

A Purim Primer

LAWS IN A SIMPLE AND CONCISE LANGUAGE

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Before Purim

❖ Parshas Zachor

Hashem vows that He will avenge the evil nation, Amalek, for attacking our ancestors as they left Egypt. He commands us to remember what they did to us and to uphold His pledge.¹ Today, this obligation is fulfilled by listening to a Torah reading pertaining to the topic.²

The mitzvah is performed before Purim because Haman was a descendant of Amalek and his downfall in the Purim story is a fulfillment of Hashem's vow.³

- It is unclear if women are obligated⁴ and they should follow the custom of their community.
 - If it is difficult for a woman to come to this, she can also listen to the krias hatorah of Purim morning since it too speaks of Amalek.⁵ (Krias hatorah on Purim is just before reading the megillah.)

Several rules apply to this reading:

- One must pay attention to the reading in order to fulfill the mitzvah but if some of the words were not heard, the mitzvah is still fulfilled.⁶
- Boys over bar mitzvah are obligated in this mitzvah.⁷ Younger boys are also obligated if they can stay attentive throughout the reading.
- Anyone who finds it extremely difficult to come to shul may also read it at home from a chumash.⁸
- It is important to understand the basic concept of what is being read.⁹

❖ Taanis Esther

Taanis Esther is a fast day that takes place before Purim. It commemorates the fasts and prayers to Hashem which brought about the Purim miracle.¹⁰

- The fast begins at dawn.¹¹
- People who find it difficult to fast could be exempt from fasting and they should consult a rabbi.¹²
 - Even those who are not fasting should not eat particularly tasty foods.¹³
- No food should be eaten even after the day concludes until after listening to the megillah.¹⁴ However, one who feels very hungry may break the fast with a snack¹⁵ from 50 minutes after sunset.¹⁶
- A regular meal may not be eaten before listening to the megillah unless delaying it would be harmful to one's health.¹⁷

❖ Machatzis Hashekel

During the days of the Beis Hamikdosh, Jewish adult males were obligated to contribute a half-shekel coin to a communal fund that was used to pay for korbanos and other public needs. After the Beis Hamikdosh was destroyed, this mitzvah is commemorated with a similar contribution to the poor.

Since the original collection began during the month of Adar, its commemoration is performed either on Taanis Esther before mincha, or on Purim before the megillah.¹⁸

- The original obligation was to give a half-shekel and therefore it is customary to give a coin that has the word "half" in its name.¹⁹ In the United States, half-dollar coins are used.
- Traditionally, each person gives three coins.²⁰
- The money used for Machatzis Hashekel may not be from funds that have already been designated for tzedaka.²¹

- The obligation applies to Jewish males but in some communities, it is the custom for women to give as well.²²
 - There is a dispute over at what age the requirement begins: At bar mitzvah, or upon turning twenty.²³
 - Some have the custom to give on behalf of their sons who are under bar mitzvah as well. One who adopts this custom must continue with it every year until his sons are of age to give for themselves.²⁴
- Since people do not usually have half-dollar coins available, shuls often provide them in the collection plate. One “purchases” the necessary amount of half-dollars by paying for them with common currency. After placing the payment in the plate, the coins are picked up (in order to halachically acquire them) and replaced in the plate in fulfillment of the mitzvah.²⁵

Purim

❖ Purim Preparation

- In honor of Purim, it is proper to clean the home and make the beds – just as is done in honor of Shabbos.²⁶
- It is also proper to dress in nice, Shabbos clothing.²⁷
 - There is a custom to wear costumes on Purim,²⁸ but be aware that in many communities this custom is limited to children. You may want to find out in advance what is done at the shul that you will be attending.

❖ Reading the Megillah

There is an obligation to listen to the reading of Megillas Esther twice on Purim – once at night and once during the day.²⁹

- Hearing the text is essential in order to fulfill the mitzvah³⁰ but it is not strictly necessary to understand it.³¹
- To fulfill the mitzvah the reader must be using a kosher scroll.³²
- Those who can follow Hebrew fast enough to keep pace with the reader should have their own individual text from which to follow. (This does not have to be an actual megillah scroll.) If a word was misheard, it should be read quietly from the text.³³
 - Those who cannot read Hebrew fast enough to keep pace with the reader should try to listen as attentively as possible.
- It is customary to bang and make noise when the name of Haman is read.³⁴
- Four *pesukim* are customarily read aloud by the audience ahead of the reader (2:5, 8:15-16, 10:3).³⁵
 - The reader should attempt to read all the names of Haman’s ten sons (starting with the last three words of 9:6 through the first three words of 9:10) in one breath³⁶. Many congregations have a custom to read these names aloud ahead of the reader.³⁷
 - These customary readings should not replace hearing the words from the reader. Therefore, one should be prepared to cut his or her personal recitation short in order not to miss hearing them.

Brachos

Three brachos are recited before the megillah reading and one after it. They are recited by the reader on behalf of all in attendance.³⁸ They can be found in a siddur or in a chumash near the megillah text.

- The audience stands while the brachos are recited.³⁹

- The third bracha is Shehechyanu- the bracha that is said before performing an annual mitzvah. When Shehechyanu is recited before the daytime reading, it also refers to the additional annual mitzvos that will be performed on Purim day (mishloach manos, matanos l'evyonim and the Purim meal). As the bracha is recited, the reader and the congregation should bear this reference in mind.⁴⁰
- The after-bracha is only recited in the presence of a minyan.⁴¹
- If the reading is exclusively to benefit women (the reader has already fulfilled his own obligation), the brachos are recited by the audience instead of by the reader.
 - In this case, there are two basic customs as how to proceed. Either:
 - Each woman recites the brachos on her own⁴² and if someone is unfamiliar with the brachos, another woman should recite it aloud to benefit her.⁴³
 - Or, one woman represents the entire group and recites the brachos out loud.⁴⁴
 - Many communities have the custom that when the brachos are recited by a woman, the first bracha is concluded with the words: "*Lishmoah Megillah*" instead of "*Al Mikrah Megillah*".⁴⁵
- Be prepared! On Purim evening, the shul recites a poetic *piyut* (acrostic) immediately after reading the megillah. It can be found in a siddur or chumash after the brachos for the megillah reading.

Who is Obligated

- All adults and children over bar/bas mitzvah are obligated to hear the megillah reading.⁴⁶
- Mature children who can stay attentive throughout the entire megillah reading are also required to hear it.⁴⁷
- Younger children are also encouraged to come to hear the megillah but only if they can remain quiet throughout the reading. **Children who may disrupt their parents or others from hearing the Megillah should not be brought to shul at this time.**⁴⁸

Timing of the Mitzvah

The evening reading should not begin earlier than nightfall⁴⁹ (in North America, this is fifty minutes after sunset⁵⁰), if this is difficult, a rabbi should be consulted.⁵¹ The daytime reading should ideally not begin before sunrise.⁵²

- To ensure that the mitzvah is not forgotten or delayed, once the earliest evening and morning times of the mitzvah have arrived, it is prohibited to begin a significant, absorbing, activity until after hearing the megillah.⁵³ Some examples are studying, napping, eating a meal or beginning a project. (Snacking remains permitted.⁵⁴)
 - If necessary, one may perform these activities if another person is appointed as a reminder to hear the megillah.⁵⁵ Even then, eating a meal is only permitted if it is essential for one's health.⁵⁶

❖ Matanos L'evyonim

On Purim, there is an obligation to give charity to at least two poor people. When performing this mitzvah, sensitivity to others must remain paramount⁵⁷ and it is advisable to donate through your rabbi.

- There is much dispute regarding the minimum value one must give. According to many opinions, it is the value of one meal.⁵⁸ Today, this is approximately five U.S. dollars for each poor person.⁵⁹
 - This ten-dollar minimum (five dollars for each poor person) may not be given from monies previously designated for tzedaka.⁶⁰
- A poor person is defined as someone who has great difficulty providing for his or her basic family needs.⁶¹
- Giving food or other items that are equivalent to the minimum value fulfills the obligation as well.⁶²

- To this end, one can give a poor person a regular mishloach manos basket that is worth at least five dollars with the intention that it should be for matanos l'evyonim instead of mishloach manos. (To preserve the recipient's dignity this intent should not be expressed.)
- An additional obligation on Purim is to give charity to anyone who asks for it. On Purim, we do not question the integrity of the claims of those in need.⁶³ (Of course, one should still use his or her intuition regarding how much to give whom.)
- One should sooner increase spending on matanos l'evyonim than on mishloach manos or the Purim meal.⁶⁴

Timing of the Mitzvah

Matanos l'evyonim is distributed on Purim during the daytime.⁶⁵

- If the recipient received it before Purim, it is questionable if the obligation has been fulfilled.⁶⁶
- One may entrust money with a rabbi (or any other responsible, Jewish adult) before Purim with the understanding that he will act as the donor's agent and distribute it on Purim.

Who is Obligated?

- All Jews over bar/bas mitzvah are obligated in this mitzvah.⁶⁷
 - Once children are of age to comprehend the concept of this mitzvah, they are also obligated to participate⁶⁸.

❖ Mishloach Manos

All Jewish people are obligated to give gifts of food to one another in order to increase happiness and friendship during the Purim holiday. These gifts are called mishloach manos.⁶⁹

- It is inappropriate for an individual woman to send mishloach manos to an individual man and vice versa⁷⁰. It may however be sent on *behalf* of a family, or *to* a family.⁷¹ (For example: A woman may give her Rabbi if it is given from her and her family. Alternatively, it may be given from her alone to the Rabbi and his family.)

Basic Obligation

Only one mishloach manos gift to one person is necessary in order to fulfill the obligation.⁷² Therefore, the following rules need to apply to just one mishloach manos that will be given.

- It must consist of a minimum of two portions of food⁷³.
 - These portions do not have a minimum size, but they should be respectable enough to be served to a distinguished guest.⁷⁴ For example, less than a whole orange would not be served, but a quarter of a pineapple is sufficient.
 - Contrary to popular misconception, both foods may have the same bracha.⁷⁵ (For example, giving two portions of cake fulfills the obligation even though both portions require the "*mezonos*" bracha.)
 - According to some opinions, the foods should be ready-to-eat without requiring any further cooking, baking or other forms of preparation.⁷⁶
 - Some opinions state that the two foods should reflect the wealth and status of the giver and recipient. In line with the above, it is a good idea to give at least one mishloach manos that reflects this.⁷⁷
- Ideally, the mishloach manos should be delivered via messenger.⁷⁸ This can be another member of the giver's or recipient's family – even a child under bar or bas mitzvah.⁷⁹
- Giving "in lieu of mishloach manos" cards does not fulfill the obligation and it is questionable whether contributing money to "communal" mishloach manos fulfills the obligation either.⁸⁰ When participating in these charity drives, be sure to give at least one regular, individually-owned mishloach manos as well.

Who is Obligated

- Every Jewish adult is obligated in this mitzvah.
 - There is discussion among the authorities whether those supported by a parent are also obligated. People in these circumstances should ideally give at least one mishloach manos of their own.⁸¹
 - Children under bar/bas mitzvah who are old enough to comprehend the concept of the mitzvah should also give mishloach manos to at least one other person.⁸²
- Mishloach manos are not sent to mourners through the thirty-day period. In many communities, they are also not sent to someone who is in the extended year of mourning.⁸³
- Whether a mourner is “sitting shivah” or in the extended year of mourning, he or she only sends simple, modest mishloach manos.⁸⁴

Timing of the Mitzvah

- This mitzvah is performed on Purim during the daytime.⁸⁵ It is proper to give at least one mishloach manos soon after the conclusion of the shacharis prayers and the megillah reading.⁸⁶
- If they were delivered before Purim, it is questionable if the mitzvah was fulfilled.⁸⁷

One Last Note:

Baked goods are often given as mishloach manos. If the bread or pastries collectively contain more than 2.5 lb. of flour (approximately 8 cups worth), there could be a requirement to do *Hafrashas Challah*⁸⁸. If one will be baking this volume of baked goods, a rabbi should be consulted as how to proceed.⁸⁹

❖ The Purim Meal

All adults over bar or bas mitzvah are obligated to eat a celebratory *fleishige* (meat) meal during Purim day.⁹⁰

- The meal should include many relatives and/or friends.⁹¹
- Once children are of age to comprehend the concept of this mitzvah, (usually about five or six⁹²), they are also obligated to participate⁹³.
- This year, 5781 (2021), Purim falls on Friday and it is appropriate to eat the meal earlier in the day – ideally even before midday - so that one will have an appetite for the Shabbos evening meal.⁹⁴
- It is also appropriate to have a smaller, festive meal the night of Purim.⁹⁵ During this meal, some have a custom to eat a variety of beans and seeds in commemoration of Esther’s diet while she resided in King Achashverosh’s palace.⁹⁶

Drinking Wine

- During Purim day, it is a mitzvah for men and boys over bar mitzvah to drink wine until the statements “Blessed is Mordechai” and “Cursed is Haman” become confused.⁹⁷
- **If a drunken state will cause a chillul Hashem (desecration of G-d’s name), the entire purpose of this mitzvah is defeated. Drinking on Purim is to bring one’s self and others closer to Hashem - not further away from Him.**⁹⁸
- The mitzvah of drinking wine on Purim does not apply to women.⁹⁹

❖ Al Hanisim

Throughout Purim, Al Hanisim is added to Birchah Hamazon after the paragraph of “Nodeh Lecha” and Shemoneh Esrei towards the end of “Modim”.¹⁰⁰

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בס"ד

- If it was forgotten and one remembers before concluding the bracha, one goes back to al hanisim and continues with "V'al Hakol" or "V'al Kulam".¹⁰¹
- If it was forgotten and only remembered after concluding the next bracha, a specific statement (see below) is inserted:
 - In Birchas Hamzaon it is inserted where the special Horachamans for holidays are said.¹⁰²
 - In Shemoneh Esrei it is inserted at the end, just before "yihyu l'ratzon imrei fee"¹⁰³ (the location where many have a custom to insert a verse that relates to their name.)

The statement is:¹⁰⁴

"הרחמן הוא יעשה לנו ניסים ונפלאות כשם שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה בימי מרדכי ואסתר..."

"Horachaman hu yaaseh lonu nisim v'niflaos kesheim she'asisa la'avoseinu bayamim haheim bazman hazeh biyemei Mordechai v'esther..."

- If Al Hanisim was completely forgotten, Birchas Hamazon and Shemoneh Esrei are not repeated.¹⁰⁵

אשירה לד' כי גמל עלי

I am indebted to my wife, my parents and my in-laws for all the patience and support they continues to have for me.

Thank you my dear reader, for without your interest this pamphlet would not exist.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to be a quick review of some pertinent laws relevant to this time of year.

It was formulated for those who do not have the opportunity or resources to study the laws in detail.

Many of these laws and sources are from the seforim:

שליט"א by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Karp הלכות חג בחג

שליט"א of Rabbi Shmuel Felder שיעורי הלכה

If you have any feedback, positive or negative, please share it with me timelytorah@gmail.com

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Adar 5780

¹ Devarim 25:17-19
² Mishna Berurah 685:14
³ Magen Avraham 685:2
⁴ See Mishna Berura Mahaduras "Dirshu" 685 note 26
⁵ See Mishna Berura 685:16
⁶ See Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder who brings this in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach
⁷ Shulchan Aruch 685:7
⁸ See Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder who brings this in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach
⁹ See Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder
¹⁰ Mishna Berura 686:2
¹¹ Shulchan Aruch 664:1 Dawn is generally calculated as 72 minutes before sunrise. See Biur Halacha 89 "V'Im"
¹² Rema 686:2
¹³ Mishna Berura 550:5
¹⁴ Rema 692:4
¹⁵ Mishna Berura 692:14
¹⁶ Igros Moshe Orach Chayim volume 4 #62
¹⁷ Mishna Berura 692:14
¹⁸ Rema 694:1
¹⁹ Rema 694:1
²⁰ Rema 694:1
²¹ Ba'er Hataiv 694:2
²² Magen Avrohom 694:3; see Kaf Hachayim 694:27
²³ Mishna Berura 694:5
²⁴ Mishna Berura 694:5
²⁵ See Biur Halacha 694 "v'yeish"
²⁶ Mishna Berura 695:3
²⁷ Rema 695:2
²⁸ Rema 696:8
²⁹ Shulchan Aruch 687:1
³⁰ Mishna Berura 690:48
³¹ Shulchan Aruch 690:8
³² Shulchan Aruch 690:3
³³ Mishna Berura 690:19
³⁴ Rema 690:17
³⁵ Rema 690:17
³⁶ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 690:15
³⁷ See Mishna Berura 690:52 !
³⁸ Shulchan Aruch 692:1
³⁹ Sha'ar Hatziyun 690:1
⁴⁰ Mishna Berura 692:1
⁴¹ Rema 692:1
⁴² See Mishna Berurah mahaduras "Dirshu" note 25
⁴³ Mishna Berura 689:7
⁴⁴ See Mishna Berurah mahaduras "Dirshu" note 25
⁴⁵ Rema 689:2, Mishna Berura 692:11

⁴⁶ Shulchan Aruch 689:1
⁴⁷ Shulchan Aruch 689:1
⁴⁸ Shulchan Aruch 689:6 see Mishna Berura ad loc.
⁴⁹ Shulchan Aruch 687:1
⁵⁰ Igros Moshe volume 4 end of #62
⁵¹ Shulchan Aruch 692:4
⁵² Shulchan Aruch 687:1
⁵³ Mishna Berura 692:15
⁵⁴ Mishna Berura 692:14
⁵⁵ Mishna Berura 692:15
⁵⁶ Mishna Berura 687:16
⁵⁷ Yesod V'shores Havodah VI 12
⁵⁸ See Hilchos Chag B'chag 14:4
⁵⁹ This is what I have heard from R' Shmuel Fuerst א"ט"ל
⁶⁰ Mishna Berura 694:3
⁶¹ This is what I have heard from R' Shmuel Fuerst א"ט"ל
⁶² Mishna Berura 694:2
⁶³ Shulchan Aruch 694:3
⁶⁴ Mishna Berura 694:3
⁶⁵ Mishna Berura 695:22
⁶⁶ See Biur Halacha 694 "lishnei"; Magen Avraham 694:1
⁶⁷ Rema 695:4
⁶⁸ See Chayei Adam 66:2
⁶⁹ Shulchan Aruch 695:4
⁷⁰ Rema 695:4
⁷¹ See Mishna Berura Mahaduras Dirshu siman 695 note 57
⁷² Shulchan Aruch 695:4
⁷³ Shulchan Aruch 695:4
⁷⁴ Aruch Hashulchan 695:15
⁷⁵ See Shulchan Aruch 695:4 where it mentions two pieces of meat as an example even though they both have the same blessing!
⁷⁶ Mishna Berura 695:20
⁷⁷ Biur Halacha 695 "chayav"
⁷⁸ Mishna Berura 695:18
⁷⁹ Da'as Torah 695; see Hichos Chag B'chag chapter 13 note 13
⁸⁰ See Hichos Chag B'chag 13:15 who questions if partners who send have fulfilled, on the other hand see Mishna Berurah Mahaduras Dirshu note 58 who brings from Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach and Rav Yosef Sholom Eliashiv that the mishloach manos doesn't need to belong to the giver.
⁸¹ Mishna Berura 695:25 see also Mishna Berurah Mahaduras Dirshu note 58, and Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder, See also
⁸² See Hichos Chag B'chag 13:11
⁸³ Rema 696:6; Mishna Berura 696:21
⁸⁴ Mishna Berura 696:17, 18

⁸⁵ Rema 696:14
⁸⁶ See Hichos Chag B'chag 13:1
⁸⁷ Ba'er Heiteiv 695:7
⁸⁸ This is an obligation based on the Biblical commandment in Bamidbar 15:17-21. It is performed nowadays by separating a small piece from the dough /baked goods, reciting a statement and burning the separated piece. Laws on this mitzvah can be found in Yoreh Dayah 322-330
⁸⁹ The obligation would only be applicable if this amount of dough/batter has been combined into one batch or one container - even after they are all baked.
It should also be noted that if the items were neither produced from the same original batch of dough and the owner wouldn't want them to be combined as one food (different flavored cookies, for example) then they do not combine to require hafrashas challah.
When there is an obligation to be mafrish challah, another potential issue is the fact that often the only liquid in the recipe is fruit juice, eggs or oil (olive oil is not an issue). In this case a small amount of water must be added before the batter has been formed.
On the receiving end, this issue is not as common since it is only applicable if all the pastries or breads are the same type and stored in one container. If this does occur ask a rabbi how to proceed. (It is not so simple to merely be mafrish just in case since one sender might have been mafrish challah while a second sender didn't and hafrasha cannot be taken from food that has had hafrasha on behalf of food that requires hafrasha.)
⁹⁰ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 695:1,2; regarding fleishigs, see Shulchan Aruch 696:7
⁹¹ Mishna Berura 695:9
⁹² Mishna Berura 128:123
⁹³ See Chayei Adam 66:2
⁹⁴ Rema 685:2 Mishna Berura 685:10
⁹⁵ Rema 695:1
⁹⁶ Mishna Berura 695:11
⁹⁷ Shulchan Aruch 695:2
⁹⁸ Biur Halacha 695 "ad"
⁹⁹ Moadim Uzmanim II #190
¹⁰⁰ Shulchan Aruch 693:2
¹⁰¹ Shulchan Aruch 682:1
¹⁰² Rema 682:1 see Mishna Berurah 682:5
¹⁰³ Mishna Berurah 682:4
¹⁰⁴ Rema 682:1 see Mishna Berurah 682:5
¹⁰⁵ Shulchan Aruch 682:1