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Esther Holds a Lesson in Combatting Antisemitism by Anthony Arnello



Purim at first glance appears like a version of Halloween, New Years, and the County Fair all combined, but there's much more to it than that. Purim celebrates the saving of the Jews by Queen Esther. For those who don't know, here's a paired down version of the Megillah: Esther was not born to royalty, but was instead chosen out of many to become King Ahasuerus of Persia's new wife.

At first, since she does not appear Jewish, she does not make her heritage known. However, it's discovered that the king's advisor, Haman, is hatching a plan to kill the Jews, so her uncle Mordecai urges her to reveal her true identity. Amidst fear of death, she tells the King of her Jewish background and urges him to stop Haman. King Ahasuerus condemns Haman, his plan is foiled, and the Jews are saved.

Purim is about celebrating the courage and the heroism exemplified by Esther. It's about the "masks" we all wear each day to get through life, but it is also about knowing when it's necessary to peel back a façade to do what is right. The rabbis teach us that Purim and Yom Kippur are "two sides of a coin." Without diving into the theological and Hebrew reasonings for this teaching, the takeaway is that Purim is important!

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[Hosting Your First Passover Seder](#)



Passover, or Pesach, is a significant holiday in our calendar that celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. As a convert to Judaism, I was eager to celebrate it for the first time. Hosting a Seder, which is the traditional meal and ritual held during Passover, is a great way to feel connected to Judaism, but it can be intimidating to host one for the first time. Here are some tips to ease your anxiety and help you host your very first Seder from someone who's been there:

1. Remember there is no perfect Jew. Despite what you may think, even the most seasoned hosts make mistakes. If you mispronounce some Hebrew or forget to hide the Afikomen, it's okay.
2. Pick the right Haggadah. The Haggadah is the book that outlines the Seder service. Whether it's a traditional or modern version, make sure you study yours and print copies for all of your guests.
3. Plan for the strictest observance of Kosher for Passover rules in your guestlist. Most traditions don't allow grains (except in Matzah), but many also avoid legumes, corn, and rice. Check with your guests to see what's off the table.
4. Organize your Seder plate. The basic elements you need are Karpas (a green vegetable eg: parsley), Haroset (a sweet fruit and nut mixture), Maror (a bitter herb, eg: horseradish), Hazeret (another bitter herb, eg: romaine lettuce), Zerora (a shank bone), Beitzah (egg). Use a roasted beet and potato for the last two for a vegetarian and/or vegan option.
5. Ask a friend for help. The best part about converting to Judaism is the community that is willing and eager to help. If you did/are doing your conversion with SCCBD, we can match you with a conversion mentor.

Passover is a beautiful and powerful time in the Jewish calendar. While it may seem stressful to host a Seder, it's a huge step in your Jewish journey. Don't be afraid to ask for help, and don't be afraid to be imperfect.

DIY Purim Gragger



Clicking this video will take you to YouTube

The main religious service for Purim is the reading of the Megillah. Also known as the Book of Esther, this reading tells the story of Esther saving the Jews from genocide at the hand of Haman. During the reading, you're expected to make loud noises whenever Haman's name is mentioned, accompanied by noise makers called groggers. Here's a quick DIY tutorial to make groggers with your children (or for yourself).

Supplies

1. Paper plates
2. Popsicle sticks
3. Hot glue gun
4. Dry beans
5. Markers for decorating

Instructions

1. Glue two paper plates together, leaving an opening on one side
2. Pour some dried beans through the opening and seal it up
3. Glue a popsicle stick to one side as a handle (It should look like a big lollipop)
4. Decorate

Purim is a fun holiday for adults and kids alike, but it's also a celebration of our people triumphing over oppression. Remember that when you're "stamping out" the name of Haman.

**Interview with a Mentee: Ana
Isabel**



Ana Isabel...

was born and raised in Guatemala City and moved to California in 2011. Since then she has started working as a Court Certified Interpreter in Los Angeles. She converted to Judaism in September of 2022, and as an alum of the SCCBD, she was paired with a conversion mentor to serve as a friend and guide as she entered the Jewish community.

How did you become interested in converting to Judaism?

Everything aligned for my conversion. Since I moved to Los Angeles, I started meeting new friends and most of them were Jewish. I became more familiar with Judaism through them because we were sharing holidays and Jewish traditions together; then I met my Jewish boyfriend and his family. I started having more of a Jewish life.

How has the conversion mentor program helped you on your journey?

It has been a great experience! Since I met my mentor I didn't feel "alone" on my conversion path. My mentor also chose Judaism, so she understands me very well. My mentor is a professional, smart and a world traveler! Besides all her support and teachings, she inspires and pushes me to go outside of my comfort zone and dare to try new Jewish things. She is Awesome!

What's one aspect of Judaism that has really resonated with you so far?

Being part of the chosen people.

What aspect of Judaism has been the most difficult for you to adopt or adjust to?

Different holidays throughout the year.

Do you have any advice for people that are interested in conversion?

I would say, read about Judaism, research on your own, and talk to different Rabbis, they are a great source of information. You can have a clear idea about history and what it means to be a Jew and once you feel it within your heart, when it resonates with you... take action and start your conversion journey. And most importantly open your heart to a new chapter in your life!

Hamantaschen is a favorite treat for Purim. They are delicious triangular pastries to remind us of Haman's hat, with filled with jam, poppy seed paste, or another sweet, or sometimes savory, filling.

This recipe opts for the more common choice with a filling of fruit preserves, but once you get the dough part right, you can get creative with what you put inside. My grandchildren prefer chocolate chips as a filling.

Prep Time: 15 min

Cook Time: 15 min

Total Time: 30 min

Ingredients

- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 2 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 5 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 cup fruit preserves, any flavor



Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Lightly grease cookie sheets.
2. Combine eggs and sugar in a large bowl; beat with an electric mixer until smooth and creamy. Stir in oil, orange juice, and vanilla. Combine flour and baking powder; stir into batter to form a stiff dough, adding more flour as needed.
3. Turn dough out in a lightly floured surface and roll out into a 1/2-inch thickness. Cut into circles using a cookie cutter or the rim of a drinking glass; place 2 inches apart onto the prepared cookie sheets. Spoon about 1 to 2 teaspoons of preserves into the center of each cookie. Pinch edges to form three corners.
4. Bake in the preheated oven until lightly browned, 12 to 15 minutes. Cool on the cookie sheets for 1 minute; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

**Converts: Faces of the Jewish
Future**

March 12th in North Hollywood

You are invited to Rabbi Jonathan



Bernhard's home to learn more about Converts and how they are a significant part of our Jewish future.

Learn with Rabbi Bernhard; meet Toyasha Sebbag, a former candidate and current Conversion Mentor, and enjoy good food.

RSVP



We Are Here For You

We have staff resources to help if you are in need of a listening ear or additional support. Please [email](#) or call if you need our help.

A Bet Din that Welcomes All People Interested in Converting to Judaism



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