

International Day of Study

LEADER'S GUIDE Children Ages 8 to 11

SESSION I – CHILDREN ONLY

(1 hour, 15 minutes)

OBJECTIVES

- Students will re-enact the Purim story.
- Students will discuss who are the heroes of the Purim story? Is God a hero?
- Students will study several texts that address the role of God in the Purim story.
- Students will discuss miracles and whether the Purim story is miraculous.

Activity 1 Purim Wordathon

Leader: *Write on the board or a large sheet of paper: Esther, Mordecai, Ahashverus, Haman*

To get us in the mood for Purim, we will play a word game. See how many words you can get out of the letters of these four names. A word can have any number of letters. *[Depending on how many children are in the session, have some read off their lists, understanding that the older children will probably be able to do better than the younger ones.]*

Activity 2 A Purim Play *(text #1)*

Leader: Probably most of you already know the story of Esther. What is it called in Hebrew? *[Megillat Esther]* Instead of reading it today, we're going to act it out as a play. While we're doing that, think about how to answer these questions: *[write it on a board or chart paper]*

- Who are the heroes of the story?
- What is God's "job" in the story?

Leader: To think about God's "job" in the Purim story, let's first think about what God did in the exodus story. *[solicit answers]* And, what was God's job in the Hanukkah story? *[solicit answers]*

Leader: Even though we can't see God, sometimes we have proof of God being there. Is God in *Megillat Esther*? Do we have any proof?

Divide parts among the students. If there are a lot, have several share roles, i.e. 2 Esthers, 2 Hamans, etc. Caution –don't give male parts only to boys, since there is only one part for girls.

Students perform "A Purim Play."

Leader asks for summary of the story.

Discussion Question: Who are the heroes in the Purim story? What did they do that was heroic?

Possible answers include:

- Vashti, in refusing to attend the king's banquet, was displaced as Queen of Persia.
- Esther, in hiding her identity, lived among strangers who were not Jewish.
- Esther, who went to visit the king to plead for her people, without an invitation. [Anyone approaching the king like this was immediately sentenced to death.]
- Esther, who pleaded for her people to not be massacred, turning a potential slaughter into a victory.
- Mordecai who successfully survived court intrigue, including an attempt on his life by Haman.
- Mordecai, with Esther's help, turned a potential slaughter into a victory.

Discussion Question: Why do you think this book is named *Esther*, and not *Mordecai*?

Leader: Before we continue, it's important you know that *Megillat Esther* is the only book of the entire Bible that does not mention God.

Discussion Question: So, although God's name isn't mentioned, is God a hero in the Purim story?

Leader: When we want to find an answer to a question, where do we look? [*encyclopedia, internet*]

When we want to find an answer to a Jewish question, where do we look? [*Torah, Talmud, Midrash*]
Since you may not be sure of how to answer this, let's look for a possible answer in a Jewish prayer in the *siddur*.

Activity 3 *Al haNissim Prayer* (text #2)

Distribute Text Sheet #2 [instructing students to be careful because it has God's name written on it]. Ask for a volunteer to read the English translation of the Hebrew prayer, Al ha-Nissim, that we read on Purim.

We thank You for the heroism, for the triumphs, and for miraculous deliverance of our ancestors, in other days and in our time.

In the days of Mordecai and Esther, in Shushan, the capital of Persia, the wicked Haman rose up against all Jews and plotted their destruction. In a single day, the thirteenth of Adar, the twelfth month of the year, Haman planned to destroy all Jews, young and old, and to allow everyone to steal their property. You, in great mercy, stopped his plan and did the evil to him that he planned to bring on others. Haman and his sons suffered death on the gallows he had made for Mordecai

Leader: *Ask the following questions*

- What do you think this prayer is about? [*record all responses on chart paper*]
- The first line of the prayer says “We thank You”. Who is the We in the prayer?
- Who is the You in this prayer?
- This prayer we read on Purim says “Thank You for the miracles. What miracles happen in the Purim story?”
- In the words of the prayer, who made the miracles happen?
- What does the “for” mean in “for the miracles”?
- If God is not mentioned in *Megillat Esther*, why do you think this prayer thanks God for the miracles in the story?

Activity 4 Where Is God? (text #3)

Leader: *Ask for a volunteer to read the following statement*

I don't think God is involved in the Purim story. God's name is not even mentioned in the story. I think there is a good reason why God is not involved in the story. God had been involved in helping the Jewish people in their early history. God had freed the slaves from Egypt, had given us the Torah, and had made the small amount of oil last for 8 days to light the Temple menorah. By the time the story of Purim took place, God decided to be less involved and so God did not create miracles like in the past. Maybe God wants us to try to create our own miracles like Esther and Mordecai did in the Purim story.

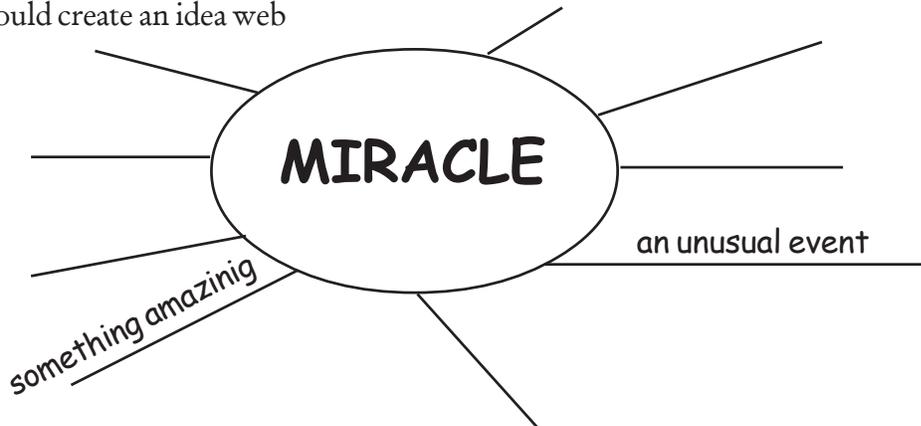
Discussion Questions:

- Who can restate this person's opinion in his or her own words?
- Why does this person think that God was not involved in the Purim story?

Activity 5 Miracles

EXERCISE 1

1. Break students into small groups. Give each group a place to congregate near a wall.
2. Each group should have a piece of paper taped to the wall and a marker.
3. Ask each group to discuss their thoughts and associations with the word “miracle.” They should create an idea web



4. On each line around the circle, students should write their thoughts and/or associations connected to the word “miracle.”
5. When they are finished, instruct them to walk around the room and examine the other groups’ miracle webs.

EXERCISE 2 (text #4)

1. Instruct the children to follow the instructions to fill in the values continuum, *What Do You Think?*
2. After reading each statement, answer accordingly: If you agree with the statement completely, circle “strongly agree”; if you disagree strongly, circle that. *[You might have to do a practice round with them on this exercise: example - Chocolate ice cream is the best.]*
3. Time permitting, discuss their responses to these statements using the following questions as a guide:
 - Which statement was easy to answer? Why?
 - Which statement was hard to answer? Why?
 - Can anyone suggest what the connection is between the first four questions and the last two questions? *[Perhaps God wants us to be responsible for our own actions.]*

Focus in again on the last two lines of the statement:

By the time the story of Purim took place, God decided to be less involved and so God did not create miracles like in the past. Maybe God wants us to try to create our own miracles like Esther and Mordechai did in the Purim story.

Discussion Questions:

- Who thinks that miracles happen because God makes them happen? Examples?
- Who thinks miracles happen because people make them happen? Examples?
- Who thinks that God *and* people can make miracles happen? Examples?

Final Discussion Question:

- We have discussed our beliefs about miracles and now let's refocus on the questions we asked before: Who is the hero in the Purim story? What is God's role in the Purim story?

SESSION II — FAMILIES

(45 minutes)

OBJECTIVES

- Children and parents will take the Purim quiz together.
- Children will share readings and values clarification activity) with their parents.
- Families will create handmade *midrash* on one of the Purim discussion questions.

[**Note to leaders:** *If the Purim play went well in the first session, and the kids want to perform it for their parents, you can substitute that for the first activity.*]

Activity 1 Purim Quiz *(text #5)*

Leader: *Welcome families together. As warm-up exercise, distribute the quizzes and give families a few minutes to fill them it out, working together. When everyone is ready, ask for a different volunteer from each family to answer the questions.*

Activity 2 Teach your parents...

Children show their activity sheets to their parents and discuss with them what they talked about earlier. They can spend a few minutes discussing the topics covered on the activity sheet. Ask if they agree or disagree with the various discussion points.

Activity 3 Handmade *Midrash* *(text #6)*

Leader: Together you will create a handmade *midrash* to illustrates your opinions about one of the questions we have been discussing: Who is the hero (heroes) of the Purim story, or what is the job of God in the Purim story? [see directions for handmade *midrash*, text #6]

Each family unit shares its handmade midrash with the group. Their descriptions should include:

- What do the images represent?
- Why did they choose those colors and shapes?

Leader: *Closing circle with parents and children.*

- Thank everyone for participating.*
- Ask if there are any final comments.*
- Reinforce the idea that God plays many roles in our lives. People have very different and very personal*

feelings about God. The important thing is to keep learning so that we can form our own opinions, but still appreciate those of others.

●*Remind everyone how important it is to hear the megillah read on Purim.*

Answers to Quiz on page 14 (Text 5)

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. twice | 8. ten |
| 2. humorous play | 9. God |
| 3. lots | 10. refused to attend banquet |
| 4. Hallel | 11. niece |
| 5. lighting candles | 12. Adar |
| 6. noisemaker | 13. had court records read to him |
| 7. bow to Haman | 14. <i>hamantaschen</i> |

A PURIM PLAY

Text #1

The Players

M = Mordecai

E = Esther

K = King Ahashverus

N = Narrator

H = Haman

G1 = Guard

G2 = Guard

V = Vashti

N: Ladies and gentlemen. You are about to hear the story of great heroes and wicked villains, of bravery and of cowardice. It is a story that happened long, long ago in the empire of Persia. As we start our story the Persian king Ahashverus is having a banquet with the most important men in his whole kingdom.

Scene 1: Inside Ahashverus' Throne Room

A: Where is she? Where *IS SHE*? Where is that Queen? I want her here. NOW!

(off to side, guards run up to Queen Vashti)

G1: Your Majesty. The King demands that you come to his banquet, immediately!

V: What did you say? Demands? He demands??? You can tell him, "no way." I'm not going to any banquet with a bunch of drunk men!

G1: (*runs back to king*) Your Majesty, if I do say so myself, she was pretty rude about it. Actually, she refuses to come to your banquet.

A: Refuse? She refuses ME? She is history! Out! Gone! Not happening! And... I want a NEW Queen. Bring me a NEW and BETTER queen.

G2: (*runs back to Vashti*) Your Majesty. Your Majesty. The king says...

V: Yeah, what could he possibly say that I would be interested in?

G2: Well, actually, he says "You're fired..."

V: Fired? He can't fire me. I quit! (*storms out*)

G1 & G2: New queen! New queen! Calling a new queen!

Scene 2: Street outside the King's Palace

M: Esther, don't ignore what I'm saying. I'm sure it's true.

E: I don't doubt what you told me, Uncle Mordecai. I just don't see how I fit into this whole thing.

M: Trust me, Esther. Have I ever let you down?

E: Never. But this is different. It isn't about letting me down.

M: Esther, just listen to me while I go over it again. Maybe with a few more details you will see it my way.

M: King Ahashverus is lonely. He's going to have a beauty pageant. All of the most beautiful girls in Persia will be at the palace for it and the king will choose a new queen. Can you imagine the life you could lead in the palace?

E: But I'm not so beautiful. Not enough to be chosen from so many girls.

M: Esther, you are beautiful. You put all the other girls to shame.

E: Ok, Uncle, I'll go, but I'm not convinced. Besides, you don't know the competition out there.

M: (*to audience*) Everything is moving so fast. Esther entered the pageant and now lives in the palace. And the best part is that King Ahashverus has chosen her to be queen. Imagine, my niece, the queen. This puts me in a good place if trouble ever happens as it usually does. In the meantime, I overheard a plot to murder the king. I told Esther, and she told the king. The king was saved. That should put me in his good graces.

Scene 3: Mordecai entering the palace to visit Queen Esther

H: Hey, you! You can't pass by the palace gates without bowing down to me! The king himself made a new rule that everyone must bow down to me.

M: I don't bow down to any person! (as he passes through the gates)

H: (*to the guard*) Who does this guy think he is? Everyone bows down to me!

G: Sir, that is Mordecai. Yesterday he told us that he didn't have to bow because he's Jewish. Is that true?

H: What? What did you say? He doesn't have to bow to me? We'll see about that! Umph!! I wear the king's ring. I have power and I am going to use it against Mordecai and all people like him. We don't need Jewish people here! I am going to kill them all! I am now going to draw lots (Purim) and choose a date to kill the Jews. Here, look what came up! The 13th of Adar will be the day the Jews will all be killed.

Scene 4: Mordecai and Esther sitting together in Esther's room

E: Uncle, don't be angry with yourself. You didn't know that Haman could have the Jews killed when you didn't bow down to him. Something can be done.

M: What? How do you know? Why do you say this?

E: We just have to be smart about this...

M: There is one chance we have. You're the queen and King Ahashverus adores you. Esther, you can get him to listen to you.

E: I can't go to the king by myself. No one can. I'd lose my head. Everyone needs to be invited to see the king.

M: But you're the queen. Can't you ask to see him? You know, King Ahashverus doesn't know that you're Jewish. Haman's killing all the Jews means your life, too. You have to tell him. Our lives depend on it.

E: This won't be easy, but I have no choice. I'll invite the king and Haman to a dinner party. They say the best way to a man's heart is through his stomach !!

Scene 5: Esther's Dinner Party

K: Esther, what a great party. What do you wish? Just ask and you can have whatever it is you want – even half my kingdom! (Esther smiles)

K: (*Haman is snoring*) Haman. Haman! Haman!

H: What? Where? What?

K: Isn't this a great party?

H: Yeah. The best. (*rubbing his eyes*)

E: Well, Your Majesty, I want you and Haman to come again to another party tomorrow night.

H: It would be a great honor, Your Majesty.

E: Thank you for accepting my invitation.

Scene 6: Esther's Second Dinner Party

K: So, here we are again, my dear queen. Another terrific party. How I love dining with you. This camel kugel is the best.

E: It's my pleasure to have you and Haman with me tonight. But, Sire, you look tired. Did you sleep well last night?

K: No, I didn't. But I'm happy now that I didn't sleep.

H: Why is that, Your Majesty?

K: When I couldn't sleep, I had my court records read to me. *(To audience)* Nothing like court records to put you to sleep... I learned that Mordecai had never been thanked for saving me from the vile and filthy plotters who wanted to kill me.

H: Oh, is that why I had to dress Mordecai up in royal robes this morning, parading him around the town on the royal horse?

K: Yes, Haman. I wanted to thank him for saving my life. Now Esther, my dear, please tell me what you want of me.

E: Sire, I'm afraid for my life. I fear that there is a plot to kill me, too.

K: *(jumping up)* What did you say? What do you mean? Why are you going to die?

E: *(pointing at Haman)* This man, your trusted advisor, Haman, has ordered all of my people, all of the Jews, to be killed!. All this because my Uncle Mordecai did not bow down to him, because Jews do not bow down to other people!

K: Oh! I can't believe my faithful assistant, Haman, would deceive me!

E: It's true, Your Majesty. You have been deceived.

H: Your Royal Highness. *(bowing low to the King)* I think the queen has had too much to drink. I would never deceive you.

K: You will pay for this, you vile, filthy beast. You and all of your little vile filthy sons. I order you all to be hanged on the same gallows you made for Mordecai and the Jews.

N: So on the day the Jews were to be killed, they were saved by Esther and Mordecai. And ever since that day, the Jewish people celebrate the feast of Purim in honor of this event.

TEXTS

Text #2

Al haNissim prayer (Siddur)

We thank You for the heroism, for the triumphs, and for miraculous deliverance of our ancestors, in other days and in our time.

In the days of Mordecai and Esther, in Shushan, the capital of Persia, the wicked Haman rose up against all Jews and plotted their destruction.

In a single day, the thirteenth of Adar, the twelfth month of the year, Haman planned to destroy all Jews, young and old, and to allow everyone to steal their property. You, in great mercy, stopped his plan and did the evil to him that he planned to bring on others. Haman and his sons suffered death on the gallows that he made for Mordecai.

Text #3

Is God Involved in the Purim Story?

I don't think God is involved in the Purim story. God's name is not even mentioned in the story. I think there is a good reason why God is not involved in the story. God had been involved in helping the Jewish people in their early history. God had freed the slaves from Egypt, had given us the Torah, and had made the small amount of oil last for eight days to light the Temple menorah. By the time the story of Purim took place, God decided to be less involved and so God did not create miracles like in the past. Maybe God wants us to try to create our own miracles like Esther and Mordechai did in the Purim story.

TEXT #4 WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Below are six statements. Read each statement carefully. Then decide how you feel about the statement. Draw a circle around the word that best describes how you feel.

Children clean their rooms because they want to.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Children clean their rooms because their parents tell them to.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Children go to school because they want to.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Children go to school because the government and their parents tell them to.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Miracles happen because people make them happen.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Miracles happen because God makes them happen.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Text #5
The Purim Quiz
Test your knowledge of *Purim*

1. *How many times and when is the Megillah read aloud on Purim?*
 - Once, in the evening.
 - Once, in the morning
 - Three times, in the evening, in the morning, and in the afternoon.
 - Twice, in the evening and in the morning.
2. *What is a Purim shpiel?*
 - A festive meal eaten on *Purim*.
 - A humorous play performed on *Purim*.
 - A long speech given on *Purim*.
 - A costume or mask worn on *Purim*.
3. *The Hebrew word Purim literally means:*
 - Lots •Paper
 - Masks •Persia
4. *Which of the following prayers is NOT said on Purim?*
 - Al Hanisim* (For These Miracles)
 - Amidah* (the Silent Prayer)
 - Birkat Hamazon* (Grace After Meals)
 - Hallel* (Psalms of Praise)
5. *Which of the following is NOT a Purim custom?*
 - Lighting candles
 - Dressing in costume
 - Gifts of food
 - Drinking alcohol
6. *What is a grogger?*
 - Triangular pastry eaten on *Purim*
 - Gifts to the poor
 - A *Purim* noisemaker
 - Prayer for the *Purim* victims
7. *According to the Purim story, what did Mordecai refuse to do?*
 - Give his horse to Haman
 - Attend a banquet given by Haman
 - Bow to Haman
 - Deliver a letter from Haman
8. *According to the Purim story, how many sons did Haman have?*
 - Two •Ten
 - Seven •Twelve
9. *Which of the following is NOT mentioned in the Megillah:*
 - Merrymaking
 - Fasting and praying
 - God
 - Monarchy
10. *Why was Vashti sent away?*
 - She got drunk.
 - She slapped her maid.
 - She refused to attend the banquet.
 - She was too old.
11. *Esther was Mordecai's:*
 - Sister
 - Daughter
 - Niece
 - Granddaughter
12. *Purim is the month of:*
 - Nissan* •*Tishri*
 - Adar* •*Kislev*
13. *When the king couldn't sleep what did he do?*
 - Had court records read to him.
 - Wrote a letter to his ministers.
 - Played solitaire.
 - Walked around the palace gardens.
14. *What treat do we eat on Purim?*
 - potato *latkes* •*blintzes*
 - hamantaschen* •*matzoh brei*

Handmade Midrash

(30 minutes)

Materials

- 1 sheet of 8 ½ x 11" (or larger) sheets of white construction paper per family
- glue sticks
- colored construction paper
- assorted decorative paper: tissue, magazines, gift wrap (this can be scraps)

In this activity you will create your own handmade *midrash*. What is handmade *midrash*?

The word *midrash* refers to the way the rabbis of long ago looked for meanings in Bible stories that were not necessarily part of the story. For example:

- The Bible doesn't tell us how Adam and Eve *felt* when they were sent out of the Garden of Eden.
- The Bible doesn't tell us how Joseph *felt* when his brothers threw him into the pit and stole his coat of many colors.

It was up to the rabbis to imagine their thoughts and feelings, and then explain them in new stories that they called *midrash*.

Handmade *midrash* is a way of creating our own ideas about stories in the Bible. But rather than speaking or writing about *how* Adam and Eve were sad or terrified, we show it through creative images using colors and shapes to express these feelings.

That's why with handmade *midrash* there is no right or wrong image, no good or bad image, no badly or beautifully created image. But unlike art, where we paint or draw images that approximate a real face or thing, handmade *midrash* uses torn pieces of paper to represent feelings and ideas.

You and your mother/grandmother are going to create your own handmade *midrash* to answer questions about Purim. It only has to have meaning for you. You will explain it to others.

1. Decide which of these questions you want to respond to or answer:

- Who is the hero of the Purim story?
- What is God's job in the Purim story?

2. Choose colored papers and decorative papers and rip them into the shapes that you want to use. As you select and tear the different colors, kinds and shapes of paper, ask yourself:

- What do the shapes mean?
- Why did I use these colors?
- What does this mean to me?

3. Arrange the ripped papers on the white construction paper in a pattern/design/image that answers the question, for you. Glue them down.

A Sample Handmade *Midrash*

Noah was the only righteous man in his generation (Genesis 6:9)

The question I wanted to answer is: What does it mean that Noah was the only righteous man in his generation?

Explanation of my handmade *midrash*

My image has three different parts to it.

- The bottom third is the ark that Noah built.
- The top half of the page is divided into two parts with a dividing line. On the right side is an image of a lone character, Noah, black with a white beard. The only other images on his side are a sea creature that would have survived the flood, and the dove that Noah later sent out of the ark after the rains stopped.
- On the left side of the page are many shapes, the people destroyed by the flood. There are several images on the left side of the ark, trying to climb on board. On the top is a large black cloud, that looks like it is gobbling up one of the images.

I chose black and white for this midrash, because it seemed to represent the world divided into good and evil. The form of Noah is the only one with a human shape, the rest are formless. It is as if God did not think of them as human creatures.

