

Purim Guidelines

What is the deal with *Taanit Esther*?

The day before Purim is the Fast of Esther - Wednesday, March 20th beginning at 5:45am.

A couple *halachot* about the day:

If you think you might want to wake up before the fast in order to eat, you should have in mind that you might do so before going to sleep.

If you feel sick during the day, i.e., too sick to function normally, you may break your fast even if your condition is not life threatening.

When does the fast end?

The fast ends at 7:45pm, but it is customary not to eat until after *Megillah* reading. If one is feeling very sick, you may drink water before hearing *Megillah*.

Anything else I need to know about *Taanit Esther*?

There is a custom to give what people call *Machatzit HaShekel* – three coins, each representing one half of the standard currency of the land, or three half-dollars in the US – to charity on the afternoon of *Taanit Esther*. This serves as a remembrance of the half shekel which was collected in the time of the *Beit HaMikdash* during this month, the month of Adar. There will be a box in the *Beit Midrash* for those who wish to donate.

When does Purim begin?

Purim begins with *Maariv* and *Megillah* reading at 7:30 pm on Wednesday evening, March 20th. The prayer *al hanissim* is added in the *Shemoneh Esrei*. We read the *Megillah* after *Shemoneh Esrei*. If one is unable to hear the *Megillah* at this point, they should attend the reading that will take place later in the evening. One who cannot make the reading at either of those times should arrange for a private reading.

What does the mitzvah of *Megillah* entail?

The *Megillah* is read publicly in the evening and during the day of Purim, generally in the morning. It must be read from a scroll which is hand-written in accordance with *Halachah*. The reader and the audience must have intent to fulfill this mitzvah and to recite/hear the blessings before and after the reading. It is forbidden to speak from the time the blessings are recited before the reading until the conclusion of the blessing after the reading. It is customary to make noise whenever the name of Haman is mentioned. One should be careful to hear every word of the *Megillah* reading; as a general rule, if you get distracted and miss a word or two, you may quickly read them from a printed text and catch up to the reader.

Okay, what exactly happens in the morning?

Shacharit on Purim day is a regular weekday *Shacharit* with the following changes: We insert *al hannisim* in the *Shemoneh Esrei*, omit *tachanun* and *lamenatzeach*, read from the Torah (Shemot 17:8-16) and read the Megillah.

For those who cannot hear the *Megillah* during *Shacharit*, there will be another reading later in the day. Once again, one who cannot make the reading at either of those times should arrange for a private reading some time during the day.

When the blessing of *shehecheyanu* is recited prior to the reading of the Megillah, one should have in mind that it covers all the *mitzvot* of the day of Purim.

What are the other *mitzvot* of the day and how do we do them?

Mishloach Manot: There is a mitzvah to give at least one gift consisting of at least two food items (drinks count!) to one Jew, but you can give to as many people as you like and you can include as many additional food items as you like. The two items should be ready to consume and not need any preparation, and should be the kinds of items which one would serve at the festive Purim meal. The delivery of this gift should take place on Purim day (before sunset). You may send it through a third party.

Matanot La'evyonim: There is a mitzvah to give a gift of money (an amount sufficient for one average meal) to at least two poor people. The money should be given out on Purim day, but you can fulfill the obligation by donating money (even in advance of Purim) to an individual or an organization that will distribute the funds on Purim day elsewhere. More should be spent on the monetary gifts to the poor than on the food gifts to friends. You can fulfill this mitzvah with the OCP by giving money (or venmoing it) to Rabbi Taubes who will be giving the money Yad Eliezer. I recommend that you give at least \$20 but obviously the more the better.

Seudat Purim: There is a mitzvah to partake in a festive meal on the day of Purim. The meal must begin before sunset which is at 7:13pm. If you are unable to start your official seudah before this point, you should have a meal earlier in the day (even by yourself) and have in mind that this will count as your Purim meal. One should wash for the *seudah*.

Anything else?

“*Al hanissim*” is inserted into every *Shemoneh Esrei* on Purim and every Grace after Meals (*Birkat HaMazon*) that is recited any time on Purim. If, however, one forgot to include “*al hanissim*,” one does not repeat the prayer.

As always, feel free to get in touch with Rabbi Taubes if you have any questions

Happy Purim!