Introduction to Purim

Purim commemorates the saving of the Jews in the Persian Empire from *Haman*'s plan to wipe them out completely. The story is a classic example of how God intervenes in human history in a hidden manner. The essential element was that the Jews were saved from physical destruction/death (contrast with *Chanuka*, where the Jews were not being threatened with physical death but with the destruction of their religious beliefs and practices).

Halachot

- Giving charity to poor people.
- Giving gifts of ready-to-eat food to friends.

  REASON To promote friendship and a feeling of community.
- Reading the *megila* of Esther at night and the next day.
- Eating a festive meal.
- Giving three half-dollars (or whatever the local unit of coin currency is where you live) to charity in commemoration of the half-*shekel*, which was given by all Jews to the *Temple* when it stood in Jerusalem.

  NOTE This is not actually an observance of *Purim*, but it has become traditional to give the 3 half-dollars on *Purim*.

Widespread Customs

- Dressing up in costumes.
- Making noise during the reading of *Haman*'s (and his wife's) name in the *megila*, in order to wipe out their names.
- Drinking more wine than normal.

  NOTE Jewish women are required to fulfill all of the commandments of the holiday, just as men are, since the women were also saved.

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