

Who knows why we're all dressed up today? [Purim!!]

That's right, it's Purim!

But what is Purim all about? What are we celebrating today?

[Jews being saved, Haman not killing Jews, Esther & Mordecai are heroes...]

That's right! Very good!

Adults, I'm going to need some answers from you, too. Thanks!

Okay, I've got another question, this one's a bit harder:

Why do we dress up on Purim?

[to be like the heroes, to have fun, to be silly, etc]

Yes! You know what I like to call it?

Purim is Jewish opposite day!

What do I mean by "opposite day?"

Well, I don't usually dress as a cowboy,
so today I'm dressing up as something different or opposite.

What are some of your costumes?

[Mordecai, Esther,]

Do you usually dress like _____ or _____ ?

[No!]

But, it goes over farther than just dressing up.

The rabbis said that on Purim, we're supposed to get so silly,
and if you're over 21 you might need some help from drinks,
(so silly) that you can't tell the difference between Mordecai and Haman!

Can you imagine, not being able to tell the difference between
one of the heroes of the story and the most awful bad guy?

That's pretty silly!

In fact, in some ultra-orthodox communities in Israel,
Purim is the one day that kids are allowed to do whatever they want
and not get into trouble!

And, trust me, they do some pretty bad things.

But, part of this is because they are expected to be really good during the whole year,
and this is the one day they can go crazy.

It's Jewish opposite day. (Kids, please check with your parents first before acting this way.)

But, where do we get the idea the Purim is supposed to be so crazy
and opposite to every other day?

What story do we read on Purim?

[The megillah, the scroll of Esther...]

That's right!

And this is such a fun and crazy story, it shows us how to celebrate Purim.

For example, there are feasts and parties all over the scroll.

But, even crazier, who knows what makes the Megillah of Esther different
from every other book in the Bible?

[??????????] - Adults, you can also answer!

Nowhere in the entire book do we read God's name!

God is hidden in this story.

It's almost like God is wearing a mask!

This is partly why some people dress up and hide their faces with a mask.

What else happens in the story to show us that Purim is opposite day?

Well, remember queen Vashti?

She disobeyed the king by **not** going to him when he called her,
and for this, she was kicked out of the palace.

But, Esther, on other hand,
she disobeyed the king by **going** to him when he did **not** call her,
but for this, she was rewarded... twice!

In grown-up terms, this is called "irony."

"Irony" is when we expect something to happen, and the opposite happens instead.

Here's another example:

At one point, the king asks Haman what should be done for someone the king wants to honor.

Haman thinks the king is talking about him
so he suggests dressing the man up in royal clothes
and letting him ride a royal horse around town so everyone can see him.

And the opposite of what Haman expects to happen takes place:

His enemy, **Mordecai**, is the one who the king wants to honor,
and Haman is stuck walking Mordecai around town on the royal horse.

And, the most important part of the story is another example of irony or opposite-day-ism.

Haman, the mean mean man, wants to hurt all the Jews.

So he tricks the king and sends out a decree to the whole kingdom, saying:

Anyone who wants to hurt the Jews is allowed to.

We have to remember that this story takes place in Persia,
and in some ways, its a lot like us living in the United States.

There are a lot of Jews, but there are a lot more of everyone else.

The Jews were really outnumbered, and were very scared about getting hurt.

But you know what happened?

Of course you do!

The opposite happens!

Once Haman is out of the way,

a new decree is sent out to the whole kingdom, saying:

the Jews are allow to fight back if anyone tries to hurt them.

And since the Purim story is all about opposites, that's what happens.

The Jews fight back and defend themselves, and end up hurting a lot of their enemies.

When I first read this, I was excited but also kind of upset.

I thought, "how could the Jews hurt so many people? That's not nice, even if they are enemies!"

But what I learned was, that this was just another example of opposite day!

The Jews didn't really hurt **that many** people, nor are we supposed to learn that this is okay.

In the story, they did the opposite of what was going to happen to them,
and it's the opposite of what we are supposed to do.

What's really cool about the Purim story,
is that even though this is tale of opposites,
of ups and downs,
parties and fights,
secrets and masks,
there is actually a very serious and important message:

As Jews, when we live in a place where most of the people around us are not Jewish,
sometimes we have to be a little careful.

This doesn't mean that anyone who is not Jewish is dangerous,
not at all!

In fact, we are really lucky in America to be surrounded by so many friendly people!

(Some of whom are visiting us today.)

But, at different points in our history, we were living very happy and comfortable lives,
and then something bad happened.

This happened in Spain in 1492 when we were kicked out,
and this happened in Germany in the Holocaust, when 6 million Jews died.

One serious lesson from Purim is that we have to stick together and take care of each other.
Esther risked her life in order to save her people.

She was really scared, but she stood up for her people in really hard times.

This is really important for us to remember.

If there's ever a time, God forbid, when the Jews are in trouble,
we have to stand up for each other and take care of each other,
even if it means putting our own lives in danger.

And from this we learn that, even in good times, we have to take care of each other,
This is one of the ways that our people have survived for thousands of years.

But, today, we remember another really important thing that helped us survive:
the ability to have fun and be silly!

On Purim, we are commanded to have a good time and let loose.

We are supposed to dress up and we are given permission to act in ways
that are opposite from how we are used to acting.

So, after we finish services, and head out to the oneg for the Megillah reading,
let's all be silly and have lots and lots of fun!

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Purim!