

# Jewish holiday Purim celebrates day massacre was averted



GARY WARTH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Bluma and Rabbi Mendy Rubinfeld of Congregation Chabad of Rancho Bernardo and Poway dress in costume for the upcoming Purim adventure scheduled for Monday at the congregation.

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When Haman walks onstage, expect to hear boos.

"There's a lot of booing when the bad guy is mentioned," said Rabbi Mendy Rubinfeld of Congregation Chabad of Rancho Bernardo and Poway, which will relive the tale of Haman during its Purim celebration Monday.

The holiday, held on the 14th day of Adar in the Jewish calendar, celebrates the salvation of all Jewish people who were targeted by the evil Haman in the year 356 B.C.

"It's a joyous time," Rubinfeld said. "This month is joyous because of the holiday of Purim. We believe that we have a good energy during this month."

As part of the celebration, people exchange Purim baskets that contain at least two food items for each person getting the gift. The food should be ready to consume, such as cooked meat, baked goods, fruits, candy, wine or other beverages. People also give money to the needy during Purim.

Chabad of Rancho Bernardo and Poway is making Purim baskets and is holding a "Purim adventure" for children ages 3 to 12 on Monday night.

"They'll be divided into groups and given a group leader who will be their Purim guide," explained Rubinfeld's wife, Bluma Rubinfeld. "There are five main characters. In each room, we'll have an actor."

Those actors will play King

Achasheroth, Queen Esther, Vashti, Haman and Mordechai.

## The story of Purim

Achasheroth was a mighty emperor, married to Vashti, granddaughter of the powerful Nebuchadnezzar. He held a royal feast and everybody was invited. Haman, a low-level official, used the occasion as a scheme to get Jews to eat non-kosher food, which would anger God. But most Jews followed Mordechai's advice and stayed away.

At the feast, a drunken Achasheroth boasted of Vashti's beauty and demanded she meet his guests. She hated the Jews and refused to come out. At Haman's urging, an enraged Achasheroth had her killed.

After several years, Achasheroth chose Esther as his new queen. What he did not know, however, was that she was Jewish and the cousin of Mordechai. At Esther's urging, the king appointed Mordechai as his Jewish adviser. Mordechai soon saved the king's life by uncovering a plot to poison him.

Haman, by now prime minister, began wearing an image of an idol, and he demanded people bow to it. When Mordechai refused, Haman schemed to kill the Jews.

Achasheroth gave Haman his signet ring, giving him absolute power to pass decrees. His first decree ordered the king's governors to arm themselves on the 13th of Adar. A sealed second decree, not to be opened until that day, would give the order to mas-

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sacre the Jews.

The prophet Eliyahu appeared to Mordechai at night to reveal Haman's plan. Mordechai went to Queen Esther and told her now was the time to reveal her nationality to the king and to plead with him to overturn the decrees.

But Esther had fallen out of favor with the king and had not been invited to see him for 30 days. Approaching him uninvited could cost her her life, but she agreed to see him.

The Jews prayed and fasted for days, and Achasherosh was so moved at seeing the frail Esther that he asked what troubled her. She invited him to a banquet with her and Haman. At that feast, Esther did not tell the king of Haman's plan, but invited him to a second banquet.

That night, Achasherosh awoke in fear that Haman and Esther were plotting against him, and he went to his book of chronicles in search of his most faithful servant. The book opened to the day Mordechai had saved his life.

The next day, Achasherosh asked Haman what should be done with a man he wished to honor. Thinking the king was referring to him, Haman said the honored man should be dressed in the king's apparel, including his crown, and should ride on the king's horse.

Now Achasherosh knew that Haman had designs on his crown. The king declared that he was talking about Mordechai, and ordered Haman to make the arrangements to honor him. A humiliated Haman carried out the order, even more determined to kill Mordechai. But first he had to attend the second banquet.

At the banquet, the king again asked Esther what she

wanted. She asked him to spare her life and her people from an evil man's plots. When the outraged king asked who dared to threaten the queen, she pointed to Haman.

Haman already had erected a gallows to hang Mordechai. But Achasherosh ordered Haman to be hanged from the same gallows, and he appointed Mordechai to replace him as prime minister.

The decree to slaughter all the Jews could not be rescinded, but the king issued a new decree for all Jews to defend themselves on the 13th of Adar. Throughout the kingdom that day, 75,000 would-be murderers were killed.

### Celebrating Purim

The story of Haman's plot is recorded in the Book of Esther (Megillat Esther), part of the Torah, the Jewish holy book. The story is read aloud in the synagogue every year on the eve of Purim and again on the next morning. The word "Purim" means "lots," as in the drawing of lots or lottery, the method Haman used to pick the day for his murderous scheme.

During the Purim adventure at Chabad of Rancho Bernardo and Poway, Bluma Rubinfeld said children will go from room to room learning the story and participating in activities in each room. Children will eat triangular Purim cookies called *Hamantaschen* and will twirl noisemakers called *graggers* whenever Haman's name is mentioned.

At the end of the program they will be told to look for someone needy who needs charity, and they will find someone dressed as a poor man waiting for them, she said. At the end of the 90-minute Purim adventure, children will have a hot-dog dinner, she said.

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