

CHAG

 CONGREGATION
NEVEH SHALOM

PURIM

5781/2021

SAME'ACH

Dear Friends,

The celebration of Purim completes an entire year of Jewish holidays that we have celebrated together primarily online. It feels particularly poignant to be marking this moment of Jewish thriving amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purim is a holiday marked by merriment, giving to others, costumes and fun; all of which are elevated by the festive feel of being in community. While we know we cannot be physically together this year, we hope that our ability to celebrate at our drive-through carnival and via Zoom brings joy and fulfillment.

This booklet is meant to serve as a guide to the celebration of Purim at this moment in time as we mark Vashti's boldness, Esther's bravery, Mordechai's defiance, Achashverosh's leadership, and Haman's failure.

We look forward to seeing you!

-Clergy, leadership and staff of Neveh Shalom

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Young Family Purim Fun (Ages 0-6)

Thursday, February 25, 6:00pm

Young families, join Rabbi Eve and Morah Leah for some special Purim joy.

To find link, click here:

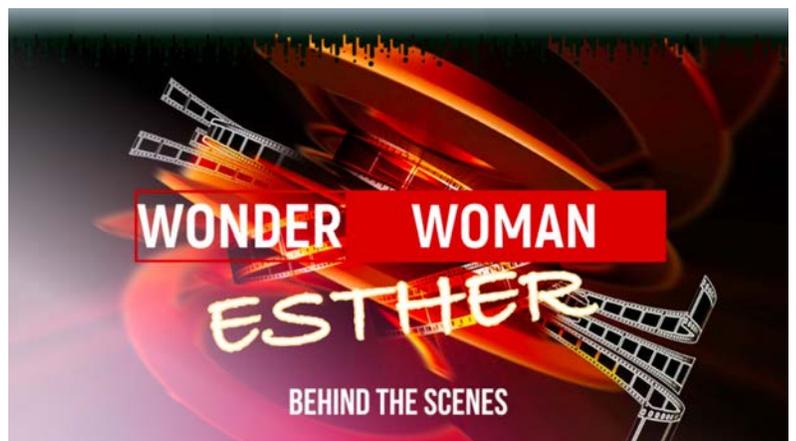
nevehshalom.org/purim5781



All Community Ma'ariv Service, Megillah Reading, and Purim Spiel : *Behind the Scenes with Wonder Woman Esther*

Thursday, February 25, 6:30pm

Join together as a community as we celebrate Purim together with our evening service, reading the story in Hebrew from the traditional scroll, and entertaining with songs and play. This year's Purim Spiel is an imaginative "Behind the Scenes" look at our very own Wonder Woman, Queen Esther. A few of our Neveh Shalom teens conduct a fun and creative interview with Queen Esther (Gal Gadot) and King Achashverosh (Jason Momoa). Costumes welcomed, and treats encouraged! Don't miss it!



To find link, click here:
nevehshalom.org/purim5781

The 4 Mitzvot of Purim:

Megillah: On Purim, the Megillah is read aloud in synagogues all over the world – and this is one time when no one is discouraged from making noise during the service! In fact, listeners shake their groggers (Yiddish for “noisemakers”) every time they hear the name of the villain of the story, Haman. This tradition is passed down **L’dor v’dor**, from generation to generation, as a means of remembering the lessons learned from persecution and celebrating the fact that our **Kehillah**, our community, has continued to thrive through today. You can find different English interpretations of the *megillah* online and be sure to join our community for the reading on Purim!

Mishlo’ach Manot: The second mitzvah is sending gifts, or *mishlo’ach manot* which is Hebrew for “sending food,” usually in the form of Purim gift baskets. Gifts of food to friends and colleagues ensure that everyone has the means to be happy, further foiling the evil plans of Haman. Sending gifts to our friends is a beautiful way to celebrate **K’lal**, the value of inclusivity, making sure every person feels the joy of Purim and of being included in the **Kehillah**, community. Make sure to sign up for the carnival, and come get your own treat from our community!

Se’udat Purim: In addition to the *purim spiel*, (the playful part of Purim), which usually includes telling the story, a costume parade, and baking or eating hamantaschen, many families also enjoy *the Se’udah*, or the Purim feast. This commandment is to “eat, drink, and be merry.” This *mitzvah* is the hardest to maintain this year because it is so difficult to safely gather in **Kehillah** (community). As a people we have had to constantly grow and innovate, create **chid-dush**, or new ways of celebrating. We invite you to think of one creative way you can have a *Purim* feast this year and share it with us!

Matanot L’evyonim: Directly giving to those experiencing poverty, *matanot l’evyonim*, is the fourth mitzvah. Giving to others, especially on Purim, ensures that everyone in our **kehillah** (community) has the means to celebrate during the holiday and honors Esther and Mordechai’s legacy of saving the Jewish people. Fulfilling the mitzvah of *matanot l’evyonim* can be as simple as dropping coins into a tzedakah box or making donations of food or clothing to a local pantry or shelter. This year, bring gently used or new pots and pans to CNS when you come to the drive-through Purim carnival for donation to Community Warehouse!

**Summaries and
reflection questions
of the ten chapters of
Megillat Esther,
*the Book of Esther***



Chapter 1

The Book of Esther opens with a description of an enormous 180-day party thrown by King Achashverosh in his 3rd year as king of the Persian Empire, ruling over 127 provinces. As the days of feasting end, he summons his wife, Vashti, to show off her beauty (by appearing wearing only her crown!). But Vashti refuses to come and the king, following his ministers' advice, has her banished.

*Vashti is often described as disobeying the King. However, other commentators note that Vashti is also standing up for herself, her values and her self-respect. This was an innovation, or a **chidush**, for this time. What **chidush**, (innovative ritual or solution) have you developed in your life?*

Chapter 2

As time passes, King Achashverosh realizes the consequences of his actions and misses his queen. The deed, however, is done. The ministers propose that he find a new queen via an elaborate beauty contest of all the kingdom's beautiful maidens. From all over the 127 provinces, beautiful women are brought to the palace for the king to select his new queen.

In Shushan, the capital city, lives a beautiful Jewess named Esther (also called Hadassah). She is an orphan who was raised by her uncle, Mordechai, one of the leaders of the Jewish people in exile. When they come to take her to the palace, Mordechai insightfully instructs her not to reveal that she is a Jewess or who her family is. After a 12-month process, Esther is deemed the fairest of them all. "The king loved Esther more than all the women... so he placed the royal crown on her head, and made her queen in place of Vashti" (Esther 2:17).

While Mordechai does not reveal his relationship to the new queen, he frequents the palace gates to hear news of Esther's well-being. One day he overhears two men plotting to murder the king and he sends word to Esther, who reveals the plot to the king in the name of Mordechai. The plotters are caught and executed, and Mordechai's name and deed are written in the king's Book of Chronicles.

*Mordechai stands up for **kehillah** (community), when he saves the King's life. What is the most powerful aspect of **kehillah** you've experienced this year? In your life?*

Chapter 3

In the meantime, Achashverosh appoints Haman the Agagite (an Amalekite) as Prime Minister and issues a decree that all should bow to him. Mordechai refuses to bow down before Haman. Mordechai's refusal infuriates Haman. Already driven by his family's historic hatred of the Jewish people, Haman goes to King Achashverosh (with 10,000 silver pieces) and asks for permission to destroy the Jews. He presents the issue to the king as a matter of loyalty, saying "There is a certain people, scattered and spread out among the peoples in all the states of your kingdom, whose laws are different from other peoples and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not worth it for the king to leave them alive" (Esther 3:8). The king agrees and issues an edict to all 127 provinces saying that on the 13th of Adar, the Jews in all the provinces are to be exterminated and their property kept as plunder.

*Haman exhibits xenophobia: a prejudice against those who are different from him. The opposite of xenophobia, in certain ways, is the value of **k'lal** (inclusivity). In what ways have you experienced the Jewish community acting inclusive and in what ways have you experienced it acting xenophobic? Have you felt included in community this year?*

Chapter 4

Upon hearing this vile edict, Mordechai dons sackcloth and ashes. He instantly sends word to Esther that she must go to the king and stop this horrible decree from becoming reality. Esther, however, is afraid to approach the king. It is known that anyone who approaches the king without being summoned faces the chance of death. But Mordechai sees the bigger picture and tells Esther “Do not imagine that [you can] save yourself in the king’s palace from the fate of all the Jews. For if you indeed keep silent at this time, relief and salvation will come to the Jews from another source, and you and your father’s household will perish. And who knows that but for a time like this you are in a royal position?!” (Esther 4:13-14) Summoning all her courage, Esther agrees to go to the king, but she first asks Mordechai to request all the Jews to fast for three days and repent for their own sins while praying for the heavenly decree against them to be reversed.

When Mordechai tells Esther that she will suffer the fate of all Jews, and that she must use her power to speak up and save her people, he was teaching her an important principle, that all Jewish people are responsible for one another. His words helped her see herself in a new light. This is an example of Talmud Torah – transformative learning. When have you learned something that changed your way of being in the world?

Chapter 5

With great trepidation and dressed in her most beautiful robes, Esther approaches King Achashverosh. Seeing the beautiful queen, the king holds out his golden scepter, a sign that she is welcome in his court, and offers to grant her any request. Modestly, Esther requests only that Achashverosh and his Prime Minister Haman join her for a private feast. Pleased at her minimal request, which shows him that she was a wise choice as queen, the King agrees. Haman is summoned and the three dine together. At the end of the feast, the king once again tells her to ask whatever she would of him and she only requests that the king and Haman join her for a second feast on the following day.

After the private feast, Haman sets out for his home well pleased with the great favor shown to him by the queen. On his way, however, he passes Mordechai, who once again refuses to bow, reigniting Haman's fury. By the time Haman reaches his home, he is crazed with anger at Mordechai's refusal to bow – after all, he is Haman, second to the king and so beloved even by the queen! He tells his wife, Zeresh, and his gathered friends “Even Queen Esther did not bring anyone else with the king except me, to the feast she prepared, and tomorrow as well, I am invited to her feast with the king. All this is worth nothing to me, every time I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate!” (Esther 5:12-13). Zeresh, who equals her husband in wickedness, suggests that Haman immediately build some gallows on which to hang Mordechai personally. This Haman does, with the assistance of his ten sons.

*Haman's plan is to end Judaism for all time. When Mordechai refuses to bow down, he is upholding his tradition and the Jewish people. One might wonder, what would be the harm in bowing down, especially if it saves his life? In every generation Jews are faced with questions of how to preserve our heritage and traditions. Mordechai's actions, like our own, are the sacred choice to transmit Jewish living from generation to generation, **I'dor v'dor**. In your opinion, who is a modern example of Mordechai? What Jewish commandment, action or value is most important to you to preserve and pass down?*

Chapter 6

That night, King Achashverosh is unable to sleep. After tossing and turning, he calls for his ministers to bring him the Book of Chronicles and read it to him. The section is read that recalls the great service rendered to him by Mordechai for uncovering the plot on the king's life and Achashverosh realizes that he has never rewarded Mordechai. Just as the king is deciding how to best reward a man who has saved his life, Haman enters. He has come, after building the gallows, to ask the king for permission to hang Mordechai. Before he can speak, however, the king asks his opinion on how the king can best honor a most loyal subject. Thinking that the king is referring to him, Haman suggests that the king dress the subject in the king's finest robes and have him led around town on the king's steed. Pleased with the suggestion, he orders Haman to dress Mordechai in the finest royal robes and to lead him around Shushan on his best stallion.

*King Achashverosh feels the need to honor others for their service to the **kehillah** (the community). Why is showing honor or celebrating others an important aspect of building **kehillah**?*

Chapter 7

After returning home feeling thoroughly humiliated, Haman is summoned to the palace to dine with the King and Queen. As the banquet ends, Esther tells the king that someone seeks her death and the death of her people. Outraged, the king demands to know who this man is. Esther reveals her identity as a Jew and identifies Haman as the arch-enemy. Overcome by anger, the king went out to “the garden orchard, while Haman stood up to plead for his life from Queen Esther...The king then returned from the garden orchard to the wine feast chamber, [just as] Haman was falling on the couch on which Esther was lying.” The king said, “Does he also intend to assault the queen in my presence here in the palace?!” (Esther 7:7-8) The king will not be placated, and Haman is hanged from the very gallows that he built for Mordechai.

*In a literary twist, Achashverosh hangs Haman from the gallows that Haman had built for Mordechai. Although we celebrate that the Jews survived yet another episode of attempted genocide, we are also taught not to celebrate the downfall of our enemies. This is a **chidush** (innovative idea) that Judaism brings to theology. How might we teach a response other than hate or violence to our next generation?*

Chapter 8

Achashverosh now sees the damage that his late Prime Minister has caused and appoints Mordechai as his new Prime Minister. The very first edict that Mordechai and Esther issue grants the Jews the right to defend themselves against those who try to harm them.

*It is important that the Jewish people are able to defend themselves to ensure the transfer of tradition **l'dor v'dor** (from generation to generation). What is a family story from your history or present about survival as a prerequisite for celebration and preserving traditions?*

Chapter 9

When the 13th of Adar arrives, the Jews successfully defeat their enemies throughout the provinces, although in Shushan the battle continues throughout the day of the 14th of Adar. The ten sons of Haman are killed, and their bodies are hanged publicly. When their enemies are vanquished, the Jews celebrate their survival with great feasts, thus the 14th (outside of Shushan) and the 15th are the days for celebrating Purim.

Mordechai, as the spiritual leader of the Jewish people, and Esther, declare that henceforth the 14th of Adar shall be a day of feasting in all the outlying provinces, but the 15th shall be a day of feasting in the city of Shushan, for these were the days on which the threat was abated. (The Great Sages amended this to give honor to the city of Jerusalem so that all cities which had walls at the time Joshua conquered the land of Canaan were given the same status as Shushan. Thus, in Jerusalem, Jews celebrate Shushan Purim on the 15th.) Mordechai also codified the practices of the holiday of Purim: the reading of the Megillah, the festive meal, gifts of food and charity to the poor.

*Chapter 9 reminds us that celebrations of **kehillah** (community) should provide an opportunity to care for one another as well. In what ways have you felt cared for by **kehillah** (community) this year? How have you cared for others?*

Chapter 10

“King Achashverosh then imposed a tax on the mainland and on the sea islands. And the entire account of his power and might, and the details of Mordechai’s greatness which the king promoted, are indeed recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia. For Mordechai, the Jew was King Achashverosh’s viceroy, the leader of the Jews, and accepted by most of his brethren, promoting his people’s welfare and preaching peace for all their descendants” (Esther 10).

*In reading the Book of Esther this year, is there a piece of **Talmud Torah**, something you’ve learned that has transformed your thinking?*



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