

Guidelines for Purim 2021/5781

Before Purim:

Taanit Esther

Purim is preceded by *Taanit Esther*, the Fast of Esther, on the 13th of Adar—Thursday, February 25th. This year, the fast begins at 5:27 AM and ends at nightfall, 6:38 PM (although one should ideally refrain from eating until after hearing Megillat Esther).

Parshat Zachor

The Shabbat preceding Purim is designated *Shabbat Zachor*, for the special *maftir* reading of the passage (Deut. 25:17-19) obligating us to remember the cruel attack of Amalek. Many consider it a biblical commandment to hear this portion read from a Kosher Torah scroll. Naturally this presents a number of challenges this year so here are our recommendations:

- A. Zachor will be lained in person at our normal 8:45AM outdoor minyan on Shabbat morning.
- B. We will have another reading immediately following our Shabbat morning minyan, at approximately 10:20AM. All attendees must register here.
- C. On Friday afternoon after Mincha, Zachor will be read from a Torah scroll in the presence of our outdoor minyan and broadcast over zoom before Shabbat begins.
- D. Individuals unable to hear Zachor in person should read it from a printed Humash at home on Shabbat. One should take extra time to study it and think about its meaning.
- E. One can have in mind the obligation to remember Amalek when listening to the Torah reading from Exodus on Purim morning which will also be broadcast over zoom.
- E. Deuteronomy 25 will be read again this summer on August 21, with Parashat Ki Teitzei. We pray that by then more people will be able to hear this passage read from the Torah with the intention of fulfilling the mitzvah at that time.

On Purim:

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 which was collected in order to have new funds for communal sacrifices for the new Temple fiscal-year which began the following month in Nisan. The process for fulfilling this custom traditionally includes lifting the bundle of 3 half-dollars and then donating money. For safety precautions this year we will have the 3 half-dollars present, but ask that folks just look at it and have in mind that they are performing this ritual without actually touching them. Those who are unable to attend shul can participate from home by setting aside three half-dollars to charity while saying “Zecher l’machazit ha-shekel – to remember the mitzvah of giving half a shekel.”

Megillah Reading

All Jewish adults, men and women, are obligated to read or hear *Megillat Esther* at night and again in the daytime. We will be having multiple megillah readings both Thursday night and Friday morning. See ostns.org/purim for the full schedule. All of these readings

will be outdoors, and all will be available on zoom. Although some opinions maintain that one can fulfill the mitzvah of hearing the megillah by listening over zoom, others maintain that this is an insufficient manner of fulfilling the mitzvah. If you have concerns about your health and safety then you should not come out of your home on Purim just to hear the Megillah and you should listen on zoom. There are amazing people in our community who have volunteered to read Megillat Esther in person for people who are homebound. If you are interested in hearing the megillah in this manner or if you are able to read the megillah for someone else, please contact us.

Matanot Laevyonim – Gifts to the Poor

At a time when many people are hungry and in desperate need, this mitzvah is more urgent than ever. On Purim we have a special mitzvah of giving gifts of money to the poor, so that they have enough resources to fully celebrate Purim. This mitzvah is incumbent on all Jews, and the Rambam teaches us that we must focus our resources on matanot l'evyonim over other forms of celebration (Hilchot Megillah 2:17).

In order to properly fulfill this mitzvah, one must give to the poor on Purim itself. In modern times this has presented some logistical challenges, so we arrange recipients of our donations ahead of time. All of the money that we collect at Ohev will be distributed by giving to the local kosher food bank, Yad Yehuda, and similar organizations in Israel. In addition, this year, as we see long lines at food banks, we feel it is vital that we also support food banks that service the general population. Therefore we will also be directing some of our collected funds to local food banks.

We will be collecting donations for these organizations on Purim. **Please bring your donations (in the form of cash or check) with you on Purim night if possible.** The earlier that we collect the money, the better we can estimate how much we can give to these organizations so that they can distribute it properly on Purim.

If you would like to donate ahead of time you may donate online at ostns.org. Select "matanot l'evyonim" from the dropdown menu. You may also mail it to the shul, as long as we will receive it by Wednesday, February 23rd. If you donate the money before Wednesday night, please have in mind that you are appointing Maharat Friedman and Rabbi Herzfeld as your shlichim (messengers) to donate the money on Purim day. That way you properly fulfill the mitzvah.

If you are writing a check, please make it out to "OSTNS" and designate it for matanot l'evyonim.

Se'udah – Festive Meal

Because Purim is on a Friday, there are two options for enjoying a seudah without it compromising our ability to enjoy Shabbat dinner. One can either have their seudah earlier in the day, so that enough time remains for us to regain our appetites for Shabbat dinner. Ideally the meal should be completed by halakhic midday 12:21 PM. If this presents a logistical challenge, one may also have an extended Friday afternoon meal that begins before Shabbat and continues into Shabbat. For example, one could have appetizers or soup on Friday afternoon, pause for candle lighting, davening, kiddush and hamotzi, and then continue with the main course.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Rabbi Herzfeld or Maharat Friedman with any questions. Chag Purim Sameach!