sending” gifts.⁷⁰ (This is in contrast the usual rule that it is better to do a mitzva yourself than through a messenger.)

Minhagim

READ IT OUT LOUD!

During the Megillah reading, there are four special pesukim that everyone in shul says out loud together:⁷³ “*Ish Yehudi*” (2:5), “*U’Mordechai yatza*” (8:15), “*LaYehudim...*” (8:16), “*Ki Mordechai...*” (10:3). The reader then repeats each one after the crowd says it. There’s also a custom to read the names of Haman’s ten sons (9:7-9) all in one breath to show how they all fell at once—just like Hashem planned it.⁷⁴

DRESSING UP(SIDE DOWN)

Purim is all about what’s hidden. Unlike the open miracles of Pesach or Chanukah, the Purim miracle was disguised in everyday events.⁷⁵ Wearing costumes reminds us that Hashem was hidden in the story, working behind the scenes the entire time.⁷⁶ It also reflects how, at the time, the Jews only pretended to serve idols, and Hashem only pretended to be ready to destroy them. We dress up to echo that double disguise.⁷⁷ Additionally, costumes help protect the dignity of the poor, who collect charity on Purim without shame.⁷⁸ And they also recall Mordechai himself, dressed in royal robes as the tides changed and Haman’s downfall began.⁷⁹



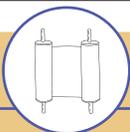
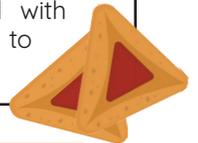
BANG OUT HAMAN!

We use a *gragger* (noisemaker) on Purim to make noise every time Haman’s name is mentioned in the Megillah.⁷¹ This is because there’s a mitzvah in the Torah to “*zachor (Remember) what Amalek did to you...*” and wipe out the memory of Amalek, the nation that attacked us when we left *Mitzrayim*.⁷² We read about this mitzvah from the Torah on *Shabbos Zachor*, the Shabbos before Purim. Haman was a descendant of Amalek, so we make noise when his name is read during the Megillah to symbolically “erase” him.



MEANING OF THE HAMANTASH

The classic *hamantash* is a cookie filled with a *mohn* (poppy seeds) filling. In Yiddish, “*hamantaschen*” means “poppy-seed pockets.” We eat seed-based foods on Purim to remember how Esther kept kosher and survived in the palace by eating seeds.⁸⁰ Additionally, *Tash* in Hebrew means “to weaken.” We eat *Haman-tashen* to celebrate the weakening of Haman and the hope that Hashem will always weaken our enemies.⁸¹ The hidden filling also reminds us that even when miracles aren’t obvious, Hashem is still hidden behind the scenes, guiding everything. Nowadays *hamantashen* are filled with everything from fruit to chocolate to even meat – you name it, it’s a flavor!



Purim-like Miracles Through the Ages

Here are some famous “local Purim” dates, celebrated for their Purim-like miracles:

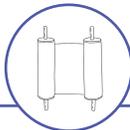
Purim of Rhodes – 1840 (14 Adar): In 1840, the Jews of Rhodes faced a terrifying blood libel. Local Greeks accused them of murdering a child for ritual purposes. Many Jews were imprisoned and tortured as the community feared the worst. But in a miraculous turn of events, the missing child was found alive and well. The Sultan himself issued a public decree declaring the Jews innocent. The decree was signed on the 14th of Adar, Purim day! From then on, the Jews of Rhodes celebrated a “Double Purim” every year, with special tefillos and songs to thank Hashem for saving them.

Stalin’s Death – 1953 (18 Adar 5713): Joseph Stalin y”sh (yemach shemo, may his name be erased), dictator of the Soviet Union, had been preparing mass deportations of Jews under the false “Doctors’

Plot.” He died a few days after Purim, on March 5, 1953. His death halted the plan completely. Many Jews saw this as a modern “Haman” falling on Purim.

Nazi Executions “Purimfest” – October 16, 1946: Ten top Nazi war criminals were hanged at the Nuremberg Trials. One of them, Julius Streicher y”sh, cried out before he was hanged, “Purimfest 1946!” eerily referencing the ten sons of Haman who were also hanged on the same Hebrew date!

The Gulf War Ends: 1991 was a time of real fear in Israel. Saddam Hussein y”sh, the ruler of Iraq, threatened to destroy the Jewish state. Sirens wailed in the middle of the night as people scrambled into sealed rooms, wearing gas masks to protect themselves from chemical attacks. Then, suddenly, on Purim morning, February 28—the 14th of Adar, the attacks suddenly stopped, and the war was over.



The Real Jewish Resistance

Purim isn't just something that happened, it's a blueprint for how Jews survive in exile and respond to threats. Throughout the ages, there have been countless "Hamans": tyrants, decrees, and threats to wipe us out. But we respond the Purim way and turn to Hashem in prayer and teshuvah, and again and again, we see hidden miracles, sudden turnarounds, and unexpected salvations.

In the summer of 1942, as Nazi General Erwin Rommel's army stormed through North Africa, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael faced a terrifying threat. Rommel's next target was British Palestine, and his reputation for unstoppable battlefield brilliance, combined with chilling reports of Nazi atrocities in Europe, sent shockwaves through Eretz Yisrael. By that point, millions of Jews had already been murdered in ghettos, mass shootings, and death camps. The Warsaw Ghetto was sealed. Deportations to Auschwitz and Treblinka were underway. European Jewry was being systematically erased, and now the nightmare seemed ready to engulf the Jews of the Middle East too. SS killing squads had already been dispatched, under the command of Walther Rauff *y"sh*, inventor of the mobile gas van. Their mission: to annihilate the Jewish population of the Middle East once Rommel succeeded. It looked like the end, not just of Jewish communities, but of *Klal Yisrael* itself.

Instead, something miraculous happened.

Like in the Purim story, a powerful enemy with a genocidal plan stood poised to strike. And like in the days of Esther and Mordechai, the Jewish people responded, not with weapons, but with fasting, prayer, and deep *teshuvah*. In *Yerushalayim*, Jews packed the *shuls* day and night, crying out and saying *Tehillim*. The Gerrer Rebbe, Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, led a massive *asifah* in the Churva Shul, calling for unity and repentance. *Tefillos* were held at the *kevarim* of the Ohr Hachaim, Shimon Hatzaddik, and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron. Thousands fasted, even secular Jews, united in their desperation and recognition of their complete dependence on Hashem. Rommel advanced swiftly—until he suddenly didn't. At El Alamein, a remote town in Egypt, British forces unexpectedly halted him.

Rommel's defeat at El Alamein hinged on an astonishing twist of fate that was so bizarre it could

only be explained as the hand of Hashem. In June 1942, the Americans had been warned to change their military code after it was discovered the Nazis were intercepting their communications. But due to a mysterious delay, the outdated code continued to be used for one more week. During that time, Rommel intercepted a U.S. message revealing that the British planned to make their final stand at Mersa Matruh. He mobilized all his resources based on this information. But at the last minute, the British unexpectedly shifted their defense line to El Alamein—a move unknown to Rommel. Rommel ignored his own officers' warnings about British fortifications at El Alamein because his outdated "reliable" intelligence told him otherwise. Expecting minimal resistance at El Alamein, he walked straight into the British army's hands. Ironically, an American failure to fix their security breach in a timely manner is what led to the Nazi's fall! The Nazi plan to invade Palestine collapsed.

What seemed like a chain of military flukes, errors, and delays was a clear act of Divine Providence protecting the Jews of Eretz Yisrael from annihilation. Just like in Shushan, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael had fasted and prayed, and Hashem had turned the tide and saved them. The extermination plan was never carried out. Rommel was later disgraced and died mysteriously after being accused of a conspiracy against Hitler. The Battle of El Alamein is remembered in history as a turning point in World War II. But for us, it is remembered as something more—a modern-day Purim, when a Haman-like enemy wanted to wipe us out and we turned to Hashem in *tefillah*. And just like then, He saved us once again.

What similarities do you see between the salvation of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael and the salvation of the Jews in the Purim story?

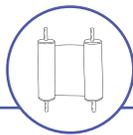


Corny Corner

What do you call a grape that complains a lot?

Wine-y!

Zoniac Zone



Purim...Every Day of the Year

The Purim story looked like a bunch of random events—a queen gets kicked out, a new one takes her place, an evil plot is made, and that plot gets stopped. But when you zoom out, you see a master plan, perfectly timed by Hashem. That’s not just a Purim thing. It’s an everyday thing! Sometimes life feels confusing, unfair, or without purpose. But Purim teaches us to see through the

mask—to see the *hashgachah*, the hidden hand of Hashem guiding everything. (It’s the *mohn* in the *tash!*) And just like Mordechai and Esther, we can respond with tefillah, teshuvah, and trust in Hashem—even when we’re not sure how it’ll all turn out. So don’t leave Purim behind when you take off your costume. Carry its message with you—every day of the year!



Mishloach Manos Mission



Jacob Cohen had once been one of TheZone’s shining stars. His summer at TheZone had lit something inside him. He loved learning, davening, and being surrounded by friends who cared. All he wanted after that summer was to go to yeshiva.

But it didn’t work out the way everyone hoped. His parents, still growing in their own Torah journey, chose a school that was academically stronger—but not the right fit for Jacob. The transition overwhelmed him. He struggled in class, felt like an outsider, and slowly began to shut down.

By the end of the year, Jacob was back in public school. He stopped answering his TorahMate’s calls. TheZone staff kept reaching out, but the connection was fading.

The next summer, his parents said he would not be coming back to camp. “He’s just not in a good place right now,” his mother said. The summer after that—still no. Two years had gone by, and it seemed like Jacob was gone for good.

Until Purim. That day, TheZone counselor, Yosef Kalman Singer, and a few friends were in the Cohen family’s neighborhood. They thought of Jacob—how much potential he had, how much they missed him—and decided to take a chance. They had a beautiful *Mishloach*

Manos package ready, filled with treats and a handwritten note: “Your Oorah family is thinking of you. We miss you.”

They called Jacob, but no one answered. “Let’s go anyway,” Yosef Kalman said. “He needs to know we haven’t forgotten him.” It took time to get there, but they made it. No one answered the door, so they gently placed the package by the entrance and walked away, hoping the message inside would be louder than words.

It was. A few weeks later, TheZone staff was stunned to see Jacob’s name on the summer applications. And not just Jacob—his older brother signed up too! That summer, the Cohen boys were back. And so were the smiles, songs, night activities, warmth, and meaning that only a summer at TheZone could bring. The *Mishloach Manos* hadn’t just delivered candy—it delivered hope and reconnection. Sometimes, one bag at the door is all it takes to bring someone home.



“MEM”ory Aid

A good way to remember the Mitzvos of Purim is to remember they all start with the letter Mem. Megillah, Mishloach Manos, Matanos Le’evyonim, and Mishteh (Another word for Seudah that focuses on the drinking part of the party).



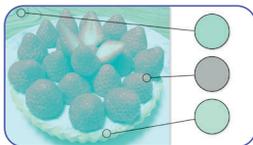
Zoniac Challenge

See Past the Illusion!



Check out this strawberry shortcake. What color are the strawberries?

Looks red, right? Surprise—it's actually made of only gray and greenish pixels! Your brain is just filling in the color based on what it expects to see. This is called color constancy, and it shows how much our surroundings shape what we think is true. Scientists explain that our brains are wired to make fast judgments based on patterns. But sometimes, that shortcut leads us to see things that aren't really there—or miss what is.



Purim was the ultimate optical illusion. Nothing was the way it seemed.

Esther: a Persian queen or a secret Jew on a mission?

Haman: rising to power or heading to his downfall?

13 Adar: a death sentence for the Jews or a day of feasting and joy?

The salvation: random coincidence or Hashem running the show?

All these twists and turns happened over nine years! Only by looking back could the Jews see that every detail was part of Hashem's master plan. That's the real message of Purim! We learned to question what we see and look deeper, revealing Hashem's hidden Hand pulling all the strings with love.



ZONIAK DILEMMA

The Last Mishloach Manos

Rina carefully tied a large bow around the last box of Mishloach Manos and smiled. She had done an outstanding job, she had to admit. The five boxes looked perfect, just as she had dreamed of them this whole monthlong. This year had been tough. She had transferred to a new school and was slowly finding her place. Giving Mishloach Manos felt like the perfect way to take a step closer to being part of the group. She was especially excited to give one to Na'ama, a friendly, outgoing girl she had just finished working on a Megillah project with. They had had so much fun together! Was this the start of a real friendship? Later that afternoon, there was a knock at the door. Rina opened it and gasped. A girl dressed as a witch grinned back at her—it was Zahava, one of the most popular girls in class. She had come all the way from another neighborhood just to bring Rina Mishloach Manos! Rina felt a glow of warmth. Maybe she really was being accepted.

A few hours later, her father dropped her off on Na'ama's block. She held her final Mishloach Manos box tightly. As she walked toward Na'ama's large, elegant home, she passed a small house with a sagging front porch—and paused. Sitting there was Rachel, a girl in her class who mostly kept to herself. She rarely spoke, always sat alone at lunch, and never worked with a study partner. She looked up and smiled shyly. Rina's hand tightened around the box. It was her last one. She had been waiting all month to give it to Na'ama. But now... Rachel was sitting there, alone on Purim. She looked at the box. Then at Rachel. Then at Na'ama's house.

What should she do? What would you do?



Daily Challenge

Spot one "coincidence" that happened today and say, "Hashem, I know this is from You!"



Sources

- 1) Bereishis 3:11
- 2) Devarim 31:18
- 3) Esther 3:7
- 4) Yoma 29a
- 5) Esther Rabbah 3:10
- 6) Chullin 139b
- 7) Pachad Yitachak, Purim, Ma'amar 18
- 8) Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 696:8
- 9) Devarim 31:18
- 10) Rav Yonasan Eibshetz, Yaaros Hadevash; Maharal's introduction to Ohr Chadash on Purim
- 11) Esther Rabbah 7:13
- 12) Ben Yehoyada to Megillah 11a
- 13) Megillah 11b
- 14) גר"א אב ד"ה כשבת
- 15) Esther 1:12, Rashi
- 16) גר"א אט, וביוסף לקח איב
- 17) Gemara Megillah 12b
- 18) Yosef Lekach 2:2
- 19) Bereishis Rabbah 39:12
- 20) Megillah 13a
- 21) רש"י בכב
- 22) רש"י מגילה טז, אסתר רבה טב
- 23) אסתר רבה טא, מדרש תהילים כב
- 24) Gemara Megilla 15b
- 25) דנה פשרא, מדרש תלפיות
- 26) דנא פשרה, גמ' מגילה טז
- 27) Megillah 16a
- 28) גמ' טז, יוסף לקח ז:ט
- 29) רש"י אא ד"ה המולך
- 30) Esther 2:7
- 31) Rashi, Esther 2:7 quoting Megillah 13a
- 32) Esther 2:7
- 33) Megillah 13a
- 34) Megillah 14a
- 35) Megillas Esther 9:20 and Rashi there and 9:29
- 36) Gemara Megillah 14a
- 37) מ"ב תרפז:ג בשם רש"י
- 38) שו"ע תרצא
- 39) אג"מ אה"ח חלק ב:קח, אה"ח חלק ד:קחו. מנח"ש סימן ט
- 40) שו"ע תרצה:ו, ומ"ב שם
- 41) שו"ע תרצב
- 42) שו"ע תרצבא
- 43) מ"ב תרצבא
- 44) שו"ע תרצ"ח
- 45) מ"ב תרצדב
- 46) מ"ב תרצדא
- 47) S.A. O.C. 694:3
- 48) Chidushei Harim
- 49) Rambam, Hilchot Megillah uChanukah 2:17
- 50) יש אומרים שאינה לעכובה: מג"א תרצה:ט, א"ר ז, שע"ת א, כה"ח ג. יש אומרים שהיא לעכובה: מאירי מגלה טו, של"ה ומהרש"ל הובא במג"א תרצה:ט, ערוה"ש ז ועוד הרבה
- 51) מבאור משו"ע תרצו:ז, פסקי מהר"ם מרוטנבורג תרכה, רמב"ם מגילה ב:טו, מ"ב תרצה:כ
- 52) מ"ב תרצה:כ
- 53) Megilla 7b
- 54) Abudraham, Purim
- 55) Eruvin 65b
- 56) Biur Halacha 695, Kol Bo
- 57) רמ"א שו"ע תרצאא
- 58) שו"ע ורמ"א תרצה:א-ב
- 59) Eruvin 65a
- 60) Berachos 17a
- 61) Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim 185
- 62) Shabbos 88a
- 63) Rambam, Hilchos Geirushin 2:20
- 64) Orach Chaim 529:1
- 65) Pachad Yitachak, Purim, Inyan 18
- 66) Esther 8:17
- 67) Eruvin 65a
- 68) Esther 3:8
- 69) שו"ע תרצה:ד
- 70) Esther 9:22
- 71) שו"ע תר"צ סעי' י"ז, ועי' משנה ברורה
- 72) Devarim 25:17-19
- 73) שו"ע תר"צ סעי' י"ז, ועי' משנה ברורה
- 74) שו"ע תר"צ סעי' ט"ו משנה ברורה
- 75) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 696:8.
- 76) Minhagei Kol Aryeh. See Rabbi Moses Hagiz (18th century), Eileh Hamitzvot, p. 293.
- 77) Bnei Yissaschar, vol. 2, in the chapters on Adar.
- 78) Talmud, Megillah 12a
- 79) Rabbi Shlomo Danah, Shalmei Todah Inyanim Nifradim, p. 30
- 80) Beis Yosef on the Tur, Orech Chaim 695 and Rabbi Moshe Isserlis in his gloss to Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim 695:2
- 81) Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun, 50:11, p.126



Dig Deeper Resources for Advanced Learning

- 1) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 686-687, 689-690, 693-697 and Mishna Berura there
- 2) Yalkut Me'am Loez Megillas Esther