PURIM BRIEFING

Starts Nightfall Wednesday 16th March and ends on the evening of Thursday 17th March
Purim is a fun and joyous festival celebrated in Jewish communities all over the world, with lots of music and dancing.

The festival is a one-day event, this year celebrated from the evening of Wednesday 16th March to Thursday 17th March (14th Adar in the Hebrew Calendar).

The festival commemorates the defeat of Haman, the advisor to the Persian king, and his plot to enact a Holocaust against the Jewish people. The story of Purim is told in the Book of Esther. Esther became the Queen to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) of Persia, and through her bravery was able to thwart the attempt to slaughter all the Jews living in Persia.
King Ahaserus of Persia was in search of a new queen and summoned beautiful women from all over the land in order to find one. After seeing many women, he chose Esther as his new wife. What the King didn’t know was that Esther was Jewish.

Haman, the chief advisor to King Ahaserus was a classic antisemite. He told King Ahasuerus that there were people living within his kingdom who were a separate people - a people who had their own laws and didn’t follow the laws of the King. The King agreed that such people should be killed and the date of the planned extermination (14th Adar) was selected by lottery (Purim literally means ‘lots’).

Mordechai, Esther’s cousin, found out that Haman was planning to exterminate the Jewish people. He entreated Esther to beg King Ahasuerus for mercy on their behalf. He told her that there was a reason that she had been chosen as the King’s new Queen - that she was supposed to rescue her people.

Visiting King Ahasuerus came at great personal risk to Esther. The King hadn’t sent for her in a long time and approaching the King without being invited could lead to her execution. But when she went to him she found that he was pleased to see her. The King said that Esther could have anything she wanted and Esther requested a banquet with the King and Haman in attendance. The King consented.

At the banquet, Esther revealed to the King that she was Jewish and told him that Haman’s plan was to annihilate the Jewish people. She begged him to spare her people.

The King flew into a rage and left the room. Haman, knowing that the King was going to punish him, begged Esther for his life. When the King returned it appeared that Haman was assaulting her. Furious at what he saw, the King arrested Haman and sentenced him to death.

The King then sent a decree giving Jews permission to defend themselves against the previous decree to kill them. After one day of fighting, the potential destruction of the Jewish people was averted. Mordechai, Esther’s cousin, took Haman’s place as the King’s advisor and all was well for many years.
Reading of the Megillah (Book of Esther) both in the evening and the daytime. Readings are a joyful affair, with adults and children alike wearing fancy dress and using noisemakers (called groggers) whenever the name of the wicked ‘Haman’ is mentioned. Unique among Jewish scripture, the Book of Esther does not contain one mention of God. God is indirectly referenced but they are ‘hidden’ in the story. This is another reason why Jewish people dress up on Purim.

A festive meal (traditionally including bread, wine and meat) is eaten. A common treat at this time of year are ‘Haman’s pockets’, called hamantaschen. These triangular biscuits represent Haman’s three-cornered hat. These are often filled with seeds or jam. Drinking and partying is encouraged on Purim; According to teachings, a person is required to drink until they cannot tell the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’, though opinions differ as to exactly how much alcohol that is!

Sending gifts to friends. Jews give at least 2 prepared food items (e.g. crisps, chocolate) to at least one friend.

Giving to charity!

Unlike many other festivals, there are no prohibitions about working, driving or using electronics. Most Jewish people will be going to work as normal.

Purim is observed in a similar way in all denominations of Judaism in the UK.
SOCIALS

Here are our suggestions of what to post on social media:

- Happy Purim!
- Purim Sameach! (Meaning Happy festival of Purim)

Please follow @jlc_uk on Twitter and @jlc.uk on Instagram to see content from the JLC, our members and Jewish communities across the country during Purim.
The JLC connects and coordinates the Jewish charitable sector, strengthens and supports leadership across our community, and magnifies and amplifies the collective voice of our member organisations. This includes the following synagogue denominational bodies:

Contact the JLC: adam@thejlc.org

If you would like to find out more about the festival of Purim visit My Jewish Learning’s educational resource.