

# QUEENS JEWISH CENTER



## PURIM 5781

### HALACHIC GUIDE



COMPILED BY  
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Dear QJC Family,

A servant of Achashverosh named Charvona came up with the idea to hang Haman on the gallows he made for Haman. For this, he is dubbed **חרבונה זכור לטוב** – Charvona, remembered for good. Well, can you guess who his evil twin brother must have been? (See the end...)

While this note will contain a lot of halachic details for Purim, we should not lose sight of the fact that Purim is a holiday of pure simcha (joy). It is a holiday commemorating the past, but it is relevant to our lives today as well. It is well known that there is no mention of God in the Megillah. What is less known is that Chazal, the Sages, discussed whether Esther was even written with ruach ha-kodesh (divine spirit). The name “Esther” has the same root as “hidden.” The theme of this holiday is that Hashem’s presence is often hidden. Yet, when we look at the accomplishments of the Jewish people, our perseverance, and especially the modern-day miracle of the State of Israel, we have a lot to be joyous for!

### Shabbat Zachor

The Shabbat of February 20, 2021 is Shabbat Zachor, in which we read the section in the Torah that commands us to remember what Amalek did to us and to obliterate its memory. We read this section before Purim because Haman was a descendent of Amalek. Although it is considered one of the “Four Parshiyot,” in which we read a special maftir, this one is unique because it is considered to be a biblical commandment to hear this Torah portion read. All adult Jews are included in this obligation.

In the main shul, we plan to read Parashat Zachor at around 10:00 am.

- For those who are not comfortable coming into shul, we will have an outdoor reading at around 10:45 am following the conclusion of the main shul minyan.
- If it rains, a reading will be arranged via Zoom during the week of Purim and will be announced at that point. Please speak with Rabbi Kerbel with any questions, concerns, or requests for accommodations.
- If you are not able to hear Zachor on Shabbat, it is still advisable to read it from the Chumash (Devarim 25:17-19).
  - If you are able to come to shul by Parashat Ki Teitzei, it would also be appropriate to have in mind to fulfill your obligation when hearing the leining in shul at that time.

## Machatzit Ha-Shekel

The act of giving a half shekel precedes Purim historically and was connected with the Mishkan/Beit Ha-Mikdash. However, we commemorate the annual giving of the half shekel on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, the day before Purim. One reason we do so is so that our shekel will precede Haman's, who bet against us.

The custom is to give three halves of the locale's currency unit. Therefore, we give three half dollars. We pick up the three half dollars and say "Zecher l'machatzit ha-shekel" (in commemoration of the half shekel), and then one can donate whatever sum of tzedakah they please. You do not need to pick up the coins in order to perform the custom.

## Ta'anit Esther

Ta'anit Esther (the fast of Esther) falls on Thursday, February 25, 2021. The fast begins at 5:15 am. Shacharit at QJC will be at 6:10 am, in which we will say *selichot*.

- If you do not daven with a minyan, remember to add Avinu Malkeinu at both Shacharit and to add Aneinu at Mincha.
  - For *selichot*, those davening at home may include selichos but should say the 13 middos with Torah trope and include the entirety of the pesukim (Shemos 34:6-7).
- We do not say Tachanun or Avinu Malkeinu at Mincha.
- Mincha is scheduled for 5:10 pm.

The fast ends at 6:20 pm. However, it is best to wait until after the reading of the Megillah in order to eat. Those who are ill or find it difficult to eat may break the fast before hearing the reading of the Megillah (although one should be careful to not miss the reading).

Ta'anit Esther is not one of the four fasts commemorating the events leading up to the destruction of the Beit Ha-Mikdash, which were instituted in the book of Zechariah. It is not commanded in Megillat Esther, nor is it found in the Talmud. Therefore, this is the public fast during which we are most lenient.

- Anyone who is ill or experiencing considerable pain (even if not technically "ill") does not need to fast.
- Pregnant women past 40 days of conception and women who have given birth in the past two years do not need to fast.
- While this fast may be less binding in nature than other ones, it has longstanding practice and should be upheld by everyone who is able.

Brushing teeth and showering is permitted.

The Fast of Esther commemorates the fast that the Jews undertook at the time of Haman's decree. Because of Esther's initiating the fast, it is named for her. While Purim commemorates the joy of the victory, the fast reminds us of the process that got the Jews to the miracle.

### Al Ha-Nissim

We say Al Ha-Nissim on Purim in the Shemoneh Esrei and Birkat Ha-Mazon. There is no special addition in Beracha Me'ein Shalosh/Al Ha-Michya.

If one forgets Al Ha-Nissim, one does not repeat the Amidah/Birkat Ha-Mazon. However, if one remembers before making the concluding blessing (ha-tov shimcha or al ha-aretz), one can go back and say Al Ha-Nissim. If one remembers before taking three steps back, one may say Al Ha-Nissim integrated with Elohai Netzor.

### Megillah Reading

We read Megillah twice on Purim — once at night and once during the day. Both are equally obligatory. Although it is a positive time bound mitzvah, women must hear Megillah because women are included in the miracle of Purim.

The time for reading Megillah at night is after the emergence of three stars until dawn. The Megillah can be read during the day from sunrise until sunset.

- At QJC, there will be Megillah readings at 6:10 pm and 9:00 pm.
- During the day, Shacharis is at 6:15 am (followed by Megillah reading at 6:45 am) and a second Megillah reading will be followed by Megillah reading at 10:00 am.

Ideally, everyone should hear Megillah read in-person, as hearing through an electronic device does not halachically constitute "hearing." For those who are not able to come to shul at this time, there are a few options available:

- If you would like to arrange to have some read Megillah for you in a safe way at your home, please be in touch with me.
- If you are able to acquire a kosher Megillah, you can listen to a livestream or recording of the Megillah while saying the words along with the reader. Recordings are available [online](#).
- If none of these options are available, you may listen to Megillah through the QJC Zoom, which will be available at the first readings both night and day.

It is imperative to hear the entire Megillah being read. One should be careful not to engage in any conversation while the Megillah is read. If one misses a word or a few words, one can read the part missed and catch up quickly. While we encourage the appropriate “booing” and the like of Haman, we should also ensure that it is quiet enough through the rest of the reading for everyone to hear.

We make three blessings before and one after. One is on the mitzvah of reading Megillah. The next praises Hashem for the miracles performed for our ancestors (like we say on Chanukah). The last is Shehechianu. When saying Shehechianu during the day, one should have in mind the other mitzvot of the day – the feast, Mishloach Manot, and Matanot La’Evyonim. One should not say “Baruch Hu U’Varuch Shemo” during the blessings. One who is reading Megillah without a minyan does not make the bracha that comes after the reading.

During the blessings, one should have in mind to fulfill their obligation of hearing Megillah through the reader.

Men should wear tefillin through Megillah Reading, as the phrase “Layehudim hayeta orah v’simcha v’sasson vikar” refers to the glory expressed through wearing tefillin.

Reading the Megillah is considered itself to be Hallel. As we read/hear it, we keep in mind our abundant gratitude for our continued salvation in exile!

Remember: there is no age limit for dressing up in costume!

### Matanot La’evyonim

It is a mitzvah for all adult Jews to give one “gift” to two individuals who are in need (i.e. one gift per person). Those who do not have enough income for the year to sustain themselves or their family are considered an *ani* for this purpose. This can be accomplished through giving money or food. The amount should be enough to have bread or another equivalent need for the Purim feast.

On Purim, we do not verify who is in need. All who extend their hand are entitled to receive.

Matanot La’evyonim is a mitzvah that applies during the day.

One can fulfill the mitzvah through appointing someone else. Rabbi Shmuel Gold will be collecting on behalf of Tomchei Shabbos, and they will distribute on Purim. You can either give him a check before Purim, or you can donate directly online at [www.tsqinc.org](http://www.tsqinc.org).

One should not use ma'aser money set aside for tzedakah for the rest of the year for the purpose of Matanot La'evyonim, but once one has gone beyond the minimum required for the mitzvah, one can use ma'aser money.

It is praiseworthy to give the equivalent of what one would spend on Purim Seudah and/or Mishloach Manot for this mitzvah. Especially this year, when we have fewer guests at our tables for seudah, it is a good opportunity to give extra for this mitzvah. As we increase our own simcha (joy) on Purim, Rambam writes that there is no greater and splendid joy than to uplift the poor.

### Mishloach Manot

It is also a mitzvah for all adult Jews to give Mishloach Manot on Purim. To fulfill the mitzvah, one gives another person two food items that are slightly different. Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon notes that even two different types of chicken or two different types of cake would count. The food should constitute something respectable that one would give to a guest in one's home. The items that one gives should be ready for consumption at the time of giving.

The mitzvah of Mishloach Manot is done during the day.

Please note that while the Mishloach Manot ordered through shul achieves the goal of increasing camaraderie among shul membership, one should still deliver personal Mishloach Manot to another individual in order to fulfill the mitzvah.

If you would like to support Israel in sending your personal Mishloach Manot, please visit [www.achi613.org/achi-market/purim](http://www.achi613.org/achi-market/purim).

In delivering mishloach manot, please be sensitive to the recipient's needs regarding COVID-19 precautions. At the same time, there is a great opportunity to use mishloach manot to bring joy to others.

### Seudah

Because the miracle of Purim was salvation from political annihilation, we celebrate through eating and drinking. One of the mitzvot of the day is to have a festive meal during the day with friends and family (of course, this year, indoor gatherings are unfortunately still not recommended). The meal should be full of joy; of course, that joy should be directed towards showing our gratitude to Hashem and the meal should include discussion of the story of Purim.

It is recommended that this meal include bread and meat, but not all authorities require either of these.

“Mishteh,” feasting, is a common theme in the Megillah, and the word itself implies the drinking of wine. It is therefore appropriate to drink wine (you are not “yotzei” through drinking beer, even if it is the Corona brand!). One should be careful to practice complete safety while drinking and should refrain from drinking and driving. The wine we drink should bring us extra joy but should also not be an impediment from bringing holiness to our tables.

Because Purim this year falls on a Friday, one should eat seudah in the late morning, starting before 12:08 PM. Doing so will enable us to eat an appropriate Shabbat meal.

There is a common thread between these four mitzvot: community and camaraderie. We come together en masse to hear Megillah; we give each other gifts; we ensure that those who are often overlooked receive their needs; and we eat a meal together with family and friends. Haman said that “there is a nation that is scattered and divided” — but we demonstrate not just our unity but our amity as the Jewish people. Our experiences this last year have taught us the importance of helping each other, and our Purim experiences this year should continue to contribute to bringing joy to our fellow Jews.

It was astonishing for me to go back to the guide I prepared last year and see certain instructions for Purim related to COVID-19, “in case” one would be exposed at that time. Here we are a year later, and many of these questions that felt theoretical at the time are very real this year. As hidden and unknown as our salvation may feel right now, may we soon see merit a “v’nahafoch hu” — Hashem’s overturning the horrible pandemic.

(And Charvona’s evil twin brother, of course, is **קורונה זכור לרע** — Corona, which will forever be remembered as infamous and wicked! May he be forever banished from our Purim seudot in coming years!)

,hcaemaS miruP

Rabbi Judah Kerbel