



## **Laws and Customs of Purim 5783 – March 6-7, 2023**

*Purim is a rabbinic holiday celebrating the Jewish people's chance to defend themselves against their adversaries, and rejoicing in the greatness of Jewish leaders Mordekhai and Esther. The astounding reversal of fortune of the Jews makes it a great day of reversals and unbridled joy. Following is a guide to the basic laws of the day from Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 686-697 and commentaries. If you have any questions, please ask a member of our Rabbinic Team. **PURIM SAMEACH! HAPPY PURIM!***

### **Parshat Zakhor**

The Shabbat preceding Purim (**March 4th**) is designated Shabbat Zachor, for the special maftir reading of the passage (Deut. 25:17-19) obligating us to remember that which Amalek did to our people. Many consider hearing this portion a Biblical mandate, and all are especially encouraged to be in shul to hear it. We have multiple readings available in case you are not able to hear it during the main Tefillot on Shabbat.

### **Ta'anit Esther**

Purim is preceded by Ta'anit Esther, the Fast of Esther, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, **Monday, March 6th** this year. This fast, according to many, commemorates the preparation the Jews undertook before standing up for their lives on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Adar. It is a minor fast, and so we do not require pregnant women and nursing mothers to fast, and anyone unwell with even minor ailments does not need to fast on Ta'anit Esther. The fast begins at daybreak – **5:10am** this year, and ends at nightfall – **6:32pm** this year.

### **Machatzit Hashekel – Half-Shekel**

It is customary in the month of Adar to give a half-shekel as a remembrance of the head-tax in Temple times. These funds were collected in order to have a new account from which to fund communal sacrifices for the new Temple year, which began the following month in Nisan. Erev Purim prior to Mincha is one customary time to collect this, while others give it on Purim morning.

At shul you will find a bundle of three half-dollars. The standard currency of the local area stands in for the half shekel. We use three in recognition of the three times the word *terumah* – donation – is used in the Torah portion describing donations in Parashat Terumah. The custom is to lift the bundled coins to acquire them, and then place them back in the basket to return them to the shul. Traditionally, one puts some *tzedakah* in the basket as well.



#### 4 Mitzvot (the 4 M's) of the Day

##### 1) Mikra Megillah – Reading the Megillah

All Jewish adults are obligated to read Megillat Esther from a kosher scroll (*klaf*) at night (after nightfall) and also in the daytime. The mitzvah of reading the Megillah can also be fulfilled by listening to someone else reading it from a scroll.

Nighttime Megillah reading should be done after nightfall (**6:37pm** this year), and daytime megillah reading should be done after sunrise (**6:20am** this year). In cases of great need, it can be read as early as daybreak (**5:00am** this year). Three *berakhot* (blessings) are made over this reading:

- *Al mikra megillah* (on reading the Megillah)
- *She'asah nissim* (Who performed miracles...)
- *Shehecheyanu* (Who has kept us alive...).

During the day, the *Shehecheyanu* applies to the other three mitzvot of the day as well. Another blessing is recited after the Megillah is read as well, thanking God for fighting our battles.

The Megillah tells an amazing story and does so with drama and richness. Many have the custom to bang and boo at the mentions of Haman's name. Some verses are read in sad melodies, and four verses are read aloud by the congregation. *We are continuing our tradition of reading two additional verses aloud this year in celebration of Esther's role in the miracle – Esther 2:7 and 9:32. Please take part in this custom which has been adopted in a number of prayer communities!*

Keeping in mind that it is halachically essential to hear **all** the words of the Megillah, **we ask that people stay quiet during the reading** and help those with them to do the same. If one misses a word or a few words, the best recourse is to read it quickly from the printed text in front of you and catch back up to the reader.

Part of the experience of the Megillah is to hear it with our community, and we enjoy having a full house to hear the reading together – *be-rov am hadrat melekh* – “more people increase the splendor of the King.” Hearing the Megillah in-person is also the preferred way to fulfill the mitzvah. Nonetheless, some people are unable to come to the Bayit to hear the reading, so we will be offering readings at elder facilities in the neighborhood as well as readings for the homebound. If one is unable to hear the Megillah in person, one can rely on some rabbinic authorities and fulfill the mitzvah by joining one of the Bayit Megillah readings via Zoom.



If you can take part in spreading Purim joy by reading Megillah for those unable to attend in-person, please email: [rabbanitbracha@thebayit.org](mailto:rabbanitbracha@thebayit.org).

## 2) Matanot L'Evyonim – Gifts to the Poor

This ancient mitzvah was part of the very first celebration of Purim as described in the Megillah (9:22). It has been interpreted over the ages to be the giving of a minimum of functional currency to at least two people, who can then use it for their Purim food or other needs on Purim day. Therefore, this mitzvah should be performed on **Purim Day**.

**We have arranged that the money we collect at the Bayit through our Project Matanot L'Evyonim will enable you to fulfill this mitzvah.**

A portion of these funds, together with any tzedakah you give to the rabbinic staff in advance of or on Purim, will be distributed in two locations:

- Rabbi Moshe Fuchs of Sons of Israel Pelham Parkway will be distributing funds in the Bronx.
- Carmei Ha'Ir, a restaurant in Jerusalem, will be serving food to those in need.

Rambam, cited by later authorities, stresses that one should spend **more** money on this mitzvah than on the subsequent two, Mishloach Manot and Seudah (Rambam Megillah 2:17).

## 3) Mishloach Manot – Sending (food) Parcels

This mitzvah was also part of the very first celebrations of Purim as described in the Megillah (9:22). It has been interpreted over time to obligate sending two types of food to a friend. Some suggest that the ideal form of sending is through an agent – another friend or a child.

### **Please note:**

- The two food items do **not** need to have two different blessings.
- The food items should be ready-to-eat; they do not need to be fancy.
- The mitzvah of Mishloach Manot is fulfilled when delivered on **Purim Day**.
- Some of the Bayit Mishloach Manot will be delivered on Sunday or picked up on Monday night, which are both before Purim Day. Therefore, we cannot guarantee that the Mishloach Manot that you order through the Bayit will fulfill your mitzvah. Please be sure to give at least **one** package of **two** food items to a neighbor or friend in order to fulfill this mitzvah.
- Please be aware that our Project Matanot L'Evyonim is **not** a Mishloach Manot project, and does **not** fulfill your Mishloach Manot obligation.



#### 4) Mishteh – Festive Meal

This mitzvah as well was part of the very first celebrations of Purim as described in the Megillah (9:22), and entails a celebratory meal. The meal is eaten specifically in the daytime, and should be begun with enough time to eat the bulk of the meal before sunset (**5:53pm** this year). The meal, like any festive Jewish meal, should include words of Torah – in the spirit of Purim 😊.

Some people particularly drink wine or other spirits to become intoxicated on this day. While the nature of this practice and its scope is the subject of significant debate, what is clear is that one who drinks should do so responsibly.

The joy of Purim is demonstrated with costumes and merriment. We have lots of festive programming at the Bayit in the night and day, and we welcome you to join us in laughter and song.

#### Special Notes Regarding Mourners

Mourners are obligated in all the mitzvot of the day. Although mourners are obligated to send Mishloach Manot, they should be kept simple and refrain from foods that particularly bring joy. It is customary **not** to send Mishloach Manot to those in their year of mourning for a parent or month of mourning (*shloshim*) for other close relatives. However, one may send to the mourner's spouse or other family members. A mourner who is sent Mishloach Manot may receive them, however. Shiva on Purim and Shushan Purim is observed without outward signs of mourning: shoes may be made of leather, the torn shirt is replaced with a regular one, and the mourner does not sit on a low chair. Mourners may also attend shul services to hear Megillah. The mourners' festive meal is more simple and without an especially large group.

Please note that formal shiva visits on both of these days are still permissible. For any questions or clarifications, please feel free to contact one of the clergy team.

#### Liturgy

Hallel is not recited on Purim. *Al Hanisim* is said in *Birkat Hamazon* (Blessing after Meals) and in the *Amidah* prayer. If forgotten, those prayers need not be repeated. Tachanun is omitted at Shacharit and Mincha, as are related prayers. The Torah is read on Purim morning, telling the story of the war with Amalek (Ex. 17:8-16).

#### Shushan Purim

In recognition of the Jews of Shushan who defended themselves on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of Adar and rested on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the day of the 15<sup>th</sup> is commemorated as Shushan Purim. We mark it by omitting Tachanun and the related prayers.

