

How to Celebrate Purim - 5779:

Purim is celebrated this year on Wednesday evening March 20th and Thursday March 21st.

1 – Fast of Esther:

1. The fast is on Wednesday, February 28th.
2. **The fast begins at 5:55 A.M. and ends at 8:20 P.M. Those who find fasting very difficult may eat at 8:05 P.M. One who finds it will be difficult to concentrate on Megilah reading may end the fast at 8:13 P.M.**
3. All adult males and females over Bar/Bat Mitzvah are obligated to fast.
4. Pregnant and Nursing women are exempt from fasting.
5. A person who is ill [even if it is not serious] is not permitted to fast.
6. One should not fast even if one only has a severe headache.
7. Children under bar/bat Mitzvah do not need to fast even for a few hours. Nevertheless, they should not be given treats.
8. You may take medications prescribed by a doctor. One, who has difficulty swallowing pills without water, may drink the amount of water required to swallow them.
9. One may rinse the mouth only if bad taste causes discomfort. Only a small amount of liquid should be used while leaning forwards in order to minimize the chance of it being swallowed.
10. One is permitted to eat before the fast, provided that one explicitly states before going to sleep that he/she plans to wake up early to eat before the fast begins.
11. Bathing is permitted even with hot water.
12. It is permitted to listen to music.
13. The special “Aneinu” prayer is said during the Mincha Amida by those who are fasting.
14. “Avinu Malkeinu” is said during Shacharis. **It is not said at Mincha.**

2 - The Half Shekel:

1. On the Fast of Esther [usually around Mincha time], there is a custom to give three coins to charity. Each coin should be the denomination of ½ the standard currency in that country [e.g. ½ a dollar].
2. If one does not have the correct coins, he should purchase them [**optimally for approximately \$15**] from the charity box, and then put them back into the charity box.
3. All adult males are obliged in this Mitzvah. The custom is that a father gives on behalf of his sons, whatever their ages.
4. The custom is that women are not obliged to give.
5. The money collected should be given to the poor.
6. If one forgot to give it on Erev Purim, he should give the money on Purim morning before the Megilah reading.
7. One may not use his “Ma’aser [charity] money” to fulfill this Mitzvah.

3 – Prayers on Purim:

1. We recite the “Al Hanisim” prayer during all 3 Amidas and for Birchas Hamazon. If one forgets to say it, he need not repeat the Amida or Birchas Hamazon.
2. “Tachanun” and “Lamenatzeach” are omitted during Shacharis.
3. The Torah is read during Shacharis – before the Megilah reading.
4. One should not pray while dressed in a costume. One must dress respectfully during davening.
5. If a person is intoxicated to the extent that he would not be able to speak respectfully to an important official, he may not pray. If he is only slightly intoxicated, to the extent that he would be able to speak respectfully to an important official, it is nonetheless not correct to pray. However, the custom is to be lenient and allow prayer in this state, although ideally he should wait until he is sober.

4- Work on Purim:

1. All forms of work are permitted on the evening of Purim.

2. **The custom is to prohibit going to work on the day of Purim. The Rabbis of the Talmud tell us that whoever works on Purim will not see any blessing from it.**
3. Work is permitted in the following situations:
 - If not working will cause financial loss
 - Work that is necessary for a Mitzvah
 - Work that is required for Purim
4. One may ask a non-Jew to do all forms of work for the Jew.
5. Laundering is prohibited unless the clothes are necessary for Purim.
6. It is permitted to shave or take a haircut if it is done in order to look presentable on Purim itself.
7. It is forbidden to cut one's nails.
8. **The custom is to wear Shabbos clothes on Purim. One should keep his Shabbos clothes on through the evening of Purim while hearing the Megilah.**

5 – Reading /Hearing the Megilah:

1. Men and women over bar/bat Mitzvah are obligated to hear the Megilah twice – one time at night and one time in the morning.
2. Children **who are mature enough to listen attentively** to the Megilah reading should do so. Preferably, such children should be brought to hear the public reading. However, **they must be properly supervised during the reading** and should understand that they have not been brought to Shul simply for the fun of banging at Haman. **Young children who are likely to cause a disturbance and prevent others from hearing the Megilah should not brought to Shul for Megilah reading.**
3. **The earliest time to read the Megilah is after nightfall – 6:55 P.M. The earliest correct time to read the Megilah in the morning is after sunrise – 6:54 A.M.** The Megilah can be read all day long until sunset.
4. Before reading or listening to the Megilah one should have in mind that they are fulfilling the Mitzvah of reading or hearing the Megilah. Additionally, the reader should have in mind to include all the listeners who wish to fulfill their obligation.
5. Three blessings are made by the reader before reading the Megilah in the evening and in the morning:
 - “Al Mikra Megilah”
 - “She’asa Nisim”
 - “Shehechyanu”
6. One should stand when saying or hearing the blessings.
7. When listening to the blessings, you should have in mind that you are fulfilling your obligation. When hearing the “Shehechyanu” blessing in the day, one should have in mind to include all the special Mitzvos of Purim. The reader should have in mind that he is reciting the blessings on behalf of the entire congregation.
8. If a person arrives to Shul in the middle of the blessings:
 - If there is sufficient time, he should quickly say the blessings himself, taking care that they are completed before the reading begins.
 - If there is insufficient time to say all the blessings, he should say as many of the blessings that he can.
 - If there is not enough time to recite any of the blessings, he should preferably attend another reading where the blessings will be heard.
 - If this is very inconvenient, he may listen to the Megilah without hearing the blessings.
9. A special blessing is made after the evening Megilah reading in the presence of a Minyan. “Shoshanas Yaakov” is sung after the Megilah reading.
10. The listeners may sit during the reading of the Megilah. The reader should stand when reading to a minyan, but may lean if necessary.
11. **One must hear every word of the Megilah. If a person missed even one word he has not fulfilled his obligation. Therefore, it is mandatory to arrive on time for Megilah reading.**
12. If a person did not hear some words, he should immediately say the words himself. However, this creates a problem since the reader continues to read the Megilah while the person is saying the missed words, thereby causing him to miss further words. Therefore, he must say the missed words and continue reading until he overtakes the reader, at which point he may resume listening.
13. It is forbidden for both the reader and listener to speak from the beginning of the first blessing until the end of the after blessing. Parents must be aware of this when bringing young children to the reading.
14. There are four verses of the Megilah which are read out loud before the reader. They are the following:

- Chapter 2, verse 5
 - Chapter 8, verse 15
 - Chapter 8, verse 16.
 - Chapter 10, verse 3
15. In addition, it is customary for the congregation to say the names of the ten sons of Haman out loud.
 16. It is a time honored tradition to bang / make noise every time the name of Haman is mentioned in the Megilah. **Nevertheless, excessive noise and tumult should be discouraged since this often prevents people from hearing clearly.**
 17. In order to enhance the Mitzvah and make greater publicity of the miracle, both men and women should make every effort to attend a public reading in Shul. Even if one can organize a minyan at home, it is better to join the congregation.
 18. If it is impossible for a person to attend Shul, he must hear the Megilah read at home from a Kosher Megilah.

6 – “Matanos Le’Evyonim” – Gifts to the Poor:

1. One must give one gift each to at least two poor people. The gift may be either money or food. The Mitzvah should be performed on Purim during the daytime. It is preferable to do it after the Megilah reading without delay.
2. One may give money to a charity collector before Purim if the charity collector will distribute the money to the poor people only on the day of Purim for the purpose of fulfilling this Mitzvah.
3. Each person should be given at least the amount of food that is eaten at a regular meal or the amount of money required to buy this. [approximately \$25 per poor person]
4. It is recommended to give more than this minimum amount of money and amount of poor people. **It is better to spend more on this Mitzvah than on the other Mitzvos of Purim.**
5. A check may be given if it can be easily exchanged for cash.
6. “Ma’aser [charity] Money” may be used for any of these donations, except for the minimum two gifts [valued at \$50.]
7. Women and children over bar/bat Mitzvah are also obligated in this Mitzvah. Although a married woman may rely on her husband to give on her behalf, nevertheless it is preferable for her to perform the Mitzvah personally. The same applies for the children. A practical solution would be to do the following: The husband could give some money to a poor person or charity collector stating that it is on behalf of his wife. The poor person / charity collector should have in mind to acquire the money on behalf of the woman, and she should know that the procedure is being used for her. The same applies for the adult children.
8. Children aged six or seven should be trained to perform this Mitzvah. The above methods can be used as well for them.

7 – “Mishloach Manos” – Sending Food:

1. On the day of Purim, one must send two items of food to at least one person. It is praiseworthy to send to many people, but see 6:4 above.
2. Preferably, one should send food that is ready to be eaten immediately
3. The two food items must be different. However, it is not necessary for the items to require two different blessings. Drinks are also suitable. One may send two different food items or two different drinks, or one food and one drink.
4. The food should be a respectable quantity according to the standards of the sender and recipient. Therefore, one should send a nicer package to a wealthy person than to a poor person, and a wealthy person should send a nicer package than a poor person.
5. One should send at least one nice package to one person and any additional packages may be ‘token’ packages. This is better than only sending a large number of small ‘token’ packages.
6. One is not permitted to use his “Ma’aser [charity] money” for this Mitzvah. If a person wishes to send several packages to poor people he may use his “Ma’aser money” for all but the first package.
7. Women and children over Bar/Bat Mitzvah are obligated in this Mitzvah.
8. According to some opinions, a package may be sent on behalf of the entire family. That package should have two food items for every family member sending the package. According to another opinion, only a husband

and wife can send together, but children should send on their own. If children prepare their own packages from food in their parents' home, they should be allowed to acquire the food before sending it.

9. Children aged six or seven should be trained to perform the Mitzvah.
- 10. It is praiseworthy to send packages to Jews who know little about Torah. This will arouse their interest in Jewish practices and increase love and friendship between Jews. In a similar vein, this is an ideal opportunity to repair broken relationships by sending packages to people with whom one has ill feeling.**
11. One may not send a package to a mourner. If another family member is not in mourning, the package may be addressed to the family.
12. A mourner is obligated to send one package, but the package should not be too elaborate.
13. If a person receives a package, it is praiseworthy to reciprocate and send one in return, but it is not an obligation.
14. According to the prevalent custom, one may give the package personally. According to some opinions, it is preferable to send the package via a third person. One may use a child as a messenger, but must confirm that the package was delivered. A reliable delivery service may be used.
15. Anonymous packages should be avoided. The recipient should know who has sent them the package.

8 – “Seudas Purim” – Feasting & Rejoicing:

1. The main Mitzvah is to have a festive meal on the day of Purim. In addition, one should have a nicer meal than usual on the evening of Purim.
2. The table should be set nicely for the evening meal. Some have a custom to light candles.
3. There is a custom to eat seeds and pod foods such as rice, peas, and beans. It is not necessary to eat bread at this meal.
4. It is customary to eat “Hamantashen” with a filling made of poppy-seed. It is also customary to eat “kreplach.”
5. The prevalent custom is to eat bread and beef at the daytime meal.
6. Some women have a custom to drink a little wine in honor of the day. It is not necessary for children to drink wine.
7. One should set a spiritual tone for this meal by doing the following:
 - Spend a little time studying Torah before the meal. There is a special Mitzvah to begin studying the laws of Pesach on Purim.
 - Have in mind that eating the meal is a Mitzvah.
 - Relate the Purim miracles and sing praise to Hashem during the meal.
8. It is a Mitzvah for men to drink wine. According to some opinions there is an obligation to become drunk until he can no longer distinguish between ‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordechai.’ According to other opinions, one is only requisite to drink more than the usual, but not to the point of getting drunk. One should then go to sleep and thereby be unable to distinguish between ‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordechai.’
- 9. The Sages certainly did not want people to make a fool of themselves and behave with frivolity and disgrace. The intention is to come closer to Hashem, using joy to reach great heights of love and praise for Hashem. A person who knows that intoxication will prevent him from making blessings or praying properly, or will lead him to light-headedness, should follow the second opinion. Everything that one does should be purely for the sake of Heaven.**
10. It is preferable to fulfill this Mitzvah by drinking wine only. A person who wishes may have other alcoholic drinks after some wine.
11. The main obligation is to drink during the festive meal. If a person wishes to fulfill the Mitzvah by sleeping, he should drink a little wine during the meal and go to sleep after Birchas Hamazon. Sufficient time should be left to sleep before nightfall.
12. One should refrain from drinking too much if alcoholic drinks are harmful to him.
13. It is customary to wear costumes and masks on Purim.
14. One should refrain from dressing in costumes of the opposite gender. The same applies for children.
15. If a person insulted someone while intoxicated, he is required to ask for forgiveness.
16. Although it is customary to have Purim ‘shtik’ [plays, skits, songs, etc.] – it is forbidden to insult or embarrass people even in jest.