

Hamantashen

10 Reasons for this Popular Purim Custom

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This year the Torah portion of Vayikra is read on the Shabbat before Purim. The Lubavitcher Rebbe found the following connection between the Torah portion and Purim.¹

The Omer Sacrifice

The Torah portion of Vayikra discusses the Omer (first barley) sacrifice.² According to our sages, when Haman came to dress Mordechai in the royal robes, he found that Mordechai was teaching his students about the Omer sacrifice. That day was the 16th of Nissan, which is when the Omer sacrifice is brought. As such, Mordechai was teaching its laws in lieu of the actual sacrifice.³ After hearing that only a fistful of barley flour was offered on the altar for this sacrifice, Haman exclaimed, “The merit of this fistful of flour has outweighed my 10,000 silver talents.”⁴ This teaches us that not only do the actual sacrifices protect us from our enemies,⁵ but studying about them accomplishes this as well.⁶

¹ Sichot Kodesh 5741, vol. 2 page 17

² [Levit. 2:14 as interpreted by Rashi](#) based on [Menachot 68b](#)

³ See [Etz Yosef on Esther Rabbah](#) 10:4

⁴ Midrash Agadat Esther, chapter 6 (quoted in Otzar HaMidrashim, page 56). See also [Megillah 16a](#) and [Esther Rabbah 10:4](#)

⁵ See [Tosfot D.H. Emesh on Megillah 3a](#) that “the sacrifices protect us from our enemies.”

⁶ Chatam Sofer al Hashas on Megillah 16a

Hamantashen

In connection to Purim, this article will discuss the origins and reasons for the custom of eating hamantashen on Purim as well as some laws and customs that relate to this particular food. This custom goes back at least several centuries as it is mentioned in the halachic works of the 17th century.⁷

Meaning of the Word

The word “*tash*” means “pocket” in Yiddish. As such, hamantashen means “Haman’s pockets.” This refers to the pocket of poppyseed (or other) filling inside the dough of the hamantash.

In Hebrew this food is called “Oznei Haman” or the “ears of Haman” (see below).

10 Reasons

Here are ten of the reasons given for the custom of eating hamantashen.⁸

1) Poppyseed Spells Haman

The word for poppyseed (the original filling of hamantashen) in Yiddish is *Mohn* or מֶהן which has the same letters as Haman (המֶן).⁹ Thus, consuming this food reminds us of the mitzvah to erase Haman and destroy him.

2) Three Corners – Three Patriarchs

The Midrash says that when Haman saw the merit of the three patriarchs, his strength was weakened. The verse in Psalms alludes to this when it says,¹⁰ “And all the horns (i.e., strength) of the wicked I shall cut off,” which refers to Haman. And “the horns (strength) of the righteous will be upraised” refers to Mordechai.¹¹ The three corners of the hamantash are a reminder of the merit of the patriarchs.¹²

3) Commemorates the Three Aspects of the Torah

⁷ See [Shulchan Aruch HaRav 168:9](#) and [Seder Birkat HaNehenin 2:7](#) in the name of the Taz [168:6](#). The Taz was written by [Rabbi Dovid HaLevi](#) who lived from 1586 - 1667

⁸ Vol. 3, pg. 257

⁹ Minhag Yisrael Torah (by Rabbi Yosef Levi) vol. 3, pg. 257 quoting the Sefer Matamim

¹⁰ [Tehillim 75:11](#)

¹¹ See Yalkut Shimoni on Esther 6:1

¹² Minhag Yisrael Torah ibid

The Talmud says that the Jewish people reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah at the time of the Purim miracle.¹³ The Talmud also points out that the Torah has three books, it was given in the third month, and on the third day of separation. It was given to the Jewish people who are made of three groups (Kohanim, Levyim and Yisra'elim), by Moshe, who was born third in his family. As such, we commemorate the acceptance of the Torah by eating a three-cornered hamantash.¹⁴ This is similar to the custom that some people to eat dairy on Purim to commemorate the acceptance of the Torah which is compared to milk.¹⁵

4) Weakening Haman

The word *tash*, which means “pocket” in Yiddish, means “weaken” in Hebrew. Thus, the word hamantash means that Haman was weakened.¹⁶

5) Mantashen - Remembering the Seeds

The Rama writes that some have a custom to eat seeds on Purim to remember that Daniel and his colleagues ate seeds while in Nevuchadnetzar's palace¹⁷ as did Queen Esther in the palace of Achashverosh.¹⁸ The original hamantash had a poppyseed filling in keeping with the above custom. As such, these pastries were called *mantashen* i.e., pockets of poppyseed as *man* means “poppyseed” in Yiddish. But, because of the similarity to the word Haman, people began calling them hamantashen.¹⁹

6) A Hidden Miracle

The filling which is hidden within the hamantash alludes to the miracle of Purim which was hidden within (what appeared to be) natural events.²⁰

7) Hiding the Sweetness

The sweet filling represents the Torah which is sweeter than honey,²¹ while the dough represents matters relating to physical pleasure.²² Thus the hamantash alludes to the

¹³ [Shabbat 88a](#)

¹⁴ Minhag Yisrael Torah ibid

¹⁵ Orchot Chaim. See [Kaf HaChaim 695:10](#)

¹⁶ Ibid in the name of Otzar kol Minhagei Yeshurun

¹⁷ [O.C. 695:2](#) See [Daniel 1:16](#). Daniel is related to the Purim story as some say that he was the courier who brought the messages from Mordechai to Esther and vice versa (see [Megillah 15a](#)).

¹⁸ [Mishnah Berurah 12](#) on ibid

¹⁹ Betzel Ha'eshel by Rabbi Shmuel Ahron Irens, page 267

²⁰ Rabbi Yekuti'el Yehudah Halberstam, [the Klausenberger Rebbe](#) in Shefa Chaim, Ra'ava DeRa'avin vol. 4 pg. 253

²¹ See [Tehillim 19:11](#)

²² See [Rashi D.H Se'or on Brachot 17a](#) that the evil inclination is compared to the yeast in dough.

fact that the Jews of that generation were making the Torah secondary to frivolous pursuits. We rectify this by studying Torah at our Purim feast²³ to indicate that we are making the Torah our primary pursuit.²⁴

8) The Droopy Ears of Haman

As mentioned above, the Hebrew name of hamantashen is *ozni Haman* – the ears of Haman. This recalls a Midrash²⁵ that when Haman heard that he would have to parade Mordechai through the streets of the capital city Shushan, he left the king's chamber embarrassed with his ears drooping.²⁶

9) Haman Listened to his Wife

Some say that the Israeli term *oznei Haman* (ears of Haman) recalls that Haman's downfall was a result of his listening to his wife's bad advice.²⁷ This is contrasted with On ben Peles who was saved by listening to his wife's good advice.²⁸

10) Accepting the Oral Torah

According to the Midrash,²⁹ the Jewish people accepted the Written Torah willingly, and G-d then forced them to accept the Oral Torah which has many more details. As such, when the Talmud says that we reaccepted the Torah on Purim³⁰ it is referring to the Oral Torah. The Written Torah is studied with one's eyes – by looking in a book, whereas the Oral Torah is studied with one's ears – by listening to one's teacher. The Talmud says³¹ that when Achashverosh gave his signet ring to Haman to sign the decree, it caused the Jewish people to do a teshuvah more powerful than the exhortations of 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses. We therefore eat "Haman's ears" to recall that it was due to Haman that we reaccepted the Oral Torah.³²

The fact that we give Haman credit for this can be compared to a prince who was eating a feast, and something got stuck in his throat. Coughing, he walked out of the party but could not dislodge it. Suddenly a passing bandit struck him with a mighty blow the

²³ See [Rama 695:2](#) that the light of Torah should precede the joy of the feast. See also [Kaf Hachaim 27](#) on *ibid* that this will ensure that nothing improper takes place at the meal.

²⁴ Shefa Chaim *ibid*, page 521

²⁵ See Chemdat HaYamim chapter 4, cited in Yalkut Yosef Purim page 204

²⁶ Lu'ach Davar Be'ito 5778 page 828

²⁷ See Rabeinu Bachaye, beginning of Parshat Korach

²⁸ Yalkut Yosef, Purim page 205

²⁹ [Tanchumah, Parshat Noach 3:4](#)

³⁰ [Shabbat 88a](#)

³¹ [Megillah 14a](#)

³² Mayan Ganim, section of Mo'adei Hashem, quoted in Tzahali VaRoni by Rabbi Nissim Dayan, pg. 92

strength of which knocked out the food that was lodged in his throat. When the king heard about this, he had the bandit killed for striking the prince, but he elevated the bandit's children in gratitude for the fact that their father saved his son's life. Similarly, although Haman was killed for his attempt to destroy the Jews, we show appreciation that he motivated us to do teshuvah by eating a food with his name.

Assorted Hamantashen Customs and Halachot

- The bracha (blessing) on hamantashen is *mezonot*.³³
- When eating hamantashen during a meal, one need not say a bracha.³⁴
- Rabbi Aharon of Belz would give out hamantashen and Lechaims after checking for Chametz on the night before Pesach.³⁵
- Some have the custom to eat hamantashen during their last Chametz meal on Erev Pesach.³⁶
- The Mishloach Manot that the Lubavitcher Rebbe gave would include hamantashen.³⁷ In addition, it seems that the Lubavitcher Rebbe was particular to eat at least one poppyseed hamantash on Purim.³⁸

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom and a Happy Purim!

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³³ Although the Alter Rebbe writes ([Seder Birkat HaNehenin 2:7](#)) that the blessing on hamantashen is *hamotzie* that was referring to hamantashen made with regular bread dough. Nowadays, when the dough is sweet, the blessing is *mezonot*.

³⁴ See O.C. 168:6 Biur Halacha D.H. Te'unim that under most circumstances one does not recite a blessing on pastries when eating them during a meal.

³⁵ Haggadah shel Pesach of Belz

³⁶ Haggadah shel Pesach, Kretchnif

³⁷ Otzar Minhagei Chabad, page 272

³⁸ [Hitkashrut gilyon 1075](#)