

Bayit Mishloach Manot Guidelines Purim 2020

As Purim draws nearer, and we continue to think through different aspects of Purim observance in the context of the daily-evolving COVID-19 outbreak, we want to share the guidelines we are strongly recommending for Mishloach Manot this year, as well as our thinking behind them.

The purpose of Mishloach Manot is, in many ways, to create social cohesion. The mitzvah invites us to prepare and bring foodstuffs from our home to the home of another. Many in our community, following the halakhic idea that the more packages we send, the more praiseworthy it is, invest beautiful energy in this mitzvah, preparing creative and extensive packages and delivering them to the homes of many others in our community, including those often less visited, and deepening the bonds we so cherish with neighbors and friends.

This Purim, this precise value bumps up against the central Jewish value of keeping ourselves and others around us as safe and healthy as possible. In the absence of specific directives from the DOH about Mishloach Manot, we have consulted with a public health professional with CDC experience in pandemic preparedness and response. We understand that the distribution of Mishloach Manot has a possible, if low, risk of spread of COVID-19 to members of our community. This is based on the following references from the CDC:

CDC states: ([CDC source](#))

- “The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.
 - Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
 - Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.”
- “It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.”
- “Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.”

Our understanding of COVID-19 in the context of the current outbreak linked to our community includes the presumption that there are likely to be undiagnosed cases in our community, and those people risk, albeit a low risk, unwittingly transmitting virus through Mishloach Manot preparation and delivery.

In light of this, we are making the following recommendations:

1) For households that have no individual family members residing in the house that are ill or under self-quarantine:

- **Please fulfill the mitzvah of Mishloach Manot this year through its basic requirement: one food package of two items given to one recipient.**

- *When preparing the Mishloach Manot package, please follow the general hygiene guidelines that have been continually recommended: washing hands thoroughly (20+ seconds, with soap) before preparing the package and before handling it, being mindful not to touch your face while preparing or handling your package.*
- *Please do not prepare or deliver packages if you have any symptoms of illness (including mild symptoms of a common cold).*
- *Please check in first with the person/family to whom you plan to deliver to confirm that nobody is immuno-compromised or has an underlying respiratory condition and that they wish to receive a Mishloach Manot package.*

2) **For families that have one or more individuals that are:**

- (a) *ill with problems breathing, coughing, runny nose, fever, or any other symptom, or,*
 - (b) *under self-quarantine (meaning they were told by a school or by public health authorities to remain in their households for a certain number of days due to a possible exposure to COVID-19).*
- ***Please use an alternative method of fulfilling the mitzvah of two food items to one recipient:***
 - a. *Appoint a friend as your agent to prepare and deliver the Mishloach Manot, following the guidelines in #1 above*
 - b. *Order food online or from a restaurant to be delivered on your behalf*

Recipients of Mishloach Manot should wash hands before eating, in accordance with general CDC hygiene guidelines.

We recognize that for some these guidelines may feel like common sense, and for others they may be surprising or disappointing. We also understand that many individuals/families have already purchased supplies toward Mishloach Manot packages for this year. We feel this loss, too. We hope that we may be able to still distribute Mishloach Manot-type gifts at a later time this year, and we encourage us all, as every year, to continually strengthen our performance of Matanot L'Evyonim in supporting the needy. We recognize the cost that also comes sometimes in performing mitzvot in ways that enhance and do not detract from the communal good, and we hope this can be a learning experience for all of us.

In keeping with the Mishloach Manot purpose of creating social cohesion, even as we reduce our package delivery, we recommend contacting by phone those in our social network we would typically deliver to, wishing them a Happy Purim and checking in on how they are managing.

Please don't hesitate to be in touch to discuss further anytime. May our extra caution be a source of comfort and joy this Purim as we pray for health and safety.

Shabbat shalom,

Rav Steven and the Rabbinic Team

Richard Langer, Executive Director

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