

Queen Esther

A Musical Comedy

Book, Music & Lyrics by
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ACT ONE

PROLOGUE - "THE MAGGID"

FRONT OF CURTAIN

THE MAGGID(30s-40s), the storyteller, enters. He is of dark complexion and wears a Bucharian Kippah.

In one hand he holds a grogger. He lowers the grogger and shushes the audience, finger to his lips.

SONG - "The Grogger Song"

THE MAGGID

(sings)

WHEN I GO LIKE THIS

(lifts and twirls grogger)

YOU MUST TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND

TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND (X2)

He turns upstage and throws open his arms - the curtains fly open.

The silhouette/animation of a man, Haman, flickers on a scrim. He is large, thick, and powerful. Atop his large head, he wears a tri-cornered hat (two forward, one back - with the look of a Hamantaschen, the Purim pastry).

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

ONCE THERE WAS A WICKED, WICKED MAN

IN A WICKED, WICKED LAND

WITH A WICKED, WICKED PLAN

A WICKED DISGRACE, HE WORE WICKED ON HIS FACE

IN A WICKED, WICKED GRIN

FULL OF WICKED, WICKED SIN

Haman disappears. In silhouette, the ENSEMBLE (7 Men and 7 Women) rise from supplication in a despondent dance.

THE MAGGID & ENSEMBLE

AI-YAI, AI-YAI, AI-YAI-YAI-YAI-YAI (X2)

(speaks)

This man was so wicked, so contemptible, so evil and cruel, we condemn his cursed name; it shall not be heard. We stomp it out with our feet, and rattle it with our grogger!

THE MAGGID

(raises grogger and sings)

SO WHEN I GO LIKE THIS
YOU MUST TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND -- NOW TURN IT!
TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND -- YES, TURN IT!
TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND --
TURN IT AND TURN IT AND TURN IT!

(shushes with finger)

WHEN I GO LIKE THIS
DON'T EVEN MAKE A SOUND (X2)

(speaks)

Now some may ask, "Why are there such wicked people in this world?" To this, I raise my shoulders and shake my keppie. [head]

In silhouette, the flashes of an ominous storm. With a blow to the head, CAIN kills ABEL.

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

CAIN KILLED ABEL WHEN HE LOST CONTROL
IT TOOK A WICKED, WICKED TOLL
ON HIS WICKED, WICKED SOUL
THERE WAS WICKED WAY BACK THEN
THERE'LL BE WICKED ONCE AGAIN
THERE ARE WICKED, WICKED SIGNS
THERE'LL BE WICKED THROUGHOUT TIME

In silhouette, the ENSEMBLE engages in torture and war.

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

AI-YAI, AI-YAI, AI-YAI-YAI-YAI-YAI-YAI
AI-YAI, AI-YAI, AI-YAI-YAI-YAI-YAI-YAI

SOME BELIEVE IN HASHEM
SOME BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST
SOME BELIEVE IN ALLAH
SOME BELIEVE THAT BUDDAH'S NICE

SOME BELIEVE IN GANESHA
SOME BELIEVE WHAT THEY PLEASE, BUT,
SOME BELIEVE THEY'RE GODS, THEMSELVES

The scrim flies out to reveal Haman and the ENSEMBLE live.

HAMAN

GET DOWN ON YOUR KNEES!

THE MAGGID & ENSEMBLE

(grogger)*

AI-YAI, (THAT'S HAMAN!), AI-YAI, (IT'S HAMAN!)
AI-YAI-YAI-YAI-YAI-YAI, (HE'S HAMAN!)
AI-YAI, (IT'S HAMAN!,) AI-YAI, (THAT'S HAMAN!)
AI-YAI -- YAI -- YAI

The CHORUS and Haman disappear and THE MAGGID shushes the audience.

**(Throughout the story, The Maggid leads the audience with a twirl of the grogger followed by a shush with finger to his mouth each time "Haman" is said aloud.)*

THE MAGGID

SO WHEN I GO LIKE THIS
YOU MUST TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND -- HAMAN!
TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND -- HAMAN!
TURN YOUR GROGGER ROUND -- HAMAN! THAT'S HAMAN! IT'S HAMAN!

SHH... HAMAN! SHH... HAMAN!
SHH... HAMAN! HAMAN! SHH... HAMAN!
SHH!

WHEN I GO LIKE THIS
DON'T EVEN MAKE A SOUND
DON'T EVEN - MAKE - A ...
(long and fading)

Shhhhhhhhhh...

(song ends)

... Good. We are good listeners and by "we," I mean "you." I am the Maggid; the teller of stories. Now! Take your grogger, put it in your lap, and hear me.

He takes a megillah (scroll) from his robe and whisks it open.

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

This is the Megillah of Esther. We begin in the Garden of the Palace; Persian Empire, thousands of years ago... nighttime.

FADE TO DARKNESS.

SCENE ONE - "180 DAYS"

THE GARDEN OF THE PALACE

From the darkness, a tanbur (a simple stringed instrument), is strummed.

SONG - "180 Days"

TANBUR PLAYER

AI-DIDDLE-DAI, AI-DA-DIDDLE-DAI
AI-DIDDLE-DAI, AI-DA-DIDDLE-DAI
DIDDLE DIDDLE-DAI, AI-DA-DIDDLE-DAI
DIDDLE DIDDLE-DAI, AI-DA-DIDDLE-DAI
DIDDLE DIDDLE-DEE-DUM DEE-DUM
DIDDLE-DEE-DUM DEE DUM

THE MAGGID

(over)

Now it came to pass, in the days of Achashverosh; Achashverosh, who reigned from Hodu to Cush - India to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty and seven provinces. King Achashverosh sat on the throne of his kingdom in Shushan, the Capitol.

3 FEMALE DANCERS enter.

FEMALE DANCERS

(over repeat of Tanbur Player verse)

000, 000-000-000, 000-000-000, 000-000-000

THE MAGGID

(over)

In the third year of his reign, he made a great feast for all his princes and servants alike, the officials and nobles of the provinces. He displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty for one hundred and eighty days.

Feet pound and soles slide across the floor as 2 MALE DANCERS enter with spears in a military flair.

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

The power of Persia! The might of Media!

MALE DANCERS

(enter over repeat of Tanbur Player and Females)

HAROOMPH! (X6)

2 MORE MALE DANCERS rush in - all four dance battle with spears.

THE MAGGID

Another land. Another time. Another people. Yet people. People are much the same.

ALL fade into darkness, leaving only the fading sound of the tar, and a faint glow on The Maggid.

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

The Grand Empire of Persia and Media was filled with a rainbow of colors and cultures from lands very near and quite far, far away. All were free to believe as they pleased, according to the laws of the time. And while the king's great feast was open to everyone, others had celebrations of their own --

TRANSITION TO:

SCENE TWO - HADASSAH

A SUKKAH [JEWISH TENT]

THE JEWS (7 Men & 7 Women) burst into song and dance in cascading circles. The women dance separately from the men.

SONG - "Hageenu La'Peezгах"

THE JEWS

LAI-DEE-DAI, LAI-DEE-DAI
LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DID-DLE DAI-DEE-DAI
DUH-DID-DLE DUM-BOM
HAGEENU LA'PEEZGAH

LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DID-DLE
DAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DID-DLE
AH-AHH, AH-AHH, AHH
LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DID-DLE
DUM

THE JEWS continue to dance.

THE MAGGID

In Shushan, the capitol, there lived a man named Mordechai, a Jew: Son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish who had been plucked from Jerusalem and dropped into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar.

THE JEWS

LAI-DEE-DAI, LAI-DEE-DAI
LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DID-DLE DAI-DEE-DAI
DUH-DID-DLE DUM-BOM
HAGEENU LA'PEEZGAH

THE MAGGID

Mordechai was heard and loved by all.

THE MAGGID removes his kippah to become MORDECHAI. (Adding or removing the kippah will be the standard transition between these 2 characters.)

THE JEWISH MEN

Mordechai!!!

THE JEWISH MEN grab MORDECHAI (The Maggid) and draw him into the dancing circle.

THE JEWS

(forte / loudly)

LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DI-DEE
DAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DI-DEE
AH-AHH, AH-AHH, AHH
LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DI-DEE
DUM

MORDECHAI hurls forth from the circle and becomes THE MAGGID.

THE MAGGID

Mordechai had a cousin by the name Hadassah.

HADASSAH, enters. She's a young Jewish woman with dark olive skin-tones and long, silky hair.

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

When her father and mother had passed, Mordechai took to raising Hadassah as his own.

THE MAGGID becomes MORDECHAI.

THE JEWISH MEN

Mordechai!

They yank him back into the circle.

THE JEWISH WOMEN

Hadassah!

THE JEWS

LAI-DEE-DAI

THE JEWISH WOMEN

(reaching out for her)

Hadassah!

THE JEWS

LAI-DEE-DAI

THE JEWISH WOMEN

Hadassah!

THE JEWS

LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DI-DEE DAI-DEE-DAI
DUH-DI-DEE DUM-BOM

HADASSAH does not join.

THE JEWS (CONT'D)

HIGEENU LA'PEEZGAH

THE JEWISH WOMEN
Hadassah!

THE JEWISH MEN
Hadassah!

THE JEWS
Hadassah!

THE JEWISH WOMEN individually reach their hands out as they each pass near her. She obviously does not want to join.

THE JEWS (CONT'D)
LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DI-DEE
DAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DI-DEE
AH-AHH, AH-AHH, AHH

MORDECHAI
Join us!

THE JEWS
LAI-DEE-DAI DUH-DI-DEE
DUM

HADASSAH
I can't!

The music and THE JEWS halt.

HADASSAH (CONT'D)
I can't dance.

MORDECHAI steps out of the circle to address Hadassah.

MORDECHAI
Noah would never have built his enormous ark by saying, "I can't."

HADASSAH
If and when the world depends on my dancing to save the future of our people, plus two of every kind,... I will dance my very best.

After a very long, awkward moment, THE JEWS throw up their arms in defeat and end the song.

THE JEWS
HAGEENU LA'PISGAH

MORDECHAI becomes The Maggid.

THE MAGGID
The Jews celebrated together. They celebrated survival. They celebrated life. They celebrated with a feast!

THE JEWISH MEN swing around to the
backside of the sukkah while -

THE JEWISH WOMAN move forward long
rectangular tables. They are
covered in platters and sacks of
food.

JEWISH WOMAN #1
(cascading
conversations)
Best diet ever.

JEWISH WOMAN #2
Fasting!?

JEWISH WOMAN #2
You fast and you gorge!?

JEWISH WOMAN #5
Did you bring figs?

JEWISH WOMAN #6
I did.

JEWISH WOMAN #5
I forgot figs.

JEWISH WOMAN #3
Oh, no!!! I forgot the chickpeas!

JEWISH WOMAN #3 turns and bolts.

JEWISH WOMAN #7
Glad to be rid of her.

JEWISH WOMAN #6
Who, Gabby?

JEWISH WOMAN #7
Why would anyone name their child Gabby?
(refers to Gabby, offstage)
That's what happens!

THE JEWISH MEN return with two
sets of benches.

JEWISH WOMAN #3

I said to him,...

JEWISH WOMAN #3 (CONT'D)

'You didn't!'

JEWISH WOMAN #3 (CONT'D)

He says,...

JEWISH WOMAN #3

'I did.'

JEWISH WOMAN #6 & #3 drink.

JEWISH WOMAN #4

What did you say?

JEWISH MAN #1

(cascading
conversations)
Listen, I'm telling you, it
was an apple.

JEWISH MAN #5

I bought it for three
talents...

JEWISH MAN #2

It wasn't an apple.

JEWISH MAN #3

(to Jewish Man #2)
You're ridiculous!

JEWISH MAN #5

I sold it for five.

JEWISH MAN #2

How am I ridiculous?

JEWISH MAN #4

I wouldn't have sold it.

JEWISH MAN #3

It's an apple...

JEWISH MAN #5

He needed it -

JEWISH MAN #3

...in every painting...

JEWISH MAN #5

(CONT'D)

- I didn't need it.

JEWISH MAN #3

...I've ever painted.

JEWISH MAN #1

Definitive proof!

THE MAGGID

Like most others in the Empire, the Jews loved to gather as a
community, celebrate, eat, drink and kibitz...

*Wives and husbands sit down in
uncomfortable silence.*

THE MAGGID (CONT'D)

...with their neighbors and friends.

*Realizing their mistake, THE JEWS
rearrange seats.*

*Men and women settle at different
tables and their cacophony of
voices erupts.*

*(beat) HADASSAH moves to take the
empty seat at the men's table.*

*THE MAGGID becomes MORDECHAI, who
sends her to the "woman's table."*

MORDECHAI

Hadassah, please... sit.

JEWISH MAN #2

Mordechai. The Tree of Knowledge. What type of fruit?

HADASSAH

(to the women as she grabs an apple)

I don't know what it is about the men's stimulating conversation, but wow, I am suddenly hungry for an apple.

She bites into one.

JEWISH WOMAN #2

I heard it was a kumquat.

JEWISH WOMAN #7

The fruit from the Tree of Knowledge was a kumquat? Who said that?

JEWISH WOMAN #2

My sister.

JEWISH WOMAN #7

The one who thinks you're an idiot?

JEWISH MAN #2

It was an apple!

HADASSAH

(turns back)

An Apple!? There are as many variety of apple as there are stars in the sky.

(after no reaction)

Apples are common - this was The Tree of Knowledge! It's special!

ALL awkwardly look to Mordechai.

MORDECHAI

Some say it was a pomegranate; others insist an apple. No one really knows. All we do know is it was the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It must have been something... special.

JEWISH MEN

(rabble)

Ohhhh. Makes sense. Apple, not apple. Something special.

HADASSAH

Isn't that what I just said!?

MORDECHAI

They didn't understand you. I said it in a way they understood.

HADASSAH

What was so different? It was something special.

JEWISH MAN #6

That's what Mordechai said. Very wise man.

HADASSAH

You know, wisdom came from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. I guess you have Eve, a woman, to thank for that.

JEWISH MEN

(rabble)

A shanda! It should never have happened! A shame. Original sin!

HADASSAH

Eve had no idea what good and evil was before she ate the fruit. The words 'good' and 'evil' were gibberish with no meaning.

JEWISH MAN #1

What?

HADASSAH

It's as if I gave you this fig and told you that if you eat it, you will receive thousands of gimbreeboles.

JEWISH MAN #3

What's a gimbreebole?

HADASSAH

Here, eat this fig and you will find out!

JEWISH MAN #5

Mordechai, your girl is meshugana.

MORDECHAI

Hadassah! Please stop confusing the men.

HADASSAH

What's so confusing?

MORDECHAI

That Adam and Eve had no *understanding* of Good and Evil before they ate the fruit that gave them the *knowledge* of Good and Evil.

THE JEWISH MEN

Ohhhhh.

HADASSAH

Are you kidding me!? I just said that. It's like nobody hears me!!! Thoughts are coming out of my mouth, and poof!

JEWISH MAN #4

Oh, we hear you.

JEWISH MAN #1

That's the problem.

MORDECHAI

(to the men)

Gentlemen.

(to Hadassah)

The men are trying to have a discussion of opinions here.

HADASSAH

Wonderful! Women have opinions. What's your opinion of that?

JEWISH MAN #7

As my father used to say to me, "If I ever wanted to hear a woman's opinion,... I was very, very, very drunk."

JEWISH WOMEN #7

Then he'd say, "I wasn't really interested in her opinion, if you know what I mean." What's worse? He still doesn't know what his father meant!

MORDECHAI

Hadassah, it's not that your opinions are unwanted; bottom line - you are a woman. Speak with the women. If you want to talk to a man, get married, you can argue with him.

MORDECHAI turns to the men who jibber-jabber in the background.

Without a word to Mordechai, but with intent directed toward him, ESTHER turns to the Jewish Women.

SONG - "I Will Be Heard"

HADASSAH

Hey, ladies - want to hear a story,.. and opinion?

JEWISH WOMEN

(ad libbing)

Yeah! Tell it to me girl! Make 'em feel it! I like stories.

HADASSAH

THERE WAS A MAN LIVING ON HIS OWN
HE HAD NO WOMAN NOR NO PLACE TO CALL HOME
AND HE WAS LONELY

JEWISH WOMEN

LONELY? LONELY?

HADASSAH

LONELY ALL OF THE TIME

JEWISH WOMAN #2

Poor fella. He sounds lonely.

HADASSAH

HE MADE UP WORDS FOR EVERYTHING HE SAW
THOUGH HE HAD NO ONE TO TALK TO AT ALL
AND HE WAS ONLY

JEWISH WOMEN

ONLY? ONLY?

HADASSAH

ONLY PASSING THE TIME.

JEWISH WOMAN #4

Sounds boring.

JEWISH MAN #3

Boring like this story.

HADASSAH

THE CRACK! A WOMAN CAME HIS WAY

JEWISH WOMAN #6

That scared me!

HADASSAH

SO EXCITED HE HAD NOTHING TO SAY!
AND SO HE LISTENED

JEWISH WOMEN

LISTENED? LISTENED?

HADASSAH

LISTENED ALL OF THE TIME

JEWISH WOMAN #3

Oh, that sounds lovely

JEWISH WOMAN #5

Say it again!

HADASSAH

OH YES, HE LISTENED

JEWISH WOMEN

LISTENED LISTENED

HADASSAH

LISTENED ALL OF THE TIME

JEWISH MAN #1

What happened next?

HADASSAH

WELL THEN A SERPENTINE
FROM THE TREE IT HUNG
IT HAD FOUR LEGS, A TAIL
A DOUBLE-FORK TONGUE

AND WHEN IT WHISPERED

JEWISH WOMEN
WHISPERED WHISPERED

HADASSAH
IT GOT INSIDE HER MIND

CRUNCH! HER MIND OPENED HIGHER
MUNCH! SHE FOUND HER DESIRE
CRUNCH! HE LISTENED -

JEWISH WOMEN
HE LISTENED? HE LISTENED? HE LISTENED?

HADASSAH
FOR THE VERY LAST TIME.

JEWISH WOMAN #5
Oh no!

JEWISH WOMAN #7
What!?

JEWISH WOMEN #1
Why he wouldn't listen anymore?

HADASSAH
HE BLAMED HER VOICE
HE CLAIMED IT WASN'T HIS CHOICE
COMPLAIN! COMPLAIN!
MEN GOT THE TOIL
WOMEN GOT THE PAIN

THEN SHE SAID
I'LL TAKE THE FALL
CAUSE GUESS WHAT?
I'M GONNA BE THE MOTHER OF ALL
I'LL TAKE THE FALL
I'M GONNA BE THE MOTHER OF ALL

AND YOU KNOW
I WILL BE HEARD
YES, THAT'S RIGHT
I WILL BE HEARD
EVERY WORD
I WILL BE HEARD

JEWISH WOMEN
WE WILL BE HEARD

HADASSAH
I WILL BE HEARD