Purim Plate and Mishloach Manot

Framing this unit
In this unit we will learn about the mitzvah of mishloach manot by studying the Purim plate through NLI collections. They will also discuss the traditions of the Jews of Germany, and then make their own plates with which to send mishloach manot (Purim food gifts).

Mishloach manot is one of the four Purim Mitzvot, easily remembered by the Hebrew letter mem מ that appears in all of the names:

1. Reading the Megillah (Book of Esther) - מילאה
2. Taking part in a seudat Purim or mishteh (a Purim feast) - משתה
3. Giving mishloach manot (Purim food gifts) - משלח מנות
4. Giving tzedakah (matanot l’evyonim) - מתנות לבריאה

The Purim plate was designed in Bamberg, Germany in the nineteenth century. The plate is made of metal and is decorated with engravings. In the centre is a picture of a king, presumably King Ahasuerus from the story of Purim. To his left is another character with a crown, probably Queen Esther, and to the right a figure holding a parasol who is probably a servant.

Around the picture is what seems to be a misquotation from Megillat Esther:

"ויבוא המלכה על המלך, ואומר לה, מה לך אסתר?"
Translation: "The Queen came to the King, and he said to her, 'What is your wish, Esther?"

This plate was intended for mishloach manot (or shalach manos). According to Megillat Esther, at Purim Jews should send gifts consisting of two different types of foods to friends and family. In some European communities, such as Germany, it was customary to give these mishloach manot on plates decorated with motifs from the festival.

Group Activity
In pairs or small groups, look at the image of the Purim plate and consider when and for what purpose this item was used.

Look carefully at the picture for clues to help you work out what the object is used for. Hint: This is a picture of an object that is used to fulfill one of the Purim mitzvot.

Complete the worksheet to help you explore the object.

How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il
Discussion
After everyone has had a chance to analyze the object in small groups, we will have a discussion about what we discovered.

- What is illustrated on the plate? What text appears on the plate?
- How were the illustrations made?
- What is unusual about the plate?
- What does the fact that there are mistakes in the Hebrew text tell us about the person who engraved the plate? (Note to educator: It may have been made by someone who wasn’t Jewish, but it is more likely that the person who engraved the plate was a Jew who knew the text but wasn’t very knowledgeable about Hebrew grammar, and therefore wrote Esther’s actions in the masculine form.)
- What do you think the plate was used for?
- What pictures would you put on a Purim plate?
- Do you like getting mishloach manot?
- Does a specially decorated package make the mishloach manot even more special?

Creative Activity
Design your own Purim plates to use for mishloach manot on Purim. You can decorate the plate with motifs from the story of Purim or Purim traditions.

Primary sources in this lesson
- Purim Plate

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