

Purim 5776 - Schedule

Sat Night - Snack and Pack 8:30p (Hillel Lounge)

Wednesday - Taanit Esther

Fast begins - 5:30a

Shacharit - 7:40a

Minha - 6:30p

Maariv - 7:45p

Megillah Reading I: 7:55pm in International Lounge

Megillah Reading II: 9:30pm in Hillel Lounge

BOO Chagiga: 9:00p

Thursday - Purim

Don't forget the mitzvot of the day: megillah, mishloach manot, matanot l'evyonim, and seudah

Shacharit (Megillah): 7a in International Lounge

Megilla: ~7:30a (but be early, no guarantees!)

Make-up Megillah: 2:45pm in International Lounge

Minha: 3:30pm in International Lounge

Shkia: 7:02pm

Ma'ariv: 10p in the Berlin Chapel.

Hilkhot Purim 5775

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The salvation of the Jews from Haman on Purim is described by our Rabbis as a *nes nistar* - a hidden miracle. God did not play a directly evident role in the story -- His name appears not once in the megilla -- but it is clear that God was very much in control “behind the scenes.” The halakhot of Purim will help us to ensure that our celebration has religious and spiritual purpose, and achieves the ultimate goal of our galut -- to bring us to take care of those who need us and of each other.¹

Below is an outline of the basic halakhot of Purim. If you have any specific questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you very much and Chag Purim Sameach!

Ta’anit Esther

The day before Purim is the fast of Esther. The fast is a minor fast, lasting from *alot ha-shachar* (dawn) to *tzeit ha-kochavim* (nightfall). If one plans to wake up early to eat before dawn, one *must* stipulate before falling sleep that they are not accepting the fast.² If anyone is feeling weak or sick throughout the day or has legitimate medical reasons why fasting is not safe for them, they need not fast -- since it is a minor fast we are lenient and the fast can be made up another day (please seek out a competent Rabbi). Like all fast days, Ta’anit Esther is dedicated to prayer and penitence and should be used to help us prepare spiritually for Purim. Even those not fasting should maintain the solemnity of the day.

Liturgical additions include:

- *Selichot*; *Avinu Malkeinu*; and Torah reading for a public fast during Shacharit
- Torah and Haftarah of a public fast day; *aneinu* and *sim shalom* during the silent Amidah; *birkat kohanim* during Chazan’s repetition; *avinu malkeinu* during Mincha

The fast this year begins at 5:30a in Waltham.

You may find the times for wherever you are located at www.ou.org/holidays/calendar/#daily

Breaking the fast

Although the fast itself ends at *tzeit ha-kochavim* (7:32p in Waltham), the fast is not broken until after the reading of the megilla.³ In the event that one feels ill, they may drink water or eat lightly (not bread).

¹ Cf Zecharya ch 8 and Esther ch 9, see if you spot any linkages. Have fun!

² Otherwise, you are considered to have implicitly accepted the fast. As a sidenote, I personally think it’s a bad idea to wake up before the fast starts to grab some breakfast and then go back to sleep, since by doing so you kickstart your metabolism, but I’m admittedly not a doctor.

³ Rama OC 692:4, MB 692:14-15

Megillah reading

One of the essential mitzvot of Purim is to hear Megilat Esther at night and in the day. Men and women are equally obligated in this mitzvah. It is important to hear every word of the Megillah. If one misses a word, they may read it to themselves from a book and then catch up with the public reading (but only for the minority of the words in the megillah). It is important that the reader repeats Haman's name after the booing, and that everyone makes sure to keep it quiet for all the other parts of reading.

When answering *amen* to the *Shehechyanu* blessing said over the Megillah, one should have in mind that the *brakhah* covers the other *mitzvot* of Purim as well. We do not say "*barekh hu u-barukh shemo*" in accordance with the practice regarding hearing any *brakhot* that satisfy our own obligations.

There will be two reading slots (one make-up) at night and two (one make-up) during the day. If you cannot make it to either, please talk to me beforehand.

Matanot la-Evyonim and Machatzit ha-Shekel

One of the mitzvot of Purim is to distribute *matanot la-evyonim* - gifts to the poor - on Purim day, to ensure that they are able to properly participate in Purim celebrations. They must be distributed to the needy *on the day of Purim*, and many organizations and sites are set up for this. Someone will be collecting on behalf of Yad Chesed in the minyan. If you want to pay via credit card in advance, OU-JLIC National partnered with Yad Eliezer, an amazing Israel-based feed-the-hungry organization, to make the mitzvah easy for you and meaningful for the hungry:

<https://www.ou.org/giving/donate-jlic-purim/>

How much to give

The minimum that one must contribute to fulfill this *mitzvah* is enough to buy a meal. One should adjust that amount based on where they are in life (and how much you would spend on a meal).

This is, of course, only the minimum; *tzedaka* is a mitzvah all year long. In making these calculations, I urge you to heed the words of the *Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chayim 694:3)* "It is best to increase money to the poor than to increase expenses for one's *seudah* or *mishloach manot* to one's friends, for there is no joy greater and more glorified than to bring joy to the hearts of the poor, orphans and widows. Thus one emulates the *Shechinah* (Divine presence)..." **If you plan on sending *mishloach manot* to many friends and/or to pay money for a costume, it is important to give a comparable amount for *matanot la-evyonim*.**

Other forms of Tzedakah

Machatzit ha-Shekel (Half Shekel) - There is a *minhag* to imitate the practice in the times of the Temple of giving a half-Shekel donation to charity. This is done by Ashkenazim by offering three half-dollar coins to represent the three donations collected in the Temple. The practice is to lift the half-dollar coins provided and exchange them with at least \$1.50 and then return the coins for others to use. Sepharadim have the practice to give the equivalent of half a shekel, i.e. 9 grams of silvers, which is today worth \$6.05. Sepharadim can fulfill both customs by “buying” the 3 half dollars and then donating them back.

There will be half-dollar coins for *machatzit ha-shekel* donations available at all minyanim during Purim.

Tzedakah to all who ask

The Shulchan Aruch (694:3) rules that one may not refuse to give tzedakah to anyone who asks for it on Purim. Many have the custom to carry coins with them all day in case someone asks for *tzedakah*.

Mishloach Manot

Every person has an obligation to send at least one Mishloach Manot Purim gift to another Jew on Purim day. Minimally, this package must contain two different types of food that are ready to be eaten. The idea that the gift must represent two different brachot *is a myth*. At least one of your gifts should be significant enough to be thought of as a course at a meal. This must be proportional to the giver and to the recipient (thus, if both are college undergrads, it can be small. If one is independently wealthy, there should be a steak in there somewhere).

In order to fulfill the mitzvah, you must send at least one actual package of foods. Sending through Hillel, synagogues, or other organizations is a beautiful way to bring joy to your friends on Purim, but does not fulfill the essential obligation. The reason is that *mishloach manot* must be “*ish le-re'ehu*” one person to another, and not through a corporation or in partnership with others.⁴

Seudah (Festive Meal)

The final mitzvah of Purim is to have a festive meal. The minimum requirement for the *seuda* is to have a meal with bread. However, it is preferable to have a festive meal with friends. Words of Torah and festive songs should be included.

The Purim seudah may be eaten all day long, though the Rema (OC 695:2) writes that it should ideally be eaten in the afternoon after one has prayed Mincha. The Rema also cautions that though the *seuda* may extend into the night of the 15th of Adar, the majority of the meal should be eaten during Purim day.

⁴ There is a wonderful and intriguing humra I was asked about recently -- sending through the agency of a third party. This is a cool and fun humra, symbolizing the foggy smokescreen of life and presumably the upshot of Purim (depending on what you think the morale of the Megillah is), but is a *da'at yachid* and absolutely not required.

Drinking

The Shulchan Aruch (OH 695:2) rules that a person must become *besumei* on Purim until they reach the point of not knowing the difference between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai.” Most authorities understand *besumei* to mean to get drunk. From here emerges the practice that many have to become intoxicated on Purim. A few notes:

- **Know your limits.** If you’re not a drinker, do not push yourself. All poskim agree that if you are afraid that you will violate any laws or halakhot, you have a mitzvah to *not* drink.
- The Rema rules that the practice is to drink a little and then take a nap. He’s an Orthodox rabbi, and tell me, **who doesn’t like a good nap?**
- Any mitzvah to drink applies to the seudah, **there is absolutely no halakhic imperative to drink at night.** It’s as much of a mitzvah to drink this Purim night as it is to drink any weeknight, i.e. **not such a mitzvah.**
- The laws of the State of Massachusetts and of the United States government apply. Underage drinking is not allowed.
- We should not allow our religious celebration turn into a source of *hilul Hashem* (desecration of God’s Name) by allowing our behavior and conduct to become overly disruptive, unruly or unsafe.

Al ha-Nisim

Al ha-Nissim is recited during the Amidah and Birkat ha-Mazon. If one forgets during the Amidah or Birkat ha-Mazon, they need not repeat it.