



THE MYSTERY BEAR

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A hungry bear, waking from hibernation, finds himself in the home of an elderly woman as she celebrates the holiday of Purim.

The holiday of *Purim*, celebrated on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of *Adar* falls in late February or early March. It is especially loved by children since it's celebrated by wearing costumes, making noise, putting on plays and eating treats!

The Book of Esther (found in the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible) tells of courageous Esther who saved the Jewish people in Persia from certain extermination by the King's evil advisor, Haman. Jews traditionally get dressed up as characters from the story and read the book of Esther in synagogue, shaking *groggers* (Yiddish for "rattle" or "noise-maker") at the mention of Haman's name in order to drown it out. Other highlights of the holiday include giving baskets of food and goodies to friends; having a big feast on the day of *Purim*; and donating enough money to poor people so they too can enjoy a festive meal.

PURIM TRADITIONS

Spiel is the Yiddish term for a lengthy speech, monologue or play. *Purim* is often celebrated with children (or adults) by putting on a humorous play about the story of *Purim* or a variety show including jokes, skits and songs. Many great websites include sample texts for a *Purim spiel*, which your family could enjoy acting out together.

Purim is a great holiday to introduce to young children

who love getting dressed up. There are many fun craft activities you can do together to celebrate the holiday, including making *hamantaschen*, *groggers* and/or baskets of food to give to friends. *Hamantaschen* are triangle cookies, said to be shaped like Haman's hat, with poppyseed or jam filling. You can search the web for simple recipes to make *hamantaschen*, or easy crafts to make your own *grogger*.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

In the story, Little Bear is able to last so long without being discovered because one of the central aspects of *Purim* is to eat a big festive meal with lots of guests. How do you feel about big celebrations with lots of people?

On pages 10-11, Little Bear sees a group of people heading inside a house, carrying baskets of food in their hands to deliver as gifts. These baskets, which are often filled with desserts, nuts and fruits, are called *mischloach manot* and are as familiar to the holiday of *Purim* as going trick-or-treating is to Halloween. You can make your own *mischloach manot* by filling bags with little fruits and cookies (like *hamantaschen*!) and giving them out to friends and neighbors. Pj