

❦ SELECTED LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF PURIM ❦

This digest cannot cover all eventualities and should be regarded merely as a guide to enable the reader to familiarize himself with the complex laws of the mitzvos central to Purim. It should not be taken as a substitute for the source texts, but as a learning and familiarizing tool. For halachic questions, one should consult the *Shulchan Aruch* and its commentaries and/or a halachic authority.

The laws and customs have been culled, in the main, from the most widely accepted authorities: the *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* [here abbreviated O.C.] and *Mishnah Berurah* [M.B.].

When a particular halachah is in dispute, we generally follow the ruling of *Mishnah Berurah*. On occasion, however (usually when *Mishnah Berurah* does not give a definitive ruling), we cite other opinions.

❦ Adar

1. When Adar begins, we increase in joyousness (*Taanis* 29a; *M.B.* 686:8).
2. If a Jew has a court case pending against a gentile, he should try to have it adjudicated during the month of Adar (*Taanis* 29b; *M.B.* 686:8).

❦ Taanis Esther

3. In the days of Mordechai and Esther, the Jews gathered on the thirteenth of Adar to defend themselves and to take vengeance upon their enemies. To accomplish this they had to seek God's compassion and help. Therefore they repented, fasted, and prayed for Divine assistance on that day. In remembrance, all Israel has accepted that day as a fast day through the generations.

This fast is called *תַּעֲנִית אֶסְתֵּר*, the *Fast of Esther*, as a reminder that *Hashem* sees and hears the plight and prayer of every person in the time of his straits, if he fasts and returns to God wholeheartedly, as our ancestors did in those days (*M.B.* 686:2).

4. Nevertheless, this fast is less stringent than the four fasts mentioned in the Prophets (10 Teves, 17 Tammuz, 9 Av, 3 Tishrei). Therefore it is proper to be lenient when necessary, as in the case of pregnant women, nursing mothers, a woman within the first thirty days of childbirth, or a person

whose eyes ache painfully. Such people should not fast. Nevertheless they should repay the fast by fasting at some later date (O.C. 686:2; *M.B.* 4). Additionally, a groom during his seven days of *Sheva Berachos* (i.e., the first seven days after marriage) need not fast (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 141:2).

5. Despite the leniencies mentioned above, all other healthy people should participate in this communal fast. Even travelers who find the fast difficult must nevertheless fast (O.C. 686:2; *M.B.* 6).

6. When the thirteenth of Adar falls on the Sabbath, the fast is observed on the previous Thursday, the eleventh of Adar (O.C. 686:2).

❦ Purim Eve

7. The home should be prepared before Purim as before every Yom Tov: the table should be set for the evening meal; candles should be lit (but no blessing recited); and Sabbath clothing should be worn in honor of the *Megillah* reading (O.C. 695:2).

❦ Machatzis HaShekel

8. It is customary for every man to donate *מַחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל*, a *half-shekel*, before Purim, as a remembrance of the half-shekel head tax of Temple times [for the purchase of communal Temple offerings]. Since the shekel is not

used universally as currency, we use a 'half' coin of the established currency in the particular country and time that it is given. [Thus, in the United States today, half-dollar coins are used.] Custom calls for each man to donate three half-shekels. The coins are customarily donated before *Minchah* on the day before Purim (O.C. 694:1).

A boy who has not reached his legal majority (i.e., his thirteenth birthday; according to some views, his twentieth birthday) is exempt from *machatzis hashekel*; however, his father may donate for him if he wishes to, and this is the preferred custom. Moreover, once the father has done so, he *must* continue to donate for his minor son in subsequent years (O.C. 694:1; M.B. 5).

☞§ **Maariv**

9. The regular weekday *Maariv* is recited — with *על הנסים* inserted into the *Modim*, Thanksgiving, blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. If this prayer was omitted, *Shemoneh Esrei* should not be repeated (O.C. 693:2; 682:1). However, if the omission is discovered before the word *Hashem* in the concluding formula *ל. ברוך אתה ה' הטוב.* has been said, one should return to *על הנסים* and proceed from there (O.C. 682:1). [One who has omitted *על הנסים* may, if he so desires, recite *על הנסים* after the verse *יהיו לרצון* at the conclusion of *Shemoneh Esrei*. (M.B. 683:4).]

During the *המזון*, *Grace after Meals*, the *על הנסים* prayer is recited during the second blessing, which begins *נודה לך*. If it is forgotten, and the omission is not discovered until after the word *Hashem* in the concluding formula, *Bircas HaMazon* should be continued until the end of the paragraph *ברוך הרחמן* (הוא) *יעשה לנו נסים* *ונפלאות בשם שְׁעִשִׁית לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּיָמֵי הַהֵם* should be recited, followed by *ברוך הַזֶּה* *בְּיָמֵי מְרֻדְכֵי* (O.C. 682:1, however, the

version printed in most *siddurim* varies slightly from this wording).

After *Shemoneh Esrei*, the *chazzan* recites the Full *Kaddish*, and the *Megillah* is read (see below). After the *Megillah* reading, *ואתה קדוש* is recited [on Saturday night *ועם נעי* and *ואתה קדוש* followed by *ויתן לך* and *הבדלה* (in those *shuls* that usually recite these during *Maariv*)] and the *chazzan* repeats the *Kaddish*, but this time omitting the verse *תתקבל* (O.C. 693:1; M.B. 1).

☞§ **The Megillah Reading**

10. Every man and woman is obligated to hear the *Megillah* reading at night and again by day. Therefore, even those single girls who do not usually attend synagogue services should go to the shul on Purim, or have the *Megillah* read for them at home (O.C. 687:1; 689:1; M.B. 689:1).

11. Parents are obligated to bring even young children to *shul* to train them in the mitzvah of hearing the *Megillah* reading. However, very young children who tend to disrupt the services and disturb the congregants should not be brought to the synagogue (O.C. 689:1,6; M.B. 17-18).

12. The nighttime *Megillah* reading may not begin before nightfall (*צאת הכוכבים*), even for one who is weak from fasting. Although ideally one should not break the fast until after the *Megillah* reading, one who is in pain may ease his hunger with a cup of coffee. or even an egg-size piece of bread before the reading (O.C. 682:4; M.B. 14).

13. The preferable place to hear the *Megillah* is in the synagogue, in accordance with the verse, *A multitude of people is the King's glory* (*Proverbs* 14:28). If this is not possible, at least a *minyan* of ten adult men should be present (O.C. 690:18; M.B. 64). If even this is impossible, each individual

[3] SELECTED LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF PURIM

should read the *Megillah* from a kosher scroll and recite the three blessings (see #15 below) that precede it. But if only one of those present knows how to read it, he should read it and the others should listen to his reading with the intention to fulfill their obligation (O.C. 689:5).

The blessing recited after the *Megillah* reading is recited only in the presence of a *minyán* (O.C. 692:1).

14. The synagogue reader customarily unrolls his *Megillah* and folds it column over column before reading from it. This is in accordance with the verse that calls the *Megillah* אגרת הפורים, *the Purim Letter*. (In ancient time, an אגרת was folded or bound, and a מגילה was rolled.) Those listening, however, do not have to fold their *Megillos* (O.C. 690:17; *M.B.* 55).

15. Before reading the *Megillah*, both at night and by day, the reader recites three blessings: על מקרא מגילה, *regarding the reading of the Megillah*; שעשית נסים, *Who has wrought miracles*; and שהחיינו, *Who has kept us alive* (O.C. 692:1).

After the reading, the *Megillah* is rolled up and the blessing הרב את ריבנו, *Who takes up our grievance*, is recited (O.C. 692:1; 690:17).

16. The reader of the *Megillah* must have in mind that his reading will fulfill the obligation of those who listen to it. Similarly, the listener must intend to fulfill his obligation (O.C. 689:2; *M.B.* 4). Moreover, the listener must hear every word, for even a oneword lapse invalidates his fulfillment, and he must hear the *Megillah* reading again from the missed word on (O.C. 690:3; *M.B.* 5). Therefore, the reader should be careful not to begin reading after Haman's name until the tumult has stopped completely; otherwise, some

congregants may miss a word (*M.B.* 690:60).

17. It is advisable for each congregant to have a kosher *Megillah* scroll before him, so that he may read along in an undertone. In this way he will be certain not to miss a single word. If this is not possible, the listener should follow the reading from a printed *Megillah*, but should not read along. Nevertheless, he may read a word or phrase from the printed *Megillah* if he was unable to hear the reader because of the noise (*M.B.* 690:60).

18. One who is following the reading from an invalid scroll or from a printed volume should not read aloud for two reasons: (a) It is difficult to concentrate on someone else's words while speaking; and (b) another person may mistake this one's voice for the reader and concentrate on listening to it, thus not fulfilling his obligation (O.C. 690:4; *M.B.* 13).

19. During the public reading, four verses are recited aloud by the congregation and repeated by the reader. They are: איש יהודי... (2:5); ומרדכי יצא (8:16) ... ליהודים היתה (8:15) ...; and כי (10:3) ... (מרדכי) but see #21 below (O.C. 690:17). Among the reasons for this custom are: (a) פירסומי ניסא, *broadcasting the miracle*; since these verses are all seminal passages in the Purim story, reciting them aloud serves to underscore and announce the miracles that took place (*M.B.* 689:16); (b) just as various customs have arisen at the Pesach Seder to keep the children awake until the end, so too does this public recitation keep the children alert and attentive (*ibid.*); (c) the verses are read aloud as an additional expression of the joy of the day (*M.B.* 690:58).

20. When the reader reaches the verse, 6:1 בלילה ההוא, he should raise his voice, for the main part of the

miracle begins there. And when he reaches 9:26 (הַאֲנֵרַת הַזֶּה), he should raise or shake the *Megillah* slightly (M.B. 690:52).

21. The reader should recite the passage that names Haman's ten sons, [חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאוֹת אִישׁ] וְאֵת ... וְיִזְתָּא עֶשְׂרֵת (9:6-10) in one breath, to indicate that they were hanged simultaneously. However, if he fails to do so the reading remains valid (O.C. 690:15).

In some synagogues this passage is recited aloud by the congregation before the reader reads them. Some authorities endorse this custom; others censure it (see M.B. 690:52).

22. If one has fulfilled his obligation and will read the *Megillah* for someone who did not hear the *Megillah* yet, many authorities maintain that the listener should recite the blessings. However, others state that it is customary for the reader to recite the blessings even in this case (O.C. 692:3; M.B. 11).

23. When the *Megillah* is read for a woman or group of women, with no man fulfilling his obligation through that reading, the blessings are recited by the reader, with the first blessing changed from *עַל מִקְרָא מְגִלָּה*, regarding the reading of the *Megillah*, to *לְשִׁמּוֹעַ לְמִגְלָה*, to hear the *Megillah*, for many authorities maintain that a woman is obligated to hear the reading, but not to read it (M.B. 682:11).

☞ Purim On The Sabbath

24. When Purim coincides with the Sabbath (such as Shushan Purim in Jerusalem) a *Megillah* scroll is *muktzeh* and may not be moved. On any other Sabbath a *Megillah* scroll is not *muktzeh* and may be moved. However, when Purim falls on a Saturday night, the *Megillah* may not be brought to the synagogue on the Sabbath, even in a locality where there is a valid *eruv*.

Such carrying is classified as *מְכִין מִשְׁבֵּת לְחוּל*, preparing for a weekday on the Sabbath, and is forbid den (*Machatzis HaShekel* 682).

☞ Shacharis

25. The weekday *Shacharis* is recited with the addition of *עַל הַנְּשִׁיחַ* in the *Shemoneh Esrei* [if forgotten, see #9 above] (O.C. 693:2). During the *chazzan's* repetition, some congregations recite *Krovetz*.

26. After the *chazzan's* repetition, the *chazzan* recites Half *Kaddish*. *תְּהִנוּ* and *אֶל אֲרֶךְ אַפִּים* are omitted. Unlike Chanukah and the Three Pilgrimage Festivals, *Hallel* is not recited (O.C. 693:3).

The Torah is read — the passage of *וַיָּבֹא אֶמְלֵק* (*Exodus* 17:8-16); Half *Kaddish* is recited; the Torah is returned to the Ark; and the *Megillah* is read (O.C. 693:4).

The *tefflin* should not be removed before the *Megillah* reading, even if one has completed the *Shacharis* service (M.B. 693:6)

27. As at the nighttime reading the reader recites three blessing before reading the *Megillah* (O.C. 692:1). The *שְׁהֵיִינוּ* blessing of the daytime reading also applies to the other mitzvos of the day — *matanos la'evyonim*, *shalach manos*, and the festive meal (see below). Therefore, both the reader and the listeners should have these *mitzvos* in mind when the blessing is recited (M.B. 692:1).

All other laws of the nighttime reading apply to the daytime reading (see #10-11, #13-23, above).

28. After the morning reading, the blessing *אֶת הַרְבֵּי אֶת רִיבֵנוּ* is recited; the *פִּיּוּט* *הַיָּאֵר* is omitted, but *שׁוֹשַׁנָּה* *יַעֲקֹב* is recited (O.C. 692:1).

29. *Shacharis* concludes in the usual weekday manner, except that *לְמִנְצָה* (Psalm 20) is omitted (O.C. 693:3).

☞ Mishloach Manos

30. In recording the mitzvah of *mishloach manos* (also called *shalach manos*) the *Megillas* states ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו *and for sending food portions each man to his friend* (9:22). The plural מנות, *food portions*, implies at least two portions, while the singular רעהו, *his friend*, implies one recipient. Thus the minimum fulfillment of *mishloach manos* requires the presentation of two foods to one person (O.C. 695:4). Nevertheless, it is praiseworthy not to stint, but to increase both the size of the gift and the number of gifts sent [but see #34 below] (*Rambam, Hil. Megillah* 2:15).

Moreover, מנות indicates ready-to-eat food and drink. Therefore it is proper to send cooked meats or fish, baked goods, wine and other beverages, fruit or vegetables (even raw, if that is how they are usually eaten, e.g., apples or cucumbers), desserts, candies, etc. However, food that must be prepared by the recipient [such as raw potatoes, unbaked dough, or coffee powder] cannot be used to fulfill the obligation (*M.B.* 695:20).

31. Both men and women are obligated in *mishloach manos*. Some women rely upon their husband's *shalach manos* to fulfill their obligation, and vice versa, but this is not proper. Rather, each spouse should send portions to at least one friend. Moreover, it is improper for a man to exchange gifts with a woman. Therefore, a man should send to a man, and a woman should send to a woman (O.C. 695:4).

☞ Matanos La'evyonim

32. Purim's special charity obligation is called מתנות לאביונים *gifts to poor people* (*Esther* 9:22). The plural מתנות, *gifts*, implies at least two gifts (usually money), while the plural אביונים, *poor people*, implies at least two recipients.

Therefore, the gifts must be given to two paupers, i.e., a separate gift to each (O.C. 694:1).

33. On Purim one should not investigate whether someone requesting alms is really needy. Rather, 'whoever stretches out his hand to receive, we give him' (O.C. 694:3).

34. Although one can discharge his obligation by giving a single penny to each of two paupers, one should strive to give with an open hand increasing both the quality and quantity of his charity.

When one is presented with the opportunity to increase either his *matanos laevyonim* or his *mishloach manos*, but does not have the resources to do both, one should minimize his *mishloach manos* and maximize his *matanos laevyonim*. For there is no greater more praiseworthy cause for joy before God than gladdening the hearts of the poor, the orphaned, and the widows (*Rambam, Hil. Megillah* 2:17).

35. One living in an area where there are no poor is not absolved of this mitzvah. He should set aside two sums of money to be given to a poor person when the opportunity presents itself (O.C. 694:4). Or he should send a messenger to deliver the money on Purim (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 142:3). Many authorities maintain that when there are no poor people in town the money can be placed into a charity box earmarked for distribution to the poor.

☞ Seudah

36. Everyone is obligated to eat, drink, and be joyous on Purim day. Although the main mitzvah is during the day, it is proper to celebrate to some degree on the preceding night also. However, the nighttime festivities do not replace or fulfill the daytime obligations, for the *Megillah* (9:22) states וימי משתה *feast days* (O.C. 695:1).

37. Some customarily eat pulse (seeds, beans, lentils, and the like) in remembrance of the foods eaten by Daniel and his comrades in Babylon [see *Daniel* 1:12], and by Esther in Shushan [see *Megillah* 13a] (O.C. 695:2).

38. The mitzvos of *mishloach manos*, *matanos la'evyonim*, and *seudas Purim* are all daytime obligations (M.B. 692:1). Moreover, since the שְׁהַחֲיֵנוּ blessing at the *Megillah* reading also applies to these mitzvos, it is preferable that they be performed after the reading.

39. *Minchah* should be recited early in the afternoon to allow enough time for the majority of the Purim meal to be eaten while it is yet day. It is also proper that the meal extend a bit into the night (O.C. 695:2).

40. When Purim falls on Friday, the *seudah* should be eaten in the morning so that it not interfere with the Sabbath Eve meal (O.C. 692:4).

41. Since many aspects of the Purim miracle involved wine — Vashti's downfall at the king's winefest; the banquet at Esther's coronation; Bigsban and Teresh's plot to poison the king's wine; Haman's downfall at Esther's party — the Sages ordained, הִכָּבְדוּ אֶת לְבַסוֹמֵי בְּפוֹרְאָא עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אֲרוּר הָמָן לְבְרוּךְ מְרַדְּכֵי, *a man should drink wine on Purim until he cannot distinguish between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai"* (*Megillah* 7b). That is, he should drink at least enough more than usual that he should become drowsy, fall asleep, thus being unable to distinguish between Haman and Mordechai (O.C. 692:2; *Biur Halachah*).

However, one who is unable to tolerate wine and one who is apprehensive that wine will bring him to neglect the blessings or prayers, or will in any other way weaken his mitzvah observance, should refrain from drinking more than a minimum. Thus, all his

actions will be for the sake of Heaven (*Chayei Adam* 155:30).

☞ Eulogies And Fasting

42. Eulogies and fasting are forbidden on both Purim and Shushan Purim (O.C. 696:3).

☞ Mourners

43. One who is שֹׁמֵר sitting *shivah* is obligated in *mishloach manos* and *matanos la'evyonim*, but should not send anything more than simple fare (O.C. 696:6; M.B. 18).

Overt displays of mourning, such as removal of the shoes and sitting on the floor or a low stool, are not performed on Purim. Nevertheless, private acts, such as refraining from cohabitation, are in force (O.C. 696:4; M.B. 12).

Mishloach manos and other presents should not be sent to mourners during their entire mourning period — twelve months after a parent; thirty days after other relatives (O.C. 696:6; M.B. 20).

☞ Shushan Purim / Walled Cities

44. In a city which is walled since the days of Joshua ben Nun, all the laws of Purim apply to the fifteenth of Adar, rather than the fourteenth (O.C. 688:1). [The only city to which this rule applies with certainty is the Old City of Yerushalayim.] Many cities in Eretz Yisrael have questionable status. Thus they follow the majority of the cities by reading the *Megillah* on the fourteenth of Adar. On the fifteenth, they read it again, but this time without reciting a blessing (O.C. 688:4).

45. The 15th of Adar is called Shushan Purim. When the Jews of Ahasuerus's provinces stood up to defend themselves and destroy their enemies, they fought on the 13th of Adar, then rested and celebrated on the 14th. But the Jews of Shushan were given an extra day to avenge themselves of their foe. They fought on the 13th and

[7] SELECTED LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF PURIM

14th, then rested and celebrated on the 15th. Although the special mitzvos' of Purim do not apply during Shushan Purim (except as detailed in #42-43 above), a vestige of yesterday's festivities does remain: the prayers **תְּהַנוּ אֶל אֲרֶד אַפִּים**, and **לְמַנְצַח** (psalm 20) are omitted (M.B. 693:8); some rejoicing and festive eating is customary. However, **עַל הַנְּסִים** is not recited. Nevertheless, if **עַל הַנְּסִים** was recited by mistake, such recitations are not considered an interposition and does not disqualify either *Shemoneh Esrei* or *Bircas HaMazon* (O.C. 693:2; M.B. 6).

⚡ § Leap Year

46. In a leap year, Purim is celebrated during the second Adar. Nevertheless, the 14th and 15th of the first Adar are called Purim Kattan. On these days, **אֶל אֲרֶד אַפִּים**, **תְּהַנוּ**, and **לְמַנְצַח** (Psalm 20) are omitted, and eulogies and fasting are prohibited (O.C. 697:1).

⚡ § Pesach

47. We ask questions regarding [i.e., we begin studying] the laws of Pesach thirty days before Pesach (O.C. 429:1), on the day of Purim (M.B. 2).