





**This year Purim begins on Motzai Shabbat (Saturday night March 11th). Accordingly, certain aspects of our observance of the Purim holiday will differ this year from past years. These differences are highlighted below:**

1. **Charity In Commemoration Of the Half Shekel** – Normally, on the afternoon before Purim, one gives money to charity in commemoration of the half shekel that was given when the Temple stood. This year, in light of the fact that the afternoon before Purim is Shabbat, the custom is to commemorate the half shekel at minchah on the Fast of Esther. (If one was unable to fulfill the commemoration of the half shekel at minchah on the Fast of Esther one can fulfill his or her obligation at shacharit Purim morning).

There are numerous customs concerning this obligation. In some places only men above the age of twenty donate, in others men over the age of thirteen. In some places women also donate, and also charity is given in the name of the children, and even pregnant women donate for their unborn child. One who gave one year should continue to donate in following years, unless the custom was begun explicitly for a limited time (and so it is correct to give bli neder - without this being an obligation).

Ashkenazim customarily give three half dollars. In shul three half dollars will be placed on a tray, each person then buys the coins by placing an amount of money in the tray (even less than the value of the special coins), and acquiring the coins by lifting them up. These half dollars are then donated back to charity by replacing them on the tray "in commemoration of the half shekel", to be used by the next person. One should be careful not to say that the donation is for "the half shekel" as it is forbidden to donate to the Temple in our days, but rather one should say "in commemoration of the half shekel". Sephardim are accustomed to give the value of 9.6 grams of silver (according to the current market value).

2. **Reading the Megilla** – The Megilla will be read Motzai Shabbat not before 6:45 (please make every effort to arrive promptly as one must hear every word of the Megilla). **Women and children who are leaving from home following the conclusion of Shabbat should be careful (i) not to prepare for Purim (including preparing costumes and noisemakers for use Saturday night) prior to the conclusion of Shabbat and (ii) to recite "baruch hamavdil beyn kodesh l'chol" prior to performing any activities otherwise forbidden on Shabbat.**

3. **Mishloach Manot - Sending of Portions** – Everybody is obligated to send at least two portions to one Jew. This can only be fulfilled during the day and not the night. Ideally, each member of the household should send mishloach manot and not rely on that which their spouse has sent; and so too the children in the family should send their own portions, and not rely on the head of the household. One should educate even small children in this, as well as the other mitzvot of Purim. As in past years, considerable time and effort has been invested coordinating a community wide mishloach manot program. This program serves as a fund raiser for the shul and has many ancillary benefits including, but not limited to, (i) ensuring mishloach manot are sent in a respectful and appropriate manner (ii) allowing individuals to send mishloach manot to the entire shul without delivering mishloach manot to the entire shul and (iii) allowing for instant reciprocity. To fulfill the technical obligation of mishloach manot each portion should be something fit for consumption as is (without further cooking). The two portions also should be different from each other; however it is enough that they have different tastes, such as two types of cake, or two different types of meat etc. (and they do not have to have separate blessings). One should send portions that are fittingly substantial (both in the eyes of the giver and in the eyes of the receiver).

4. **Matanot LeEvyonim – Gifts to the Poor** – Every person is obligated to give charity to two poor Jews. This can only be fulfilled during the day and not the night, though one can give the money to a messenger any time before Purim day in order that the messenger give the money to the poor during the day of Purim itself.

**It is better to increase one's gifts to the poor, rather than increasing the amounts of Mishloach Manot and the size of one's Purim Meal.** This is because there is no greater joy than to gladden the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widow, and the stranger. In gladdening the hearts of the needy, one acts in accordance with G-d Himself, as it says "To enliven the spirit of the lowly, and to enliven the hearts of the downtrodden" – Rambam.

The amount donated must at a minimum be equal to a "prutah" {a minimal coin} and can be money or food. However it is proper to increase ones gifts to the poor both in the amount of money and the amount of poor people being given to, and at a minimum one should donate at least \$10 each to two individuals (as a respectable festive meal in a Teaneck establishment likely costs at a minimum approximately \$10). One should not be particular on Purim, and should give to all who request. However in order to ensure that one fulfills the essential mitzvah, one should guarantee that one gives to at least two bona fide poor. (The best way to ensure this is to appoint a trustworthy charity collector as ones messenger to deliver the money on their behalf).

Each family member should give themselves, and not rely on the charity given by the head of the family. One may not use Ma'aser (Tithe) money for the primary fulfillment of this mitzvah.

One who is in a place where there are no Jewish poor, should set the money aside in order to give to poor at a latter time.

5. **The Purim Meal** – Every person, both men and women, are obligated to have a festive meal on Purim day. It is the custom to eat bread at this meal.

6. **Alcoholic Consumption** - The Talmud records that "One is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim, until one cannot distinguish between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordechai'". **There are many opinions about this statement, but all agree that it is forbidden to become intoxicated to the point of rowdiness, and profane stupidity. All the more so one is forbidden to break any commandments, or forget to fulfill any religious obligations.** The custom in most houses in Israel is to drink more wine (and other spirits) than usual until one reaches, through this, a stage of happiness of the festival, and gratitude to God. (Some are accustomed to fall asleep due to the more than normal quantity of wine, and thus reach a state [asleep] of being unable to distinguish between Haman and Mordechai). This mitzvah applies only to men, though in some places women drink a small amount of wine in honor of the holiday – but they are not obligated in becoming intoxicated.

Chag Sameach!!

Rabbi Halpert