

Invitation to Judaism – Lesson Plan – Purim

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Readings: Robinson p. 116-118, Telushkin pp. 102-3, 637-639

I. History

- A. Gordis, in his book on *Esther*, identifies Ahashueros with Xerxes of Persia. See also Ezra 4:6.
- B. This would be about 486-465 BCE; after return from Exile, before Alexander the Great conquers the world (about 330 BCE).
- C. Jewish community in Persia is under attack by Viceroy (?) Haman. But through chance, King is married to Jewess (Esther) who reveals Haman's plan to King and saves the Jews. Serious story, but the book itself is very funny. So, too, holiday is joyous, lighthearted, but has important meaning for us today.
- D. "Purim" means "lots" (like casting lots – i.e. game of chance). Story is about seeming randomness of evil decree, and "luck" of redemption.

II. Meaning

- A. Fight against evil (Amalek)
 - 1. Ex. 17:8-15 Amalek attacks Israelites. Deut. 25:17-19 we learn that they attacked from the rear (women and children) when they were tired and hungry – sort of like ancient "terrorists"
 - 2. I Samuel Ch. 15, King Saul is charged with destroying Amalekites, but (v. 8) he spares King Agag, Prophet Samuel kills him (v. 33) [Note: Saul's lineage 9:1-2, from line of Kish a Benjaminite]
 - 3. Esther 3:1 – Haman is an **Agagite**; Esther 2:5 Mordecai's [Esther's uncle] ancestor is Kish the Benjaminite! That's the real reason we make noise when we hear Haman's name when reading Megillah – to "blot out the name of Amalek" – in very concrete manner
 - 4. So, this is eternal battle against Evil! Epic, generational conflict – like Star Wars. [**Also: Elijah Shochet *The Enemy Within***]
- B. It is the story of finding and affirming our faith in a powerful Diaspora community (like America or Persia back then) where tendency is to assimilate (even intermarry? – Esther and Ahashueros)

1. God is “absent” in story. No miracles here (or are there? Does God act through *our* actions?) This looks much more like the life we know today than Exodus.
2. Like Joseph story, too. Court Jew saves the Jewish people by rising to power, influencing the King of powerful Diaspora country (like U.S. or Egypt)
3. Talmud Shabbat 88a – Mt. Sinai we accepted the commandments under duress [“under the mountain” Ex. 19:17]; now in Diaspora with God’s presence hidden, we accept the commandments (relationship/covenant) willingly! We could have assimilated, but didn’t! [*Kimu v’kiblu* Esth. 9:27]

C. Reference to rest of Calendar

1. Note: it is the last holiday of the Jewish calendar. Begins with Exodus (via extraordinary miracles), and ends with Diaspora holiday about redemption through our *own* actions.

2. Chart:

Holiday	Marriage analogy	Nationality analogy
Passover	Betrothal (Song of Songs)	Declaration of Independence
Sukkot	Engagement Period	Fight/sorting out independence
Shavuot	Wedding (10 C’s=Ketub.)	Constitutional Convention
Purim	25 th Ann.–renewal of vows	Ratification of Constitution

3. No Hallel (like Hanukkah and Festivals; either Megillah takes its place or not complete redemption – still under Persian rule, or outside land of Israel and after Israel had been homeland), no kiddush (except a funny one), no prohibition against working, no sense of sacred time

III. Observance

- A. **Read the Megillah** (Scroll [book] of Esther) evening and again in the morning; make noise with grogger when Haman’s name is mentioned
- B. ***Mishloah Manot*** –gifts to friends, including *hamentashen* (cookies in 3-cornered shape, filled with fruit or poppy seeds), at least 2 types of food to at least 2 people, Esther 9:22
- C. ***Matanot L’evyonim*** – gifts to the poor, Esther 9:22
- D. ***Se’udah*** – Festive meal