

## EITZ CHAYIM HALACHAGRAM -- PURIM LAWS AND CUSTOMS

1. **Parshas Zachor** -- On the *Shabbos* before *Purim*, we read *Parshas Zachor*, which recalls *Amalek's* attack against the Jewish nation. This is a **biblical commandment** and, therefore, all men and women should attend *shul* to hear the special reading.
2. **Taanis Esther** -- The Fast of Esther, which commemorates the fast observed by the Jewish people during the *Purim* story, generally takes place the day before *Purim* (the 13th of *Adar*). The fast begins at dawn and ends at nightfall (see the *shul* calendar/announcements for exact times), but the custom is to wait until after the *Megilla* reading to break one's fast. If *Purim* falls on Sunday, then the fast takes place on the preceding Thursday. **Pregnant, nursing, and women within 30 days of childbirth** need not fast. The custom is to exempt **children** as well. One who is **ill and suffering** from fasting may break the fast. **Bathing** is allowed. The *poskim* differ as to whether it is permitted to **rinse one's mouth with water, mouthwash, or brush one's teeth**. One can rely on the view that mouthwash and tooth-brushing (including rinsing one's mouth with water afterwards) are allowed. One who has difficulty swallowing **medication** without water may drink the amount of water needed to swallow the medication.
3. **The Half-Shekel** -- Before *Megilla* reading, it is customary to donate three half-dollars to a *shul* (which you can find on the *shul's bima*) to remember the half-shekel that was given when the Temple stood. An individual acquires the half-dollars from the synagogue in exchange for other money. The individual then raises the half-dollars and donates them back to the charity. The head of the household often performs this custom as an agent for each family member.
4. **Date of Purim and Al HaNisim** -- With the exception of walled cities from the time of *Yehoshua* and Jerusalem, *Purim* is celebrated on the 14th day of *Adar* (*Adar II* during a leap year). *Al HaNisim* is added to *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Bircas HaMazon*. If forgotten, one does not repeat.
5. **Megilla Reading** -- Men, women and *chinuch*-age children are required to hear *Megilla* by **day and night**. One must hear the **entire reading** in its proper order from the beginning to the end. If one misses the beginning of the reading, he or she must hear the *entire* reading over again. If one **missed a word or phrase** from the *Baal Koreh*, he should read it immediately to himself and continue reading until caught up to the *Baal Koreh*. It is customary to make **noise** when Haman's name is mentioned. However, it should not be so noisy that the community cannot hear every word of the *Megilla* reading. **Three berachot** are recited by the *Chazan* for the entire congregation before the reading, and one after the reading is complete. Both the reader and the community should have the intent that the reader is fulfilling the mitzvah of reading the *Megilla* for the listener. Most authorities assume that the **morning Megilla reading is more important** than the evening. When the **shehecheyanu blessing** is recited before the morning reading, one should have in mind that this blessing refers to the *Megilla*, as well as the other *mitzvos* of the day (*i.e.*, the meal, charity to the poor, and food gifts to friends).
6. **The Purim Meal** -- It is a *mitzvah* to have a **sumptuous meal** on *Purim*, which includes wine, and, according to some authorities, meat as well (minimally fish). This feast must be held during the day **before sunset**, but after midday (except when *Purim* falls on Friday, the meal should be eaten early enough [preferably before midday] so as to have an appetite for the *Shabbos* meal). The miracle of *Purim* came about via **wine**. Thus, some have a custom to drink until they are slightly intoxicated. The more proper custom is to drink slightly more than one would normally drink so that one becomes sleepy and take a short nap. Thereby, one fulfills the requirement to drink on *Purim* until one no longer knows the difference between "cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai." It is **forbidden to actually become drunk**.
7. **Gifts to the Poor** -- Every individual is required to give at least **two gifts to two poor people** on the day of *Purim* itself. We collect for charities in Israel and America, which distribute food to thousands of families on *Purim*. Each gift to the poor should be a minimum of \$3.00 (*i.e.*, \$6.00 in total). On *Purim*, if an individual approaches claiming the need for charity, one should give without evaluating whether that person is in fact deserving.
8. **Mishloach Manos (gifts to friends)** -- On *Purim* day, every individual (including *chinuch*-age children) must send a gift consisting of a minimum of two different foods to a friend, which can be eaten without further preparation. A **mourner** should send only one non-elaborate gift.