

Adar

Purim: Celebrating the Holiday Through Four Mitzvot

In honor of the month of Adar and the holiday of Purim, this lesson will focus on four of the mitzvot of the holiday in an active, experiential way.

Goals

- > The students will learn about Purim and the mitzvot of the holiday.
- > The students will understand and internalize the joy of the holiday through values such as kindness and giving, enjoyment, and the importance of remembering the miracle.

Sources

- > Rambam (Maimonides): "Hilchot Megillah" in *Mishneh Torah*
- > Verses from Megillat Esther, The Scroll of Esther

Ages



Can be adapted for Grades 1–3



Grades 4–6



Grades 7 and up

Supplies

- > 4 Activity cards (in the supplements)
- > White sheets of paper for drawing
- > A pen or pencil

Background for the Teacher

The holiday of Purim was established to remember the miracle of the Jews being saved from the decree of destruction. The miracle occurred in the time of the Persian Empire (2,350 years ago, approximately 325 BCE) and the story of this miracle is told in the Scroll of Esther (Megillat Esther).

Mutual responsibility is a central theme in the megillah, as seen in how the Jews of Shushan fasted together with Esther before she went to see King Achashverosh. This value of solidarity is also expressed in the customs of the holiday, which are known as the Four Mem's (four customs beginning with the Hebrew letter *Mem*): **mikra megillah** (reading the megillah), **mishloach manot** (sending gifts of food), **matanot l'evyonim** (gifts for the poor), and **mishteh** (a feast).

- > **Mikra megillah** (מִקְרָא מְגִלָּה) is the mitzvah of reading Megillat Esther on the evening of Purim and then again on Purim morning. The story is read from a hand-written scroll made of parchment, usually in the synagogue with the community. This mitzvah helps us to remember the story of Purim and to understand the reason for the joy and celebration.
- > **Mishloach manot** (מִשְׁלוחַן מָנוֹת) is the mitzvah of sending portions of food and drink to friends for the holiday meal, in order to increase feelings of love, unity, and happiness among people. It is customary to send at least two foods to two different people.
- > **Matanot l'evyonim** (מַתָּנוֹת לְאֲבֵיוֹנִים) is the mitzvah of giving charity to poor people, in the form of money or food, to make them happy on the holiday and to allow them to celebrate.
- > **Mishteḥ** (מִשְׁתֵּה) is the mitzvah to make a happy, celebratory meal at which we eat, drink, and give thanks for the great miracle that was done for the Jewish people.

All of these mitzvot express happiness and solidarity and remind us of the importance of the values of unity and mutual assistance for the Jewish people throughout the generations.

Over the years, a custom of dressing up in costumes developed in most communities. In the last century, this custom of dressing up has become a central part of the joy of the holiday, especially for children.

Activities

Opening Hook

Prepare the class to dance together. Play this video of the song [Mahapecha shel Simcha](#) [Happiness Revolution] and encourage the kids do the dance steps shown in the video.

After the dancing, explain to the students that, on Purim, we emphasize our happiness about the miracle of the Jews being saved. We do this through the four mitzvot of the holiday and the custom of wearing costumes.

Main Activity

Part 1: The Story in the Megillah and the Explanation of the Four Mitzvot

 Ask the students, “What miracle happened to the Jews on Purim?”

Briefly tell the story in the megillah. You can do this with the help of this [slideshow](#).

Explain that we express our happiness about this miracle through four different mitzvot, which all begin with the Hebrew letter מ (Mem), which sounds like an M: *mikra megillah*, *mishloach manot*, *matanot l'evyonim*, and *mishteḥ*. Show the students the slide [“Mitzvot Ha-Chag”](#) and ask them to identify which picture matches each mitzvah.

Part 2: Experiential Activity Stations

Divide the class into groups, which will move through four different activity stations. At each station, set up the appropriate activity card from the supplements, along with any necessary supplies.


Station 1 – Mishteḥ: We'll learn about the source of the mitzvah in the verses of the megillah, study a picture, and play a memory game. Note: The two pages necessary for this station should be printed on separate pieces of paper, not two sides of the same sheet of paper.

Station 2 – *Matanot L'Evyonim*: We'll learn about this mitzvah through the words of the Rambam and compose a jingle to encourage people to contribute to those in need. At this station, you will need sheets of paper and markers, colored pencils, or crayons.

Station 3 – *Mishloach Manot*: We'll learn what *mishloach manot* are and design some special *mishloach manot* of our own. At this station, you'll need sheets of paper and markers, colored pencils, or crayons.

Station 4 – *Mikra Megillah*: We'll learn about reading Megillat Esther, the Scroll of Esther. Somebody wrote about the Purim story, but made a few mistakes. At this station, we'll try to find and fix all of the mistakes in that person's story. For this station, print out a copy of the activity card with the story to be corrected for each student. Depending on the age of the students, you may choose to remove the bank of answers from the copies of the story.

After each group has passed through all of the stations, bring the class back together and let the groups present what they've made and done. You can take this opportunity to review the meaning of each mitzvah and the values that it expresses.

 Ask the students summarizing questions:

- > Why do you think that the festive meal (*mishteh*) is considered a source of happiness?
- > Why does helping the needy lead to happiness? Do you agree with the Rambam?
- > Why are we commanded to give *mishloach manot*? Isn't it enough that we have a festive meal in our own home?
- > Purim includes the mitzvah of *mishloach manot* and the mitzvah of *matanot l'evyonim*. Why is it important for everyone – poor people and our friends – to receive gifts on the same day?
- > What part of the story in the megillah makes you happy?



Conclusion

We saw that, on Purim, there are different ways to express our happiness about the miracle that happened in the days of Esther and Mordechai. We took a close look at the four mitzvot of the holiday, which express the values of joy and giving. Invite the students to think about other things that make them happy and about how they can engage in acts of giving in the classroom. *Chag sameach!*



Computer Game

What's Hidden in the Picture?



Invite the students to play a guessing game involving digital pictures. This game has two levels. The students can play as individuals or as teams. In the game, there are slides that represent the mitzvot and customs of the holiday. But, only some of the pictures can be seen. The students will compete against each other as they guess what each picture shows. Try to guess what each of the pictures shows.

Supplement 1 / 1

Station 1:

Mishteh

One of the mitzvot of the holiday is *mishteh*, having a big, festive meal. Read the verses from Megillat Esther and answer the question.

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹרְדֵכַי אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל הַיְהוּדִים...
לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יָמֵי מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה.
(מגילת אסתר ט, כ; כ"ב)

**“And Mordechai wrote these words and sent scrolls to all of the Jews...
to make them days of feasting and happiness”**

Esther 9: 20, 22



We celebrate the holiday of Purim with a festive meal. What do you think you need to have at a meal to make it a festive, holiday meal, as opposed to just a regular meal?

Just for Fun

Here is a picture of a Purim meal from more than 100 years ago.

Study the picture carefully for several minutes, without reading the questions!

Turn over the picture and use your memory to answer the questions.

- > How many grown-ups are there in the picture?
- > How many children are there?
- > How many masks and costumes are there?
- > Are there any animals in the picture?
- > What's on the table?
- > What color clothing is the man on the right wearing?
- > What musical instrument is being played?

Supplement 2

Station 2:

Matanot L'Evyonim

One of the mitzvot of the holiday is matanot l'evyonim, giving money to needy people so that they can buy food for their celebration of the holiday. Read the passage from the Rambam and answer the question.

**It is better for a person to spend more on
matanot l'evyonim
then on his holiday meal or on sending
mishloach manot to his friends,
since there is no joy greater or more beautiful
than the joy of gladdening the hearts of poor people
and orphans and widows and strangers.**

(Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Megillah and Chanukah 2:17)



Do you agree with Rambam that helping the needy brings great happiness? Explain your answer.

Just for Fun



Work together to write and draw an advertisement or prepare a short song with a tune that everyone knows, to encourage everyone to give to poor people and to help make people who need help feel happy. Each member of the group should come up with an original, rhyming sentence that explains why it's important and fun to give to others. Then, combine all of the sentences into one text. You can record it for the school radio station if there is one, or to be broadcast on the school loudspeaker or make it into a colorful poster to be hung up in the school.

Supplement 3


Station 3:

Mishloach Manot

Read the explanation and answer the question.



One of the mitzvot of the holiday is mishloach manot, sending at least two foods to a friend or to anyone with whom we want to be friendly. Mishloach manot can help people who don't have enough to also enjoy the holiday. Mishloach manot need to be given on the actual day of Purim.

-  1. Why do you think this mitzvah needs to be done on the actual day of Purim?
2. What do we feel when give something to a friend?

Just for Fun



Choose **two** of the rules from the list below and design a special mishloach manot of your own in accordance with these rules.

The mishloach manot includes:

- > Only things that are red
- > Only things that are smaller than a matchbox
- > Only things that start with an M
- > Only salty things
- > Only things that dissolve in water
- > Only things that come in wrappers

Supplement 4

Station 4:

Mikra Megillah



One mitzvah of the holiday is to read Megillat Esther. The megillah reminds us of the great miracle of the Jews being saved. The megillah tells about how events were transformed for the better, which strengthens our own feelings of hope and happiness.

Just for Fun

Dan wrote the story told in the megillah, but he made a few mistakes. Find the mistakes, cross them out, and write the correct words above them.

The story took place last year. So, the king of France, whose name was Achashverosh, divorced his wife Elizabeth and chose a new queen, Miriam. Miriam was a young Jewish woman who was smart and beautiful. Her Uncle Avraham instructed her not to tell anyone that she was Dutch.

Achashverosh had an important chef, named Haman, who wanted to kill all the Jews. When the story reached Avraham, he asked Miriam to beg to save her people. Miriam bravely approached the king and invited him and Haman to three parties. Then, the king found out that Haman wanted to kill her and her people.

The king was very happy, kissed Haman, and sent letters to all the nations in order to protect the Jews. The Jews were saved and they established a Hiking Day to remember the miracle of being saved.

Answer Bank: Persia // Esther // Vashti // minister // two // Mordechai // punished // day of feasting and celebration // got angry // a long time ago // Jewish