

## Chagim

### The Laws of Purim

#### *Rabbi David Sperling*

1. The Fast Of Esther - The 13th of Adar is a fast from sunrise to nightfall (4.36am ♦ 6.07pm in Jerusalem 5763). A person who will be hearing the Megilla on the night after the fast, is forbidden to eat until after hearing the Megilla. In cases where this is difficult, one can eat a little (without fixing a meal on bread or "mezonot") after nightfall before hearing the Megilla.
2. The laws of this fast are more lenient than other fasts, and so pregnant and nursing mothers, as well as the sick (or even those suffering from just major discomfort), do not fast.
3. The community adds "*Aneinu*" prayer to the *Amidah* in *Shomeiya Tefillah* [as opposed to the Chazzan who adds this as a blessing in and of itself] (Sephardim in *Shacharit* and *Minchah*; Ashkenazim, the community adds only in *Minchah*). "*Avinu Malkeinu*" and *Tachanun* are recited during *Shacharit*, but not during *Minchah* (unless the fast falls early on the Thursday before Purim on Sunday). The Torah portion for a fast is read during *Shacharit* and *Minchah*, (and the Ashkenazim read a *Haftorah* during *Minchah*).
4. Charity In Commemoration Of the Half Shekel - On the afternoon before Purim, one gives money to charity (to the poor, charity organizations, or Torah institutions) in commemoration of the half shekel that was given when the Temple stood. (If one did not give then, one can donate during all the month of Adar). There are numerous customs concerning this. In some places only men above the age of twenty donate, in others men over the age of thirteen. In some places women also donate, and also charity is given in the name of the children, and even pregnant women donate for their unborn child. One who gave one year should continue to donate in following years, unless the custom was begun explicitly for a limited time (and so it is correct to give *bli neder* - without this being an obligation).
5. Ashkenazim customarily give three coins that are called "half" coins (in Israel the 50 agarot coins that are minted with "1/2" on them). The Sephardim are accustomed to give the value of 9.6 grams of silver (according to the current market value). There are places where the synagogue places three special coins on a tray, each person then buys the coins by placing an amount of money in the tray (even less than the value of the special coins), and acquiring the coins by lifting them up. The special coins are then donated back to charity by replacing them on the tray "in commemoration of the half shekel", to be used by the next person.
6. One should be careful not to say that the donation is for "the half shekel" as it is forbidden to donate to the Temple in our days, but rather one should say "in commemoration of the half shekel".

7. The Date Of Purim - in places that were surrounded by a wall in the days of Joshua, ("walled cities" - even if unwalled today), Purim is celebrated on the 15th of Adar. In other places ("unwalled cities") Purim falls on the 14th of Adar. Today only Jerusalem is definitely a "walled city", and the other ancient cities in Israel (Jaffo, Zefat, Tiberias, Bet Lechem, Schem, Lod, Akron, Be'er Sheva, Gaza, Hebron, and others) customarily celebrate both days from doubt (see below).

8. Those places that are adjacent and within view of a "walled city" also have the law of a "walled city". Therefore all the new city of Jerusalem has the law of Purim on the 15th, (there is some discussion of the distant suburbs such as Ramot - one should act in accordance with the local Rabbi). Some people hold that this law of adjacency also applies to the doubtfully walled cities (for example Tel Aviv, which is adjacent to Jaffo) - one should celebrate the 14th only, unless there is a local custom to celebrate both days from doubt.

9. Those who travel from place to place on the 14th and 15th are sometimes obligated on the 14th, sometimes on the 15th, sometimes on both days, and sometimes on neither [but it is not correct (and according to some opinions impossible) to travel so as to miss Purim altogether]. The essence of the obligation depends on where one is at sunrise of the 14th and 15th. If at sunrise of the 14th one is in an "unwalled" city, one is obligated in Purim on the 14th even if one later travels to Jerusalem. So too if at sunrise of the 15th one is in a "walled" city one is obligated in Purim on the 15th, even if one leaves the city later. From this we see that one can be obligated in two days (being in Tel Aviv at sunrise of the 14th, and Jerusalem at sunrise of the 15th). There are many opinions in this matter, and one is advised to consult with a Rabbi before traveling.

10. Places that are doubtfully "walled cities" (see 7 above), read the Megilla on both days, but only recite the blessing on the 14th. In connection with the other commandments and prayers of Purim, some say to perform them on both days, and some say only to perform them on the 14th. It is fitting to be strict and perform them on both days.

11. Prayer - "*Al HaNissim*" is added to all the prayer services (in the *Amidah*), as well as to *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace after Meals). One who forgot to add it, and has already finished the *Amidah* or *Birkat HaMazon*, does not need to repeat it. If one recalled that they had forgotten it before the end, one adds "*Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha SheTa'aseh Lanu Nissim V'Niflaot KeShem SheAsitah LeAvatainu BeYamin HaHem B'zman HaZeh, B'Yemay Mordechai V'Esther*" etc, before "*Oseh Shalom*" at the end of the *Amidah*, or one can add it near the end of *Birkat HaMazon*, in the form of "*HaRachaman Hu Ya'aSeh Lanu Nissim*" etc). One does not recite *Tachanun*, neither on the afternoon preceding the 14th nor on the 14th or 15th, in both walled and unwalled cities. The other changes and additions to the services are printed in the *Siddur*. *Hallel* and *YaAleh VeYavoh* are not recited.

12. Reading the Megilla ♦ Everyone is obligated to read (or hear) the Megilla - men, women, and children who have reached the age of understanding. The Megilla is read

both in the night (directly after nightfall, until the morning if need be; and the day, from sunrise, until sunset if necessary ♦ but one should try to fulfill one's obligation as soon as possible).

13. It is forbidden to eat before hearing the Megilla, both in the night and the day. In cases where this causes hardship, one can snack on a small amount of bread or cakes etc, up to an eggs worth, or any amount of other foods.

14. The best way to perform the *mitzvah* is to hear the Megilla amongst a large congregation, or at least ten men (or women). However the *mitzvah* is fulfilled even by reading the Megilla alone. A woman can read for herself, or even for other women, but she should not read for a man, unless there is no other possibility. A child cannot read for an adult.

15. One must hear every word of the Megilla. One should not hear via a microphone, telephone, or radio [some permit this in a time of need]. If one did not hear a word (or more) one should read the word(s) from a Megilla in front of them (even a printed one). However this must be done in such a way as to ensure that every word is heard in its' correct order ♦ that is one should pronounce the words they missed, and keep reading until they catch up to the reader, so the reader's recital continues from where they stopped reading.

16. One should be careful that those who stamp on Haman's name do not cause others to miss hearing even a single word. And those who go overboard with noisemaking are guilty of several varied sins.

17. It is forbidden to speak from the start of the first blessing before the Megilla, until the after the end of the after blessing "*Harav et Riveinu*". If one spoke during this time, and because of this missed hearing even one word of the Megilla, one needs to repeat the entire Megilla.

18. The Blessing Over the Megilla ♦ one needs to have intention to fulfill their obligation by the reader's blessings (and as such one does not say "*Baruch Hu U'Baruch Shemo*" during the blessings). At women's readings, the custom is for one of the women to bless "*Lishmoah Mikrah Megilla*" (or "*Lishmoah Megilla*") and not the regular "*Al Mikrah Megilla*" (Ashkenazim). There are some Sephardim who do not recite a blessing at all at a women's reading, and some recite "*Lishmoah Megilla*". Concerning the blessing after, some Ashkenazim do not recite it unless there are ten men, and others recite it when there are ten or more women, (and this is the Sephardi custom).

19. Most of the Ashkenazim recite "*Shehechyanu*" both before the reading at night and at day, and one should have intention to include the mitzvot of *Mishloach Manot*, and Gifts to the Poor, as well as the Purim meal in this blessing. Sephardim only recite this blessing before the evening reading.

20. Mishloach Manot - Sending of Portions ♦ Everybody is obligated to send at least two portions to one Jew. This can only be fulfilled during the day and not the night.

21. A man should send to a man, and a woman to a woman. If one sent to a family as a whole, one need not be particular about whether the man gave to a man, and visa versa. A married woman should send portions herself, and not rely on that which her husband sends; and so too the children in the family should send their own portions, and not rely on the head of the household. One should educate even small children in this, as well as the other *mitzvot* of Purim.

22. The portions need to be something fitting for eating or drinking as is (without further cooking). The two portions also need to be different from each other, however it is enough that they have different tastes, such as two types of cake, or two different types of meat etc (and they do not have to have separate blessings). One should send portions that are fittingly substantial (both in the eyes of the giver and in the eyes of the receiver).

23. It is good manners to reciprocate and send portions to those who sent to you.

24. In order to fulfill all the opinions one should send at least one set of portions to someone who is celebrating Purim on the same day as you.

25. One should not send portions to someone who is in the year of mourning for their parents, (or the month of mourning for other close relatives). One may send to the other members of the mourner's family (who are not in mourning). However, those in mourning are obligated to send portions.

26. From the letter of the law one does not have to send portions via a messenger ♦ however there are those who have this custom, and send their portions via messengers, even via children or non-Jews. One should ensure that the receiver knows who sent the portions.

27. Matanot LeEvyonim ♦ Gifts to the Poor ♦ Every person is obligated to give charity to two poor Jews. This can only be fulfilled during the day and not the night, though one can give the money to a messenger any time before Purim day in order that the messenger give the money to the poor during the day of Purim itself.

28. It is better to increase one's gifts to the poor, rather than increasing the amounts of *Mishloach Manot* (portions) and the size of one's Purim Meal. This is because there is no greater joy than to gladden the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widow, and the stranger. In gladdening the hearts of the needy, one acts in accordance with G-d Himself, as it says "To enliven the spirit of the lowly, and to enliven the hearts of the downtrodden" ♦ Rambam.