



**מגילת אסתר**

Megillat Esther

The Story of  
Queen Esther

ברכות פורים  
Purim Blessings

*Before reading the Megilla*

Our ancestors have blessed us with the tradition of reading the Megilla.

Blessed is the spirit of humanity that led our ancestors to perform heroic deeds long ago at this season.

*Shehechyanu*

Blessed is the spirit of humanity that sustains us and brings us to this season.

*Hodaah Meditation*

The book of Esther relates the story of the wicked Haman, who plotted to destroy the Jewish people. By the intervention of Mordecai and Queen Esther, the Jewish people were saved from total destruction. Although this story is entirely fictional, through it we learn important lessons. The first is the importance of humor and frivolity in human life. The book of Esther is a work of satire, and the survival of Purim celebrates the absurd. The second is the importance of human effort. The book of Esther is notorious for never mentioning God, and the Jews are saved by the actions of two Jewish people, not by miracles. On this very merry holiday, we give thanks for the efforts of all those who make the world a more just, equitable, and happy place.

*(Blessings and Meditation from **The New Jewish Humanist Siddur**)*

## **MEGILLA - מגילה**

When Queen Vashti refused to come before King Achashverosh and his drunken friends at a feast, she was banished. In search of a new queen, King Achashverosh ordered all the beautiful women in the royal precinct of Shushan to be brought to the palace so he could choose a wife.

During this time, there lived in Shushan a Jewish man named Mordecai, who took care of his orphaned niece Esther (In Hebrew, Hadassah). Esther was a girl of exceptional beauty, and so she was brought to the palace. Out of all the young women, she was selected as the king's favorite and declared queen. As Mordecai had advised her, she told no one of her Jewish heritage.

One day, when Mordecai was walking outside the royal gates, he overheard two guards plotting to assassinate the king. Mordecai told Esther of what he had heard, and she in turn, told the king. Thanks to Mordecai, the king was able to stop the attempt and execute the conspirators.

Following the foiled assassination attempt, Haman, a chief advisor to the king, periodically went outside the palace gates and demanded that the king's servants bow to him. But Mordecai refused to bow to Haman. This infuriated Haman, and after he discovered Mordecai was a Jew, he conceived a plot to exterminate all the Jews of the kingdom.

When Mordecai heard of this, he asked Esther to plead with the king on their behalf. However, Esther reminded Mordecai that whoever went to the king uninvited would face the penalty of death unless he extended his golden scepter. Mordecai urged Esther to visit the king anyway. On the third day, Esther went to see the king, and he extended his golden scepter to her saying, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even if it be half my kingdom, it shall be granted you." (Esther 5. 3)

Esther invited him to a banquet the next night, and he accepted. At that banquet, Esther invited him to a second banquet the following night.

As Haman walked home, Mordecai once again refused to bow to him. Infuriated, Haman ordered the construction of a gallows fifty cubits high for Mordecai's execution.

That night, the king was unable to sleep, and asked for the chronicles of the city to be read to him. Hearing of Mordecai's role in stopping the assassination, he inquired whether he had been rewarded, and his servant responded that he had not. Haman was then brought in to the king's presence.

Later, the king and Haman attended Esther's second banquet, where she told the king of the plot against the Jews. Disturbed by this revelation, the king asked who had organized it, and Esther replied, "The enemy oppressing us is this wicked Haman." Upon hearing this, the king was incensed, and he had Haman executed upon the very gallows built for Mordecai. The king made a decree that the Jews could defend themselves on the day of their attack, and the Jews triumphed over their enemies.

Esther demonstrated exceptional bravery and strength. While she could have been killed for visiting the king unannounced, she knew that a cause greater than herself was at stake.

Each and every one of us has a purpose in our lives. As a young orphaned Jewish girl living in Persia, Esther could never have imagined she would become queen and save all the Jews in Persia. It reminds us that by our own strength we will succeed in life.

Another feature of this holiday was the unity of the Jewish people in their own defense. As a result, religious practice dictates that we must share our food with those less fortunate, and trade meals with our friends and neighbors. We must come together in greater friendship, for that is the true secret of Jewish survival.



ESTHER STANDING IN THE INNER COURT OF THE KING'S HOUSE

**WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM**  
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