

## **Laws and Practices of Purim 5776**

Below is an outline of the basic halakhot of Purim, based on traditional-Orthodox Halakha. If you have any specific questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you very much and enjoy Purim!

### **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 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.

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 5:26am in New Haven.**

**You may find the times for wherever you are located at [www.ou.org/holidays/calendar/#daily](http://www.ou.org/holidays/calendar/#daily)**

### **Breaking the fast**

Although the fast itself ends at *tzeit ha-kochavim* (7:38pm in New Haven), the fast is traditionally not broken until after the reading of the megilla. In the event that one feels ill, one may break the fast earlier.

### **Megillah reading**

One of the essential mitzvot of Purim is to hear Megilat Esther read from a scroll 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 catch up with the public reading (but only for the minority of the words in the megillah).

When answering *amen* to the *Shehechyanu* blessing said over the Megillah, one should have in mind all the *mitzvot* of Purim.

### **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 (approximately \$5x2=\$10). One should adjust that amount based on where they are in life (and how much you would spend on a meal). It is important to prioritize Matanot la-Evyonim among the Mitzvot of the day.

**(Half Shekel)** – There is also a *minhag* to imitate the practice in the times of the Temple of giving a half-Shekel donation to charity. This is generally done by offering three half-dollar coins to represent the three donations collected in the Temple. (Most shuls have them on hand at Mincha on Ta’anit Ester.)

### **Mishloach Manot**

Every person has an obligation to personally send at least one Mishloach Manot Purim food gift to another Jew on Purim day. Minimally, this package must contain two different types of food that are ready to be eaten (*berakha* is irrelevant). The goal of *mishloach manot* is to foster a sense of friendship, and to provide people with food for their festive meal!

### **Seudah (Festive Meal)**

An important 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, meat, and festive songs. The majority of the meal should be eaten during Purim day (before 7:09 pm in New Haven).

### *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,” which is a source for drinking on Purim, especially as connected to the festive meal.

Of course, this should be done within reason, safety, and the law, and increase rather than decrease one's happiness on Purim.

### **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.

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