

## **Parshas Zachor**

The special pre-Purim Torah reading that commands us to remember and eradicate the evil of Amalek is read in Shul on the Shabbos before Purim.

Since this is a time-bound Mitzva, the majority of authorities maintain that **women** are not obligated in hearing this Torah reading. While many have the custom to come hear Parshas Zachor and it is meritorious to do so, if it is a hardship, women need not feel obligated to come. It is commendable for those staying home to read the passage (Devarim 25:17-19) from a Chumash.

## **Halacha Guidelines**

### **Half-Shekel**

There is a custom to give three half-dollars to charity at the Mincha services on Ta'anis Esther (February 25). This is often done by lifting and replacing the half-dollars provided in exchange for charity. Note that the custom may be fulfilled by simply giving charity, and one is not required to handle the designated coins. If one was not able to fulfill this before Purim, one should do so on Purim day or at some point in the month of Adar. Money set aside for charity (ma'aser) should not be used to fulfill this custom.

### **Eating Before Megillah**

Unless one feels weak, the Fast of Esther should not be broken until after hearing Megillah. If one is not hearing Megillah until later in the evening, snacking other than significant amounts of cakes and cookies (*mezonos* foods) is permissible. However, a full meal should not be eaten until after one hears Megillah. Alternatively, if one arranges for a person to remind them to hear Megillah, they may eat freely.

### **Reading the Megillah**

Both men and women are obligated to hear the Megillah. Children who are old enough to understand the meaning of the holiday should also hear the Megillah. The Megillah is so important that even Torah study is deferred to hear the reading! These are some selected laws related to Megillah:

-It is read twice -- first at night, and again the next day. The time for the night reading is from nightfall (tzais hakochavim) until dawn (alos hashachar). The time for the daytime reading is from sunrise (Netz HaChamah) to sunset. Post facto, the daytime reading may be read from daybreak (alos hashachar). Similarly, post facto it may also be read after sunset as long as the reading is concluded before nightfall. However, in that case, the blessings may not be recited.

-Because of the concept of B'rov Am Hadras Melech ("With the multitude of the nation is the King honored", Proverbs 14:28), it is preferable to hear the Megillah at a shul with a large number of people.

We recite three blessings before reading. The blessings should be said standing (even when reading for an individual). If one accidentally omitted the blessings, or entered shul after they were recited, but before the Megillah reading began, he has still fulfilled his obligation to hear Megillah.

-When the "sheh-hecheyanu" blessing is recited in the daytime, one should have in mind that it includes the mitzvos of Matanos La'evyonim (gifts to the poor), Mishloach Manos (gifts of food to others), and the Purim meal.

-Unless one is following along in a kosher Megillah, he may not read along with the reader, but should listen quietly and follow in a printed book. It is forbidden to speak during the reading. To fulfill one's obligation to hear the Megillah, one mustn't miss even a single word. If an individual word or phrase is not heard, one should read the missing words to oneself and catch up to the reader.

-The Talmud says that the names of all ten sons of Haman (and the following word, "aseres", 9:6) should be read audibly in one breath. There is an opinion that each individual should read this verse in one breath, since the reader cannot fulfill others' requirement of "one breath." The custom is also to include the three words ("chamesh me'os ish") which precede the ten sons in the one breath as well, if possible.

-After the Megillah reading, we recite the blessing "harav es riveinu", thanking G-d for saving us. This blessing should be said only with a minyan. (If there is no minyan, it may be said without G-d's name.) After the night reading, we continue the Maariv service with the recitations of: Uva Li-Tzion, Alenu, Kaddish, and the liturgical poem, Shoshanas Yaakov.

### **Purim Seuda**

The Purim Seudah is held during the daytime. On normal years, some have the custom to extend the meal until after dark. Even if the meal finishes after dark, we still include the paragraph of Al HaNissim in bentching. One is obligated to drink until he can no longer distinguish between Arur Haman (cursed is Haman) and Baruch Mordechai (Blessed is Mordechai). The Rama rules that this can be done by drinking more than usual and taking a nap. However, many follow the custom to fulfill this obligation literally by become drunk in celebration of G-d's miracles and blessings. However, one should not become so drunk that he will be negligent in performing mitzvos -- e.g. Netilas Yadayim (washing hands before bread), saying the blessings of "HaMotzi" and bentching, and praying Mincha and Ma'ariv. It is improper to recite bentching or pray if a person is so drunk that he is "unfit to stand before the King."

### **Purim Seuda on Erev Shabbos**

It is best to begin the Purim Seuda before Halachic midday (12:50pm), but certainly no later than 4:20pm. The Seuda should ideally include bread, meat and wine.

### **Mishloach Manos**

The mitzvah is accomplished by sending two different ready-to-eat food items to one friend; both foods may have the same *beracha*. Each of the foods should be a somewhat substantial portion. Most people deliver many additional packages and this is indeed commendable and a wonderful display of goodwill and friendship, fitting the Purim themes of joy and unity. However, especially this year when Covid restrictions call for extra precautions, please consider contributing extra money to Tzedakah in lieu of delivering extra or extravagant Mishloach Manos. Note that Mishloach Manos should not be given directly to someone in mourning.

### **Matanos L'evyonim**

Matanos La'evyonim is fulfilled by giving money to at least two poor people on the day of Purim. It is proper for each gift to equal the value of a small meal. Matanos La'evyonim is a special mitzvah, and may not be fulfilled from the amount of money a

person sets aside for charity during the rest of the year (ma'aser). However, ma'aser money may be used for any donation beyond the minimum two gifts. The Rambam writes that it is better to spend more on this mitzvah than on Mishloach Manos and the festive Purim meal. He explains that the greatest happiness comes when one gives joy to those less fortunate.

*[Click here](#) to give Matanos L'evyonim through the Rabbi's Charity Fund.*