

PURIM

FREQUENTLY

ASKED QUESTIONS

המגפה

פורים שאח

2021





Mahatzit ha-Shekel

1. I seem to remember giving a few coins for a special *tzedakah* on or around Purim time. What's that all about?

In the times of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, each year every person would donate one half *shekel* to a special fund that would be used for purchasing the communal *korbanot*. Even though we no longer have a *Beit ha-Mikdash*, the custom continues to this day. The Sephardic custom is for each person to give the monetary equivalent of 9 grams of pure silver to *tzedakah*. The price changes based on market fluctuation and on *Erev Rosh Hodesh Adar*, the amount came out to be \$7.89 per person (**please note** that the price of silver increased significantly since last year once again). The price seems to be fluctuating somewhat in these last few weeks, so if you can, it may make sense to aim for \$8.00 per person if possible.

It is appropriate to give this amount for each person above the age of *bar* and *bat mitzvah* in the family and to give \$1.50 for each child under that age. One who finds this difficult, can give \$1.50 for each adult as well. If that is also difficult, then \$0.50 per person is sufficient. The money should be donated to Torah institutions. It's customary to give this special *tzedakah* on *Ta'anit Esther* or prior to reading the Megilah. There will be a collection plate outside of the *Beit Midrash* on *Ta'anit Esther* and on Purim day for collection.

The money is given specifically as *zekher le-mahatzit ha-shekel* – as a **symbolic remembrance** of the half *shekel*.

Some have the custom to donate whatever amount and then lift three half-dollar coins as a symbolic commemoration of the three half-*shekels* that were donated in the Desert for the *Mishkan*. This is not a Sephardic custom or practice.

Parshat Zakhor

2. On the Shabbat before Purim, we read a special Torah reading. Do I really have to hear it?

On that Shabbat, we read *Parshat Zakhor*, which describes the mitzvah of remembering how Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael right after leaving Egypt and of our responsibility to erase their memory. According to many *Poskim*, this reading fulfills a Torah requirement and is the only time throughout the year that reading the Torah is an absolute individual requirement.



Technically speaking, women are **exempt** from this obligation. Nonetheless, it is appropriate for women, if they can, to try their best to hear *Parshat Zakhor* read from a *Sefer Torah*. To maximize opportunities to hear *Parshat Zakhor*, we try to offer multiple opportunities to hear it.

Before we read it in shul, we remind everybody that they are about to fulfill a Torah obligation and in addition to the mitzvah of reading the Torah, they should also have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah of remembering what Amalek did.

Understanding that with the current COVID restrictions in place, we don't have enough room to accommodate our normal crowd size. To make sure that everybody who wants can hear *Parshat Zakhor* we will be reading it two additional times throughout the day:

- 11:30 AM – shortly after the end of the main *Shaharit minyan*.
- 2:50 PM – right before the 3:00 PM *Minhah*.

Ta'anit Esther

3. Do I really need to fast the day before Purim? It isn't commemorating anything sad!

Yes. **All men and women** over the age of *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah* must fast on *Ta'anit Esther*, the day before Purim. Pregnant and nursing women are exempt.

Indeed, *Ta'anit Esther* does not commemorate any sad event at all. The *Me'iri* in fact writes that there are those who refer to it as a שמחה של תענית – a fast day of celebration. When Esther and the Jews of Shushan fasted, prayed, and did *teshuvah*, Hashem listened to their prayers and they were saved. So too, in their merit, we ask Hashem to listen to our prayers and accept our fasting and *teshuvah* that we should also merit redemption.

4. When does the fast end? When can I eat?

There are actually two different questions. This year the fast ends by 6:35 PM.

Generally speaking, it's appropriate to wait until after hearing the Megilah before breaking one's fast. However, this is not an absolute prohibition.

This year, because of our limited capacity, we will have multiple Megilah readings, with the precise schedule yet to be announced. We anticipate that many people will be attending a later Megilah reading than they are used to, so as to accommodate the larger crowds.

Those who are attending a later reading may drink and eat a 'small snack' after 6:35 PM. A small snack can consist of fruits, vegetables, or less than a כביצה (the volume of an egg, 54 grams) of *mezonot*, but not a full meal.



Reading the Megilah

5. How many times do I really need to hear *Megilat Esther*?

All men and women over the age of *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah* must hear the Megilah **twice**, once at night and once during the day. Please look at the BRS schedule for multiple opportunities to hear the Megilah.

6. I cannot make it to one of the Sephardic *minyanim*, can I go to an Ashkenazi *minyan*?

The differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim when it comes to reading the Megilah are minor and not halakhically significant. The major differences are in pronunciation. But so long as you can understand what the *Hazzan* is saying, even if you wouldn't talk or read the same way yourself, you have fulfilled the mitzvah. [The only hesitation might be regarding *Parshat Zakhor* when it's commendable to try to hear it according to your own tradition.]

7. Should I bring my children to *shul* to hear the Megilah?

The Torah's focus on education, particularly in areas of mitzvah performance, is paramount. We want our children to experience performing mitzvot and encourage them to participate to the best of their abilities. It's not only to prepare them for adulthood, but to give them a taste of the beauty of Judaism even while they are young.

This year, in addition to the requirement to hear and every word of the Megilah from the *Hazzan* and it is **forbidden to speak during the entire** reading, we must also take our COVID precautions into consideration. Reading the Megilah can take 40 minutes or so and it is very hard for young children to sit quietly in *shul* for that long (and equally as hard for parents to sit with them without having to interrupt or speak). We therefore strongly urge you to only bring children to *shul* if they can reasonably be expected to sit quietly for the full 40 minutes – usually around age 10 and up.

Given social distancing, we are severely limited in the number of people we can safely accommodate at any time. Please take these precautions into account when considering whether or not to bring children this year.

Be-ezrat Hashem we will be back to a more 'normal' situation shortly when we can openly welcome everybody to all be together in *shul*.

8. Do women really need to hear the Megilah again during the day?

Yes. Both men and women are obligated to hear the Megilah both at night **and** during the day. There are multiple *minyanim* held throughout the morning so as to facilitate maximum participation.



9. Can I just read the Megilah at home from a book?

No. A person must read or hear the Megilah being read from a 'kosher' Megilah – meaning one written in the appropriate script on parchment.

10. Why do some people (not just the *Hazzan*) have a 'real' Megilah? During Torah reading, I've never seen anybody pull out a pocket sized Torah to read from privately?

The mitzvah of Megilah requires that each person hear every single word of the Megilah read from a kosher Megilah. Some people therefore have their own kosher *megilot* to be able to follow along with the *Hazzan*. However, even those who do have a kosher Megilah, should **not** read along with the *Hazzan*, but should instead listen to the *Hazzan's* reading.

11. What if I miss a word or two? Is it such a big deal?

Actually, it is. Each person is required to hear each and every word of the Megilah.

If a person misses a word or two for whatever reason, he or she should read that word from the Megilah that they are holding in their hands, preferably a kosher Megilah, but it is permissible to read those few words that you missed from a paper Megilah as well. At minimum, a person must hear most of the Megilah from a kosher Megilah and therefore, can make up for a few missed words here and there by reading from the Megilah in front of them.

12. How much noise do I have to make when I hear Haman's name?

None, actually. We have a custom to make noise so as to symbolically show that we are 'erasing' the memory of Haman. There is certainly no requirement to do so.

More importantly, since it's necessary to hear each and every word of the Megilah from the *Hazzan*, it is important to follow the instructions of the *Gabbai*, and to stop making noise as soon as he signals, so as not to disturb other people from hearing the Megilah.

Mitzvot of Purim

13. What is appropriate to wear to *shul* on Purim?

The *Poskim* write that although Purim is technically a weekday and not a *Yom Tov*, it has a special elevated level of *kedushah* and therefore **it is appropriate to wear Yom Tov clothing to shul, particularly at night.**



The common practice is to wear costumes on Purim (for a variety of reasons), with some wearing them to *shul* as well. If you do wear a costume to *shul*, please make sure that the costume reflects values that are appropriate for a *makom kadosh*.

14. What's the deal with working on Purim?

Strictly speaking, there is *no* איסור מלאכה on Purim as there is on Shabbat and *Yom Tov*. Driving, using electronics, cooking, and all other forms of מלאכה are permitted. Nonetheless, *Hazal* tell us that one who works on Purim does not merit to see a סימן ברכה from that effort. They are quick to note that this does not apply to somebody who needs to work on Purim so that they might have what to eat for the Purim *seudah*.

Therefore, it's advisable, if possible, to take the day off. Understanding that this is not always simple or easily accomplished, it's still significant and worthwhile to try to get some time off or at least to try to dedicate some part of the day to truly appreciating and celebrating Purim in an appropriately festive and celebratory manner.

15. What do I really have to give for *Mishlō'ah Manot*?

At the minimum, each person must give one gift to somebody else. The gift must contain two different types of foods, such as cake and a drink. Ideally, these should be foods that can be eaten as part (or for dessert) of the *Purim Seudah*. When delivering *Mishlō'ah Manot* please be sensitive to COVID precautions and refrain from entering other people's homes or spending time in close proximity to others.

16. How fancy do my *Mishlō'ah Manot* have to be?

They don't have to be fancy at all! *Mishlō'ah Manot* must only contain two different food items (such as a beverage and a food) and each person only needs to give one. We have a practice to give many, since one of the goals of *Mishlō'ah Manot* is to increase happiness and friendliness. However, the Rambam is quick to point out that a person should focus more on *Matanot la-Evyonim* (below) and spend more money on *Matanot la-Evyonim* than on *Mishlō'ah Manot*.

17. I try to give *Tzedakah* every day. Is the mitzvah of *Tzedakah* all that different on Purim?

Yes. On Purim there is a specific mitzvah to give *Matanot la-Evyonim* – meaning the value of two gifts to two people (for a total value of 4 gifts). To protect the dignity of those who receive *Matanot la-Evyonim*, our practice is to give the money to the rabbi to distribute discretely. There will be specially designated areas to leave money for this purpose on Purim day and Rabbi Goldberg will distribute the money in the afternoon.



The Sephardic Kehillah of Boca Raton Synagogue

הקהילה הספרדית של ק"ק בוקה רטון

At minimum, each gift should be \$1, for a total of \$4 per person. Rav Ovadiah Yosef^{zt"l} recommended that each person give enough so that the recipient will be able to purchase at least a falafel and a drink with which to have a *Purim Seudah*. In Boca Raton, it comes out to approximately \$10. As such, each person should ideally give at least \$20 for *Matanot la-Evyonim*.

Additionally, the *Shulhan Arukh* records that on Purim, כל הפושט יד נותנים לו – we give to anybody who stretches out his hand. There is no minimum that needs to be given (above and beyond the *Matanot la-Evyonim*), but nobody should be sent away empty handed. The *Poskim* write that just like we grant assistance to anybody who asks, so too, Hashem grants any and all requests that we make on Purim.

18. When should I have my *Purim Seudah*?

The *Purim Seudah* must take place during Purim **day**. This year, because Purim is on a Friday, there are additional considerations as well, as it's usually inappropriate to each a large meal too close to Shabbat.

If possible, the *seudah* can be held in the morning, even before midday (12:34 PM). However, this is not always reasonable or practical. Instead, the meal can be held in the afternoon, but the meal itself including *Birkat Ha-Mazon* should be completed by 3:25 PM. Snacking, dessert, and continued celebration are still permitted [and encouraged!] throughout the rest of the day.

[There are those who have the practice to begin the *seudah* later in the day straight through the beginning of Shabbat. In the middle of the meal, they cover the table with a clean cloth, recite *kiddush*, and continue what now amounts to a joint Purim-Shabbat meal (פורס מפה ומקדש). For a variety of reasons, this appears to be less than ideal.]

19. Is there anything particular that should be served at a *Purim Seudah*?

It's best to have a meat meal that begins with bread. Additionally, a person should drink wine at the meal. Since there is no *kiddush* on Purim, a separate בורא פרי הגפן must be recited on the wine, even if it is drunk after one has already made the *berakhah* of לחם מן הארץ. This is all true even on a Friday afternoon [and is part of the reason that the meal should be completed several hours before Shabbat begins].

The *Mekubalim* write that Purim is compared to Yom Kippur. As such, when we have the *Seudat Purim* in the late afternoon, it is comparable to *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur. It is a time of intense holiness where a person can reach very high levels of spirituality.

The *Purim Seudah* should be a festive meal with singing and sharing *divrei Torah*. The Megilah focuses on how Purim is celebrated משפחה ומשפחה – by each family. It's a time to spend with friends



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and family and share insights and ideas of אמונה. One of the themes of the Megilah is searching for and seeing Hashem's hand in our lives and in history. It's a beautiful idea to go around the table and ask each person to share an instance or experience in which they felt Hashem's hand and suggest ways to try to see it more clearly in their everyday lives.

Even with the focus on enjoyment and happiness, it's important to make sure that our priorities are still in order. *Birkat ha-Mazon* is a Torah requirement and each person should be careful that no amount of *Simhat Purim* gets in the way of reciting or remembering to recite *Birkat ha-Mazon*.

וטוב לב משתה תמיד!

