

A Prompt (Proper) Purim Primer

By Rabbi Reuven Spolter

The Four Parshios:

The rabbis designated the four weeks surrounding Purim with special readings for *maftir* and the *haftorah* in order to remind us of this unique time in the Jewish calendar. *Parshas Shekalim* (read this year on Shabbos March 8th) reminds us how the people gave towards the communal fund for sacrifices offered in the *Beis Hamikdash*. *Parshas Zachor* (read of Shabbos, March 15th) reminds us of the terrible attack against the Jewish people perpetrated by the nation of Amalek. Many authorities consider listening to this Torah reading a positive Torah commandment for men and women, so I urge you to make an extra effort to arrive in shul to hear the reading of *maftir*. Similarly, hearing the reading of *Parshas Parah* on Shabbos, March 29th, is also a mitzvah (though less popular than Zachor). Finally, on April 5th we read *Parshas Hachodesh* to herald the coming of the month of Nissan and the onset of the Pesach season.



The Fast of Esther – *Ta'anis Esther*:

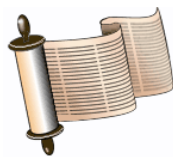
While Esther fasted for three days to repent in preparation for her fateful meeting with King Achashveirosh, we fast on the 13th day of Adar to commemorate the days of battle as the Jews defended their lives against the enemies plotting to kill them. While many of the fast days we observe seem difficult to relate to, this one to me feels very relevant, so I encourage you to have in mind the young men in women fighting both in Israel to defend our people, and for the US Armed Forces defending our freedom as you fast. The fast, which takes place on March 20th this year, begins at 6:23am, and our custom is to continue fasting until after the reading of the megillah. Minchah is at 7:20pm, and we'll begin Ma'ariv followed by the megillah reading at 8:20pm. For women who plan to hear a later megillah reading, the fast ends at 8:30pm. (You can thank the United States Congress for making daylight savings time three weeks earlier!) Customarily, we also participate in the custom of giving *machatzis hashekel* – the half-shekel the Jews gave as part of the census. Today, we have the custom of giving three half-dollars per person in the household to tzedakah. We'll have half-dollars for you to exchange in shul at Minchah on *Ta'anis Esther*.



Purim Mitzvos:

Megillah reading: Every Jew is required to hear the entire megillah reading twice: once at night and once during the day.

Gifts to the Poor – *Matanos L'evyonim*: The megillah mandates that each person give money to at least two people for them to use on Purim day. If you don't know someone personally who you'd like to give to, feel free to write a check



to the shul's tzedakah fund for distribution on Purim day, or send a donation to Matan B'seter, Detroit's wonderful tzedakah organization.

Sending Items of Food – *Mishloach Manot*: We send gifts of food to our friends and neighbors – preferably food that can be utilized for the Purim meal. *Shalach manos* should include at least two portions or two different types of food.

Additionally, we don't send gifts to people during their year of mourning (but we can send to their family members).

Purim Meal (*Seudah*): The custom is to have a substantial meal worthy of a holiday, and it must include bread. This year, as Purim falls on a Friday, in order not to ruin your Shabbos meal on Friday night, it's best to begin your meal before midday, which on Purim (March 21st) is at 12:40pm.

Work on Purim: Customarily, people today usually do go to work on Purim, and then return home sometime in the afternoon for the Purim meal. This year because of Shabbos that becomes difficult. While Jewish law certainly doesn't forbid work on Purim, it's important to celebrate the day in the proper spirit, with a celebratory holiday meal. That's hard to do when stealing a sandwich at lunch at your desk – no matter what you eat for lunch.

Drinking on Purim

The halachah states that it's a mitzvah to get drunk on Purim "until you don't know the difference between 'cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai'". That's pretty drunk. According to many authorities, one may drink until he's a little tipsy, or tired enough to go take a nap. In any case, please take care that:

- Anyone who's drinking has a designated driver. We hear the horror stories every year, and don't need any coming from Detroit.
- Know yourself. Purim is about celebrating the holiday in a spiritual and joyous matter. If alcohol makes you vulgar or inappropriate in any way, it's better not to drink at all.
- Finally, given the dangers of alcohol abuse and addiction in the world today, I feel strongly that no minor (under 21) should be given anything to drink, despite the religious imperative. Aside from the legal issues which cannot be overlooked, teenagers have difficulty knowing their own limitations and making good choices. Why encourage behavior that we know can have serious, negative ramifications at such an early age?



If you have any questions, please feel free to call me (248-967-3652) or email me at

rabbispolter@yiop.org. I wish you all a happy, enjoyable and safe Purim!

