



PURIM SPIEL

An adaptation of the
Book of Esther

by

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AUDIENCE NOTES

Many of the elements that make up modern melodramas come from ancient theatre traditions. Audience's vocalization, for example, is a long-held custom each year in the re-enactment of the story of Esther. The audience is encouraged to boo and hiss, shake noisemakers (groggers) or stomp their feet (with an H, written on the sole of the shoe) when the evil villain Haman's name is even mentioned and cheering always accompanies the mention of either of the heroes Esther and Mordecai. The audience is also encouraged to gasp in times of tension, to sigh in times of relief. Have fun, participate and enjoy the show!

CAST

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

(There are fourteen speaking parts, and roles for 10 or more extras (4 Princes, 4 Attendants and Beauty Contestants), for a total of more than 24 people. That's a big cast! Plenty of room for everyone to be involved who wants to be. Make sure to encourage the cast to "ham it up!" Melodrama is best when exaggerated. If all those are not available, feel free to double up some of the extras and other parts.)

NARRATOR

KING

PRINCES (WISE MEN: 3 + 4 Extras)

ATTENDANTS (3 + 4 Extras)

MEHUMAN (Attendant)

BIZTHA (Attendant)

VASHTI

KARSHENA (Prince)

MEMUKAN (Prince)

SHETHAR (Prince)

MORDECAI
ESTHER

HEGAI

BEAUTY CONTESTANTS (Extras)

HAMAN

SERVANT

HARBONA (Attendant)

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THE STORY OF ESTHER

NARRATOR The story of Esther takes place during the period of time between the separate returns to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel and Ezra. After 10 years of captivity, about 50,000 Israelites return to their homeland of Jerusalem but the vast majority remain in Persia. Esther's story takes place in the King's palace in Susa, one of the capitals of Persia.

Our play opens in the palace. King Ahasuerus is giving a feast for the princes of the land. Meanwhile, a special feast is being held for the women by Queen Vashti. On the seventh day of the feast, the King sends for Vashti so he can show off her beauty.

(KING, CENTER FRONT, SEVEN PRINCES AND SEVEN ATTENDANTS----
OFF TO SIDE)

KING My wife, Queen Vashti is gorgeous, she's beautiful. I mean totally awesome. There's not another woman like her in all of my Kingdom. I know. Let me send for her so that you can appreciate my good taste and her glorious splendor.

Mehuman! Go and bring me my Queen so that these valiant men can be graced by her presence.

(MEHUMAN & BIZTHA, TWO OF THE KING'S ATTENDANTS, GO OFF TO
GET THE QUEEN)

MEHUMAN (TO VASHTI) The King requests the honor of your presence at his banquet.

VASHTI Seven days later he invites me to his banquet!? Well, you tell him that I'm busy with my own banquet, but maybe I'll stop by later.

BIZTHA But the King said we had to come and bring you now. He wants to show you off.

VASHTI Well that's just too bad. I'm busy. Now be off.

(MEHUMAN & BIZTHA RETURN WITHOUT THE QUEEN. QUEEN
LEAVES THE SCENE.)

KING Did I not send you for my Queen? Where is she?

M & B (TOGETHER, LOUDLY AND WHINEY) She won't come!

KING What do you mean she won't come? How dare she! Did she forget that I'm the one in charge around here? I mean, they don't call me the King for nothing!

(WISE MEN (PRINCES) COME IN AND STAND NEAR THE KING, WHO IS CENTER FRONT)

WISE MEN (TOGETHER) Yeah, you're going to have to do something about this, King.

KING You bet I'm going to do something about this! What am I going to do?

KARSHENA Kill her.

MEMUKAN How about a trial?

KARSHENA Hang her.

SHETHAR Oh come on, how about a public apology?

KING We must make an example of her so the people of the kingdom know what happens if you disobey me.

KARSHENA Kill her.

MEMUKAN A law must be made. If it pleases the King, issue a royal decree that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of the King, and give the royal position to someone else.

KING Good idea, Memukan. Yes, a law must be made. Vashti must pay for her rebellion. Never again will she be allowed to enter my royal presence—in fact, she must be banned from my entire kingdom.

NARRATOR So the King sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language proclaiming that every man should be the ruler over his own household.

And then a search was made for a new Queen. The King appointed commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all the beautiful girls to the Palace. There was a Jew named Mordecai who had a lovely niece named Esther. Mordecai brought Esther to the palace and placed her under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the harem. Before he left her, Mordecai warned Esther not to reveal her family background or nationality.

Esther found favor with Hegai, and he provided well for her, assigning her the best maids and the best place in the harem. After 12 months of beautification, it was Esther's turn to go before the King.

(BEAUTY CONTEST)

HEGAI If it pleases his Royal Highness, I have gathered yet another group of fair maidens from the kingdom for your possible Queen.

(HEGAI ANNOUNCES ALL CONTESTANTS. CONTESTANTS WALK IN FRONT OF THE KING; LINE UP FACING KING AFTER "MODELING" FOR THE AUDIENCE)

KING Let it be known this day that the King has chosen his new Queen—Queen Esther.

(ESTHER IS CROWNED. SHE STEPS FORWARD SHYLY.)

NARRATOR So Esther became Queen, but continued to keep the secret of her Jewish background just as Mordecai had told her. One day, Mordecai was in the court and overheard two of the King's officers plotting to kill him. He took this news to Esther, who in turn went before the King with it and told him it was Mordecai who told her. When the report was found to be true, the two officers were hung. All this was recorded in the Book of Annals in the King's presence.

(CONTESTANTS, PRINCES, KING MOVE TO SIDES, BOW AS HAMAN WALKS AROUND, MORDECAI STANDS AT THE SIDE.)

After these events, King Ahasuerus made Haman Prime Minister. This meant that all the people in and around the palace bowed before him; but Mordecai refused to do this. As a Jew, he would not bow before anyone but God.

(EVERYONE CONTINUES TO BOW BEFORE HAMAN, MORDECAI DOES NOT.)

HAMAN (TO MORDECAI) Excuse me, do you know who I am?

MORDECAI Yes, I know who you are, you are Haman, the Prime Minister. (STARTS TO WALK AWAY.)

HAMAN Stop! Knowing who I am, why do you not bow down before me?

MORDECAI As a Jew, I will not bow down to anyone, except the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (WALKS AWAY.)

HAMAN (TALKING TO HIMSELF.) OK, we'll see about this. Let's go see what the King says about these Jews not bowing down to me.

(HAMAN APPROACHES THE KING)

HAMAN Your majesty, it has been brought to my attention that there are certain people in your kingdom who refuse to obey your laws.

KING In my kingdom!? Rebels? Who are they?

HAMAN The Jews, your majesty. They have pledged their allegiance to another king, they won't bow to you or keep your commands.

KING Then do as you see fit with these Jews.

HAMAN Yes, your majesty.

(KING LEAVES. HAMAN CHUCKLES TO HIMSELF AND GOES TO THE TABLE TO WRITE THE FOLLOWING LETTER...)

HAMAN (READING ALOUD AS HE WRITES) I hereby decree by authority of the King that you destroy, kill, cause to perish, and generally don't be nice to all Jews both young and old, little children and women, in one day upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to take the spoil of them. (LOOKING UP FROM THE LETTER) Now I'll get rid of that Mordecai!

(HAMAN POSTS THE LETTER PUBLICLY. MORDECAI COMES ALONG AND SEES THE DECREE AND GOES INTO HYSTERICS)

MORDECAI We have been condemned to death. Oh No! How could this be? What can we do? We are lost. Wait! Esther can save us. (TAKES THE DECREE DOWN AND GOES TO ESTHER.) Esther! Esther!

(ESTHER COMES OUT, MORDECAI GIVES HER THE DECREE, SHE READS IT)

MORDECAI Esther, look at this. We have been condemned to die! Go to the King and show this to him and ask him to deliver us from the decree.

ESTHER If I go before him without being summoned, he might put me to death. It's the law.

MORDECAI Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this. Maybe you were made Queen so that you could deliver us from this wicked Haman.

ESTHER Alright, Uncle Mordecai, I'll speak to the king. But for three days have our people fast and pray and I'll do likewise. Then I'll see the King and if I die, I die.

(MORDECAI LEAVES, KING COMES IN. ESTHER GOES TO CENTER FRONT NEAR THE KING)

NARRATOR Three days later, Esther appeared in the King's court knowing that it could cost her her life if the King did not want to see her at that time. The King sees her and calls her to him, holding out the golden scepter that is in his hand.

KING Esther, what a pleasant surprise, come here, what can I do for you? Make your request, even if it is for half of my kingdom, and I will give it to you.

ESTHER (ESTHER TOUCHES THE TIP OF HIS SCEPTER) Your majesty, I would like to request the honor of your presence and of Haman's at a banquet this evening. Will you come?

KING Of course I will.

NARRATOR That night Haman and the King attended Esther's banquet. The King tried to find out what Esther wanted but she played coy and only invited them back to another banquet the next night. When the King returned from the banquet, he could not sleep, so he called for a servant to read to him from the Book of Annals. It was found recorded that Mordecai had exposed the two officials who conspired to kill the King.

KING What honor has Mordecai received for this?

SERVANT Nothing has been done for him.

KING Who is in the court?

SERVANT Haman is standing in the court.

KING Bring him in.

(SERVANT BRINGS HAMAN TO THE KING)

KING What should be done for the man the King delights to honor?

NARRATOR Haman thinks the King is referring to him!

HAMAN If it delight the King to honor him, have a royal robe the King has worn and a horse the King has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and the horse be entrusted to one of the King's most noble princes. Let them place the robe on the man and lead him on the horse through the city streets proclaiming before him that this is what is done for the man that the King delights to honor.

KING Good idea Haman! Go at once, get the robe and the horse and do just this for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the King's gate.

NARRATOR Haman got the robe and horse. He robed Mordecai and led him on the horse through the city streets proclaiming before him...

(HAMAN LEADS MORDECAI ACROSS FRONT)

HAMAN This is what is done for the man the King delights to honor. ... This is what is done for the man the King delights to honor. ... This is what is done for the man the King delights to honor. ...

NARRATOR Afterwards, Mordecai is returned to the King's gate, but Haman rushes home to tell his wife and friends what happened to him. While they were talking, the King's attendants came and hurried Haman way to Esther's second banquet.

(MORDECAI LEAVES, HAMAN IS HURRIED TO THE SECOND BANQUET BY THE KING'S ATTENDANTS. KING, ESTHER AND HAMAN SIT AT THE FRONT OF THE AUDIENCE.)

KING (TAKING ESTHER'S HAND) What is your request Queen Esther? Ask anything up to half of my kingdom and it is yours.

ESTHER If it please your majesty, then let my life be spared and the lives of my people. For it has been decreed that we are all to be killed.

KING (IN HORROR) Who is he that would dare do such a thing? Where is this man?

ESTHER A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!

KING (KING GETS UP, GRUNTS, AND GOES OFF) I must think...

HAMAN (FALLS AT ESTHER'S FEET, GRABS HER ARM AND PLEADS FOR HIS LIFE) My Queen, I didn't know you were a Jew. I meant you no harm, it was only Mordecai I wanted to get rid of. Spare me, spare me please!

ESTHER Mordecai is my uncle, you fiend! Let go of me!

KING (RETURNS AND SEES HAMAN HOLDING ONTO THE QUEEN) Will you attack the Queen too, and in my own palace!? Take him away!

HARBONA The gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the King, is standing at Haman's house.

KING Hang him on that.

(ATTENDANTS TAKE HAMAN AWAY, AS HE OBJECTS)

NARRATOR The King then promoted Mordecai to the position of Prime Minister and granted him permission to issue a decree permitting the Jews to defend themselves.

(MORDECAI COMES IN WITH A SCROLL)

NARRATOR Haman, who had plotted to hang Mordecai on a special gallows was hung himself on that same gallows. Following a time of warfare, the Jews then lived in peace and prosperity. Mordecai was second in rank to the King, and decreed that the fourteenth and the fifteenth of Adar, the day Haman had cast the Pur (which mean lots) and planned to destroy the Jews, would instead be a day of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor. Purim would be celebrated for all the generations to come. And the King and his beautiful Queen Esther lived happily ever after.

(KING AND ESTER WALK THROUGH ARM IN ARM)

THE END