

The Maggid Mar 2026

Congregation Etz Chaim

P O Box 3752
Merced CA 95344



With costumes, spiels and lots of drinking, Purim is one of Judaism's most raucous holidays. We all know about beautiful Esther thwarting evil Haman's plans, the custom of getting drunk and what Hamantaschen are...

Below are a few less known (somewhat speculative) things about this holiday from the My Jewish Learning website:

1. Esther followed a vegetarian diet.

According to midrash, while Queen Esther lived in the court of King Ahasuerus, she followed a vegetarian diet consisting largely of legumes so that she would not break the laws of kashrut (dietary laws). For this reason, there is a tradition of eating beans and peas on Purim.

2. You're supposed to find a go-between to deliver your mishloach manot, the gift baskets traditionally exchanged with friends and family on Purim.

The verse in the Book of Esther about mishloach manot stipulates that we should *send gifts to one another*, not just give gifts to one another. Therefore, it is better to send packets of goodies to friends via a messenger, instead of just giving them outright. Anyone can act as the messenger, even a random person you meet just outside your friend's door.

3. The Book of Esther is one of just two biblical books that do not include God's name.

The other is Song of Songs. The Book of Esther also make no reference to the Temple, to prayer, or to Jewish practices such as *kashrut* [keeping kosher].

4. Hamantaschen might have been designed to symbolize Haman's hat — or his ears or pockets... Or something a little more womanly.

Some say these cookies represent Haman's ears (the Hebrew name for them, *oznei Haman*, means just this), and refer to a custom of cutting off a criminal's ears before his execution. Some say that the three corners represent the three patriarchs whose power weakened Haman and gave strength to Esther to save the Jews. Some say that because the German word *tasche* means "pouch" or "pocket," the cookies could signify Haman's pockets and the money he offered the king for permission to kill the Jews. In recent years, some feminists have suggested the cookies, which after all, are not dissimilar in appearance to female reproductive parts, were meant to be fertility symbols.

5. In 1945, a group of American GI's held belated Purim services inside Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels' confiscated castle.

According to Jewish Telegraphic Agency's coverage at the time, the Jewish chaplain "carefully arranged the candles over a swastika-bedecked bookcase in Goebbels' main dining room," and Jewish soldiers explained to their Christian comrades in attendance "about Haman and why it was so fitting that Purim services should be held in a castle belonging to Goebbels."

6. The Book of Esther, which many scholars theorize is fictional, may be an adaptation of a Babylonian story.

Some scholars argue that the Book of Esther adapted stories about the pagan gods — Marduk *becoming Mordecai* and Ishtar *transformed to Esther* — to reflect the realities of its own Jewish authors in exile

7. The Jewish calendar has a periodic leap year with two months of Adar, but only one Purim, which falls during the second Adar).

To ensure that the holidays remain in their mandated seasons, the Jewish calendar was ingeniously adjusted to accommodate the 11-day difference between the lunar and solar years. In the 4th century C.E., Hillel scheduled an extra month at the end of the biblical year, as necessary. The biblical year begins in spring with Nissan (Exodus 12:1-2) and ends with Adar. Hillel, in conjunction with the Sanhedrin (Jewish supreme court) chose to repeat Adar (Adar I and Adar II) every 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th year over a 19-year period. And Purim is celebrated during the last month of the year.

8. Purim is celebrated one day later inside walled cities than it is everywhere else.

The Book of Esther differentiates between Jews who lived and fought their enemies for two days within the walled, capital city of Shushan and those who lived in unwalled towns, where only one day was needed to subdue the enemy. The Rabbis determined we should make that same distinction when memorializing the event. Accordingly, if a person lives in a city that has been walled since the days of Joshua (circa 1250 B.C.E.), as Shushan was, Purim is celebrated on the fifteenth of the month of Adar, a day referred to as "Shushan Purim."

9. Just after the 1991 Gulf War, Israel's most popular Purim costume was of the Israel Defense Forces spokesman whose face appeared on TV every time a Scud missile alert sounded — and people snacked on "Saddamtaschen" instead of hamantaschen.

Spokesman Nachman Shai's "reassuring tones earned him the sobriquet 'National Valium,'" while Israel was being pelted with Iraqi missiles, according to Jewish Telegraphic Agency's coverage at the time. That year, while many costume-makers avoided the temptation to make Saddam Hussein costumes (it would be like a Hitler costume, one vendor told JTA), bakeries hawked "Saddamtaschen," which "look and taste exactly like Hamantaschen."

President's Message from Belinda Braunstein

One of my favorite things about Merced is the multitude of trees with white and pink flowers all over town at this time of year: first lovely almond, then the pom-poms of ornamental pear, and now the happy pink of ornamental plum trees along major roads and in front of houses. A week ago, a few carloads of Etz Chaim members enjoyed the almond orchards near John Kirihara's childhood home in Livingston with a caravanning car tour of orchards after a filling breakfast at Granny's Pantry in Atwater.

That little adventure just barely out of Merced was the first of three small congregational adventures out of town. The next will be a Purim road trip to Temple Israel in Stockton for "Purim Royal" – a Las Vegas-style afternoon retelling of the Megillah on Saturday, March 7th. We'll be carpooling from the Chavurah House to support those who don't wish to drive. More info is on the flyer in this Maggid.

Because this group likes both food and travel, the following weekend, March 14th, we are carpooling again – this time into the hills, to Hornitos! The destination is their Masonic lodge's corned beef and cabbage dinner fundraiser, 5-7pm. Etz Chaim member and Vice President Rich Kleitman suggested this, and board thought it would be fun. More info about this is also further in this issue of the Maggid.

We're wrapping up March with our March 20th potluck followed by a lay-led service at the Chavurah House. Keeping with the apparent food theme of the month, please start thinking about this year's Community Seder for Passover, which will be on Saturday, April 4, at the Chavurah House. Add this to your calendar now respond to the RSVP form in this Maggid. RSVPs are required!

Wow, I'm full just thinking about the month ahead.

B'shalom,
Belinda

Scenes from Feb. 21 brunch at Granny's Pantry followed by car touring of almond orchards and a visit to John's childhood home



Activities

Please plan to join us:

Saturday, March, 2:30 pm Meet at our Chavurah House to Carpool to Stockton for Temple Israel's Purim Spiel, Dinner and Carnival

Saturday, March, 4:30 pm Meet at our Chavurah House to Carpool to Hornitos to join their Masonic Lodge's St Patrick's Day Corned Beef and Cabbage Dinner Fundraiser

Friday, March 20, 6:30 pm Potluck dinner followed by
7:30 pm Lay Led Kabbalat Shabbat Services,
at our Chavurah House

Other Upcoming Community Events

April 4 - Community Passover Seder

May 3 - Annual Membership Meeting and 2026/ 2027 Board Elections

High Holidays - Passover

Weekly Shabbat Challah Deliveries

Contact Rachel Hadley (rhadleyfam@gmail.com) for more information,
or to be added to or removed from the deliveries list
(Merced area deliveries only)

October - April

1st Fridays: 7:00 Formal Lay Led Services with Torah Reading

**3rd Fridays: 6:30 Potluck and 7:30 Lay Led Kabbalat Shabbat Services
at our Chavurah House on Parsons Ave**

2025/ 2026 Annual Dues are DUE

Our Fiscal Year is July - June

\$500.00 per Year per Family Unit

Please mail your 2025/ 2026 Dues payment to:

Congregation Etz Chaim

P O Box 3752

Merced CA 95344

For those who prefer, we do accept monthly Dues payments year round

Spring Has Sprung!
And the WEEDS are threatening
to take over our Chavurah House!

Please help with Spring Cleaning
Saturday and/ or Sunday, March 7-8
10:00 – noon

The back patio weeds:
The pomegranate to the back fence
Along the back fence
The roses and the lantana
The gravel patio border
The middle circle

The front yard weeds:
The front patio
The front roses
The side honeysuckle
The street strip Oriental Pistache
The driveway crepe myrtle

This Purim, Congregation Etz Chaim is taking a road trip to Temple Israel in Stockton for...



PURIM ROYALE



What Happens in Shushan, Stays in Shushan



Throw on a costume and join us for a creative telling of the story of brave Queen Esther and evil Haman.

Saturday, March 7 @ 4pm
Dinner & Carnival following the shpiel

Carpools will depart from the Chavurah House at 2:30pm.
Return times TBD.

You must RSVP by 3/5 to carpool: bbraunstein@ucmerced.edu

No cost for admission or ride to Stockton.
Dinner & Carnival tickets on sale following the shpiel.



Please join us on **Saturday, March 14th**
as we travel to **Hornitos**
to support their Masonic Lodge's
Corned Beef and Cabbage Dinner Fundraiser

Those who want to caravan or carpool
will meet at our Chavurah house
at 4:30

The suggested donation for the dinner is
\$20.00 per person

RSVP to Rich Kleitman
(erkarkdad@gmail.com)
or for more information



2026 PASSOVER SEDER

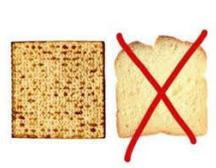
WHEN: Saturday, April 4, 5:30 PM



Where: Our Chavurah House on Parsons Ave

What: A traditional Seder Service and meal led by our own Greg Friedman, including:

Matzah, Gefilte Fish, Charoset, Chazeret, Egg, Maror, Parsley
Wine and Grape juice,
Chicken Soup with Matzah Balls
Brisket, Salmon,
Potatoes, Vegetables
Dessert



Cost: \$36.00 for adults
\$10.00 for children 12 and under

SEDER RESERVATION FORM

Return this form with your check by **March 31st** to reserve your place
(we need an accurate count to prepare the food)

Name: _____

Email/Phone: _____

Please let us know how many:

Specify number of:

____ Adults Brisket ____ Salmon ____ Vegetarian ____

____ Children under 12 Brisket ____ Salmon ____ Vegetarian ____

Deadline for reservations: **March 31st**



Mail check to:
Congregation Etz Chaim
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More Beautiful than Before...



March Yahrzeits

Lillian Bauman
Louis Dake
Gertrude Davis
Bernard Gobler
David Gregory
Brenda Hatcher
Frances Katz
William Katz
Stephen Leonard
Ignacy Lieberman
Sam Litowsky
Joseph Matlin
Michael Rosenbaum
Adam Schroeder
Gerald Shainberg
Morris Shapiro
Syl Wachs
Rose Zwillinger

March Birthdays

Dave Colnic 3/4
John Hofmann 3/12
Natalie Wight 3/20

In the year of their passing

Raissa Moore (05 - 2025)
Mary Kaplan (01 - 2026)

זכרונם לברכה

May their memories be a blessing

Sudoku Solution

6	4	7	3	2	5	1	8	9
5	1	2	9	8	4	7	3	6
8	3	9	7	6	1	2	4	5
7	5	3	6	9	8	4	1	2
9	8	6	4	1	2	5	7	3
1	2	4	5	3	7	9	6	8
2	9	8	1	7	3	6	5	4
3	7	5	2	4	6	8	9	1
4	6	1	8	5	9	3	2	7



Please send your tributes to: Congregation Etz Chaim, P O Box 3752, Merced, CA 95344

Congregation Etz Chaim gratefully acknowledges the following tributes:

Rachel Hadley in loving memory of her husband Steve Leonard

Ardene Shaeffer in loving memory of her father Bernard Gobler

Ardene Shaeffer in loving memory of her grandmother Frances Katz

Ardene Shaeffer in loving memory of her grandfather William Katz

Harlan and Judy Dake in loving memory of Louis Dake

May their memories be a blessing זכרונם לברכה

Rachel Hadley in Honor of Ardene Shaeffer and Sheryl Wight for their weekly assistance in delivering challah!