

Iran/Persia Purim Script

Passport to Peoplehood

Jews are a multicultural people who live around the world.

Introduction

Despite its air of frivolity, or perhaps because of it, the Jewish holiday of Purim offers the opportunity to explore the challenges we face when it comes to identity inclusion and race.

Both the story of Purim and the rituals of the holiday speak directly to a contemporary sensibility and provide us with some important lessons for living in a diverse multicultural world.

Big Ideas

1. Purim is an ancient holiday that affirms individual and collective Jewish identity.
2. Throughout history there have been many ways that Jews have protected themselves and one another. Esther uses her proximity to power to prevent the destruction of the Jewish community of Shushan.
3. The story of Purim reinforces the value of not being forced to leave parts of our identity at the door. Code-switching is an ancient and modern Jewish concept.

Slide 1: Introduction to Purim

Since ancient times, Jews have had to adapt to different cultural settings and navigate different identities. The Purim story celebrates how this flexibility has contributed to the strength and longevity of the Jewish people.

Slide 2: Exiled from Jerusalem

In 722 BCE, Assyrians conquered the kingdom of Israel. Descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel were sent into exile in Persia. The story of Purim is set in that time and place.

Slide 3: King Achashverosh

Iran/Persia Purim Script

In the Purim story, King Achashveros (Ahasuerus) rules Persia. His kingdom spans Asia and North Africa, from India to Ethiopia. Because Achashverosh's empire is so large, his subjects speak many languages and come from over 120 different provinces.

Slide 4: Queen Esther

King Achashverosh's capital is the city of Shushan. Esther is a Jewish woman who lived in Shushan with her uncle Mordechai, an adviser to the king. When Achashverosh's queen falls out of favor, Achashverosh chooses Esther to be his wife and queen. However, because it is dangerous to be Jewish in Shushan, Queen Esther hides her identity. She does not tell Achashverosh that she is Jewish or even that Mordechai is her uncle.

Slide 5: Esther Hides Her Identity

Esther faces a difficult choice. She comes from an important Jewish family, yet, at first, she hides that she is Jewish and behaves like the other residents of the palace. We all behave differently in different situations, even if we aren't in great danger. Have you ever had to pretend to be something you were not--even if you didn't want to?

Slide 6: Haman Makes Assumptions

Under King Achashverosh's rule, his adviser Haman issues a decree that all Jews will be killed. What Haman doesn't know is that the Queen is Jewish, so this decree could get him in trouble. Haman couldn't tell Queen Esther was Jewish just by looking at her, because there is no one way to look Jewish. We can't tell everything about a person just by looking at them. In fact, when we make assumptions, sometimes we get things very wrong.

Slide 7: Esther Reveals Her Identity

When the safety of the Jewish people is at stake, Esther reveals to King Achashverosh that she, too, is Jewish. This is very brave. The king could have decided to kill Queen Esther along with everyone else. Instead, he chooses to repeal the decree and punish Haman instead. How do you think Esther felt after she had revealed who she really was and Haman was punished?

8. Celebrating Purim Today

Since the time of Esther and Mordechai, Purim has become a major Jewish holiday. The tombs of Esther and her cousin Mordecai are in the city of Hamadan, one of the oldest cities in the world, and thousands of pilgrims visit them every year. At Purim, Jews all over the world dress up, eat special foods, and retell the story of Esther's bravery.

Iran/Persia Purim Script

9. Wearing Costumes

Why do we dress up at Purim? Jews live all over the world, and so our customs are often influenced by our neighbors. In medieval Italy, every year, Catholics held several days of carnivals and masquerades where people dressed up in masks and costumes. These parties took place around the same time as Purim. Eventually, the tradition spread from Italian Jews to other Jewish communities.

10. Masks

The idea of wearing masks may have come from medieval Italy, hundreds of years ago. However, when we wear masks today, we can think about when Esther chose to only show parts of herself and when she chose to show her whole self. Hiding her identity was like wearing a mask. Telling the truth about herself was like taking off a disguise.

11: Purim Foods

Even Purim foods around the world help us to think about hiding. In Italy, people eat tortellini, a pasta that hides a filling inside. Persian Jews eat *ghotab* cookies, filled with almonds and rose water. Among Ashkenazi Jews, hamantaschen hide poppy seeds, jam, and other fillings inside cookie dough. What other hidden foods might you add to the Purim menu?

12. The Megillah

Every year, we retell the story of Purim multiple times, because it is such an important Jewish story. Every time we enter a new situation, we have to decide how much of ourselves to share or conceal.

14. The End

Purim is a festive holiday with much fun and good food. But the rituals of Purim also help us think about what it means to be part of a world in which people judge others based on how they are seen and not for their true selves or character.