

Purim Customs around the World

Germany

On Purim eve, torches containing gunpowder would be ignited. During the Megillah reading, the gunpowder exploded with a deafening noise. In one town in Germany, on the eve of Purim, two candles would be lit in the synagogue. One was called "Haman" and the other "Zeresh" (Haman's wife). The candles were allowed to burn down completely, and were not extinguished. Thus should the haters of Israel be burnt. Doll-shaped cakes, called "Haman", were also prepared. The children would cut off the doll's head and eat it with great glee.



Italy

The youngsters would divide into two camps and throw nuts at each other. The adults rode through the streets of the town on horseback, with cypress branches in their hands. They also placed an effigy of Haman in a high place, and encircled it, to the sound of trumpets.

France

Children used to take smooth stones, write or engrave Haman's name on them, and strike them together during the Megillah reading whenever Haman's name was mentioned, in order to erase it, in compliance with the verse: "I shall surely wipe out the memory of Amalek".



Salonika

"Haman-shaped" cakes were baked on the eve of "Shabbat Zakhor", and placed on the window ledges until the festive Purim meal. During the meal, the cakes were sliced so that participants could fulfill the precept "And they shall devour Haman with open mouth".

Algeria

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Many wax candles were lit for the Purim meal; children were invited to light the candles as on Hanukkah.



Egypt

The young men rode through the Jewish street on horsebacks, camels and asses, in memory of the verse "and they brought him on horseback through the street of the city".

Persia

The children prepared a large effigy of Haman, and filled its clothes with gunpowder. In the middle of the courtyard, they set up a large stick, from which they "hung" Haman. They then threw oil over the effigy and set it alight.



Rhodes

The men also participated in the great tumult, stamping their feet loudly during the Megillah reading.

Tunisia

All the schoolchildren participated in burning an effigy of Haman. The younger children made small "Hamans" out of paper, and the older children made a large "Haman" out of rags, old clothes and straw. All the townspeople gathered by the school. A large bonfire was prepared and everyone stood round it. By turn, all the children went up and threw the "Hamans" they had made into the fire. They then beat the burning "Haman" with special sticks that they had prepared in honor of Purim. After all the "Hamans" had been thrown on the fire, salt and sulfur were added. All the participants stood round the fire, hitting the burning Haman with sticks and shouting "Long live Mordechai, cursed be Haman, blessed be Esther, cursed be Zeresh".



Libya

The youngsters threw an effigy of Haman into the fire and jumped over the fire, competing to see who could jump highest.

In Bukhara

The ground would usually be covered with snow at Purim time. A large snow-Haman was built next to the synagogue. This Haman had a funny-shaped torso, long thick legs, like an elephant's, a large head, eyes of charcoal, a carrot for a nose, and a piece of beetroot for the mouth. A "gold chain" made out of water melon peels was hung over the stomach as a symbol of office, and a broken pot was placed on the head.

After the meal, the whole community gathered round the Haman. A large fire was made around it of wood, rags and paper, and they stood and watched until Haman melted in the heat and disappeared, singing until it was completely melted.



Caucasia

The women prepared blackened wood by the kitchen fire. When the men came home after the Megillah reading, they would ask, what's this, and the women would reply: Haman. The men then said: "burn him", and the wood was immediately thrown into the fire.

Afghanistan

The children drew pictures of Haman on planks or cardboard. During the Megillah reading, the planks were thrown to the ground and trampled on, making a lot of noise. Wooden gloves (a kind of wooden sandals) were held in the hands and clapped together, also making a loud noise.

The synagogue carpets were taken up and the congregants trampled underneath them, in case Haman was hiding there.

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Yemen

Even before Purim, the children of the "Heder" would set up two sticks "lengthwise and crosswise", like a kind of cross, cover them and declare in a loud voice: "Haman the wicked." This is the source of the Yemenite Jewish saying: "In Adar - we put up Haman crosses".

In the Yemenite town of Asaddeh, it was customary to make a large effigy of Haman out of rags. This Haman was placed on a donkey and led by the children from house to house. Each householder gave the children sweetmeats, and beat, spat or even threw dirty water over the Haman on the donkey.

In some places in Yemen, the children used to put a kind of scarecrow in a wooden cart with a horse. Two beads were stuck into its head for eyes, a beard was attached, and it was dressed in colorful tattered clothes, and adorned with a kind of absurd decoration. The children placed the scarecrow on a wooden horse and preceded it, calling out: "thus shall be done to the wicked Haman".


On the eve of Purim, they dragged the cart through the streets shouting: "Haman", and dancing and singing: Here comes Haman Riding a lame horse He burst and exploded, woe to his mother, Here she comes.

The "Haman" was then hung from a high tree in the courtyard of the synagogue, where it was "abused" and taunted. Stones and "arrows" were hurled at it until it was torn to shreds. In some places Haman's cross was left until the end of Purim, and then taken down and burnt. It was covered with kerosene and set alight. The participants departed only when nothing was left but dust and ashes.


(Compiled from: "Purim", a manual edited by the Center for Fostering Jewish Awareness; "Purim", teaching material edited by Y. Frishman; "Hag ve-Moed", Rivka Tzadik; "Festivals and Holidays in Education", Dr. Yehuda Bergman).

CURIOUS FACTS ABOUT PURIM


 **G-d's name isn't even mentioned once in the entire Scroll of Esther.**

 **The longest verse in the Bible is found in the Scroll of Esther (VIII: The original text contains 43 words while the English translation has 90.)**





 **The day on which Purim is celebrated (14th of Adar) can never occur on, Sabbath. The 15th of Adar does occasionally fall on the Sabbath. The Jews of Jerusalem, who celebrate the 15th of Adar then must celebrate a "three day Purim". On the 14th the Megillah is read; on the 15th the blessing "who wrought miracles" is recited; and on the 16th the Seudah (Purim Feast) takes place.**

 **Queen Esther Street is found in the heart of Tel Aviv.**

 **In a speech of Hitler on-January 30, 1944, he said that, if the Nazis went down in defeat, the Jews could celebrate "a second Purim".**

 **The Hadassah organization was founded on Purim in 1912.- Hadassah is another name for Esther (Esther 11:7).**

 **A most curious fact is that Mordecai is said to have descended from King Saul and Haman from Agog, king of the Amalekites, whom Saul defeated. Many years after this battle their great great grandchildren met once again in the court of King Ahasuerus and relived the life and death struggle between Israel and Amalek.**

 **Purim became in many lands the symbolic name for Jewish deliverance and whenever a Jewish community was saved from a horrible fate, from pogrom or exile which a Haman-like ruler tried to impose, the community would celebrate yearly, the day of rescue as a special, local Purim, in the same manner as the universal Jewish Purim.**

 **The Jews of Persia celebrate Purim with great splendor as that is where the story was unfolded. The children of the**

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religious schools spend weeks before Purim studying the Scroll of Esther, and making a life-size figure of Haman to be hanged in effigy on Purim. During the reading of the Scroll the children do not use groggers when Haman's name is mentioned. They shoot off fireworks instead. At night all dress in gay Purim costumes, sing songs, and send gifts to each other.

Greater Miami Bureau of Jewish Education: Purim Around the World