



## **Laws and Customs of Purim 5785 | March 13 - 14, 2025**

*Purim is a rabbinic holiday celebrating the Jewish people's chance to defend themselves against their adversaries, and rejoicing in the greatness of Jewish leaders Mordekhai and Esther. The astounding reversal of fortune of the Jews makes it a great day of reversals and unbridled joy. Following is a guide to the basic laws of the day from Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim 686-697 and commentaries. If you have any questions, please ask a member of our Rabbinic Team. **PURIM SAMEACH! HAPPY PURIM!***

### **Parshat Zakhor**

The Shabbat preceding Purim (**March 8th**) is designated as Shabbat Zakhor, for the special *Maftir* reading of the passage (Deut. 25:17-19) obligating us to remember that which Amalek did to our people. Many consider hearing this portion a Biblical mandate, and all are especially encouraged to be in shul to hear it. We have multiple readings available in case you are not able to hear it during the main Tefillot on Shabbat.

### **Ta'anit Esther**

Purim is preceded by Ta'anit Esther, the Fast of Esther. This year *Ta'anit Esther* is observed on Thursday, **March 13**. Please click [here](#) for more details about *Ta'anit Esther*.

### **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. These funds were collected in order to have a new account from which to fund communal sacrifices for the new Temple year, which began the following month in Nisan. It is customary to give the half-shekel **before** Purim, therefore we generally put out the baskets on *Erev Purim* (generally *Taanit Esther*) prior to Mincha. Others posit that it should be given on Purim morning, therefore we put out the baskets on Purim day as well.

At shul you will find a bundle of three half-dollars. The standard currency of the local area stands in for the half shekel. We use three in recognition of the three times the word *terumah* – donation – is used in the Torah portion describing donations in Parashat Terumah. The custom is to lift the bundled coins to acquire them, and then place them back in the basket to return them to the shul. Traditionally, one puts some *tzedakah* in the basket as well.



## 4 Mitzvot (the 4 M's) of the Day

### 1) Mikra Megillah – Reading the Megillah

All Jewish adults are obligated to read Megillat Esther from a kosher scroll (*klaf*) at night (after nightfall) and also in the daytime. The mitzvah of reading the Megillah can also be fulfilled by listening to someone else reading it from a scroll.

Nighttime Megillah reading should be recited after nightfall (**7:45pm** this year), and daytime Megillah reading should be recited after sunrise (**7:09am** this year). In cases of great need, it can be read as early as daybreak (**5:48am** this year). Three *berakhot* (blessings) are made over this reading:

- *Al mikra megillah* (on reading the Megillah)
- *She'asah nissim* (Who performed miracles...)
- *Shehecheyanu* (Who has kept us alive...).

During the day, the *Shehecheyanu* applies to the other three mitzvot of the day as well. Another blessing is recited after the Megillah is read as well, thanking God for fighting our battles.

The Megillah tells an amazing story and does so with drama and richness. Many have the custom to bang and boo at the mentions of Haman's name. Some verses are read in sad melodies, and four verses are read aloud by the congregation. *We are continuing our tradition of reading two additional verses aloud this year in celebration of Esther's role in the miracle – Esther 2:7 and 9:32. Please take part in this custom which has been adopted in a number of prayer communities!*

Keeping in mind that it is halachically essential to hear **all** the words of the Megillah, **we ask that people stay quiet during the reading** and help those with them to do the same. If one misses a word or a few words, the best recourse is to read it quickly from the printed text in front of you and catch back up to the reader.

Part of the experience of the Megillah is to hear it with our community, and we enjoy having a full house to hear the reading together – *be-rov am hadrat melekh* – “more people increase the splendor of the King.” Hearing the Megillah in-person is also the preferred way to fulfill the mitzvah. Nonetheless, some people are unable to come to the Bayit to hear the reading, so we will be offering readings at elder facilities in the neighborhood as well as readings for the homebound. If one is unable to hear the Megillah in person, one can rely on some rabbinic authorities and fulfill the mitzvah by joining one of the Bayit Megillah readings via Zoom.

If you can take part in spreading Purim joy by reading Megillah for those unable to attend in-person, please email: [rabbanitbracha@thebayit.org](mailto:rabbanitbracha@thebayit.org).

\*\*Note: There will be a reading from a kosher Megillah **in English** on Purim day. One who does not understand Hebrew may fulfill the mitzvah by listening to the English version.



## 2) Matanot L'Evyonim - Gifts to the Poor

This ancient mitzvah was part of the very first celebration of Purim as described in the Megillah (9:22). It has been interpreted over the ages to be the giving of a minimum of functional currency to at least two people, who can then use it for their Purim food or other needs on Purim day. Therefore, this mitzvah should be performed on **Purim Day**.

**We have arranged that the money we collect at the Bayit through our Project Matanot L'Evyonim will enable you to fulfill this mitzvah. Click [here](#) to donate.**

A portion of these funds, together with any tzedakah you give to the rabbinic staff in advance of or on Purim, will be distributed in two locations:

- Rabbi Moshe Fuchs of Sons of Israel Pelham Parkway will be distributing funds in the Bronx.
- Carmei Ha'ir, a restaurant in Jerusalem, will be serving food to those in need.

Rambam, cited by later authorities, stresses that one should spend **more** money on this mitzvah than on the subsequent two, Mishloach Manot and Seudah (Rambam Megillah 2:17).

## 3) Mishloach Manot - Sending (food) Parcels

This mitzvah was also part of the very first celebrations of Purim as described in the Megillah (9:22). It has been interpreted over time to obligate sending two types of food to a friend. Some suggest that the ideal form of sending is through an agent – another friend or a child.

### **Please note:**

- The two food items may have the same blessings, or different blessings.
- The food items should be ready-to-eat and they do not need to be fancy.
- The mitzvah of Mishloach Manot is fulfilled when delivered on **Purim Day**.

The Bayit offers an opportunity to send Mishloach Manot to other community members. However, some of the Bayit Mishloach Manot will be delivered on Thursday (Purim night), and some on Friday (Purim Day). Therefore, we strongly advise that you give at least one package of two food items to a neighbor or friend on Purim Day in order to fulfill this mitzvah.

**\*\*Please be aware that our Project Matanot L'Evyonim does not fulfill your Mishloach Manot obligation.**



#### 4) Mishteh – Festive Meal

This mitzvah as well was part of the very first celebrations of Purim as described in the Megillah (9:22), and entails a celebratory meal. The meal is eaten specifically on Purim day. As this year Purim coincides with Erev Shabbat there are a number of options for eating the festive *seudah* (Peninei Halachah Zemanim p.355 ch 16:15)

##### 1) **Conclude the meal before Shabbat**

- a) If possible, begin the meal before the afternoon, in honor of Shabbat - you may even have the *seudah* for breakfast! For this preferred opinion, the majority of the meal should be eaten by *chatzot* (halakhic midday) - **1:05pm** this year.
- b) If the option above is not possible, it is best to complete the meal at least three hours before *shekiah* (by **4:01pm**). If that is not possible, it is best to begin eating any time before *shekiah* (**7:01pm**). If one begins the meal close to Shabbat, it is important to limit the amount of food in order to eat the Friday night meal with a good appetite.

##### 2) **Conclude the meal on Shabbat**

Alternatively, there is a custom to combine the Purim meal with the first Shabbat meal on Friday night which is referred to as *pores mappah umekadesh* (spread a cloth and make kiddush). Here is how to follow this custom:

- a) Daven Minchah and then begin the meal while it is still Purim.
- b) Approximately a half-hour before *shekiah* (**6:31pm**), accept Shabbat by lighting the Shabbat candles, reciting (or singing!) Kabbalat Shabbat, placing a covering over the bread, and reciting kiddush over wine. If you have already recited the blessing over wine (*hagafen*) during the Purim meal, omit that blessing in kiddush.
- c) After kiddush, continue the meal, making sure to eat a *keveitzah* of bread (50cc or app. the size of 2 golf balls), or at least a *kezayit* (25cc or app. the size of a golf ball), for the Shabbat meal. It is appropriate to have two whole loaves or rolls in honor of Shabbat, but no need to recite the blessing on the bread.
- d) At the end of the meal, recite *Retzei Vehachalitzeinu* in Birkat Hamazon, adding *Al Hanisim* in the *Harachaman* ("May the Merciful One") section at the end of the prayer. The language is as follows:  
**הרחמן הוא יעשה לנו מיסים כמו שעשה לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה**  
*Harachaman Hu Yaaseh Lanu Nissim Kemo Sheasa La'avoteinu Bayamim Haheim Bezman Haze*, and then continue with the Purim paragraph.
- e) After the meal, daven Maariv for Shabbat (without *Al Hanisim*).



The meal, like any festive Jewish meal, should include words of Torah – in the spirit of Purim 😊.

Some people particularly drink wine or other spirits to become intoxicated on this day. While the nature of this practice and its scope is the subject of significant debate, what is clear is that one who drinks should do so responsibly.

The joy of Purim is demonstrated with costumes and merriment. We have lots of festive programming at the Bayit in the night and day, and we welcome you to join us in laughter and song.

### **Special Notes Regarding Mourners**

Mourners are obligated in all the mitzvot of the day.

**Shiva:** Shiva on Purim and Shushan Purim is observed without outward signs of mourning: shoes may be made of leather, the torn shirt is replaced with a regular one, and the mourner does not sit on a low chair. Mourners may also attend shul services to hear Megillah. The mourners' festive Purim meal is more simple and without an especially large group.

Please note that formal shiva visits on both of these days are still permissible. For any questions or clarifications, please feel free to contact one of the clergy team.

**Mishloach Manot:** Although mourners are obligated to send Mishloach Manot, they should keep them simple. In general we refrain from sending Mishloach Manot to those in their year of mourning for a parent, or month of mourning (*shloshim*) for other close relatives. Rather, it is customary to send to the mourner's spouse or other family members. Please note that if a mourner receives a Mishloach Manot package, they may accept it.

### **Liturgy**

Hallel is not recited on Purim; although some say that the Megillah is a form of Hallel. *Al Hanisim* is recited in *Birkat Hamazon* (Blessing after Meals) and in the *Amidah* prayers. If forgotten, there is no need to repeat those prayers. *Tachanun* is omitted at Shacharit and Mincha, as are related prayers. The Torah is read on Purim morning, telling the story of the war with Amalek (Ex. 17:8-16).

### **Shushan Purim**

In recognition of the Jews of Shushan who defended themselves on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of Adar and rested on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the day of the 15<sup>th</sup> is commemorated as Shushan Purim. We mark it by omitting Tachanun and the related prayers as extra joy is associated with this day.

**Note:** In Jerusalem only, Purim is celebrated on **Shushan Purim**, (this year is celebrated as *Purim Meshulash*, Friday-Shabbat-Sunday).

