



**14 Adar**



**Celebrating at KCT**

**Wednesday Evening, March 7, 2012**



## KEHILLAT CHOVEVEI TZION SHABBAT AND PURIM SERVICES

*March - April 2012      Adar - Nisan 5772*

|                |         |         |  |         |
|----------------|---------|---------|--|---------|
| Shabbat Zachor |         |         |  |         |
| Friday         | March 2 | 6:00 PM |  | 5:27 PM |
| Saturday       | March 3 | 9:00 AM |  |         |

### **Erev Purim**

#### **Megillah Reading**

**Wednesday      March 7      7:30 PM**

|                  |          |         |  |         |
|------------------|----------|---------|--|---------|
| Shabbat Ki Tissa |          |         |  |         |
| Friday           | March 9  | 6:00 PM |  | 5:34 PM |
| Saturday         | March 10 | 9:00 AM |  |         |

|               |          |         |  |         |
|---------------|----------|---------|--|---------|
| Shabbat Parah |          |         |  |         |
| Friday        | March 16 | 6:00 PM |  | 6:42 PM |
| Saturday      | March 17 | 9:00 AM |  |         |

|  |          |         |  |         |
|--|----------|---------|--|---------|
| Shabbat HaChodesh (Rosh Chodesh Nisan) |          |         |  |         |
| Friday                                 | March 23 | 6:00 PM |  | 6:50 PM |
| Saturday                               | March 24 | 9:00 AM |  |         |

*With the start of Nisan, comes the call to "Begin Pesach Preparations"!*

|                   |          |         |  |         |
|-------------------|----------|---------|--|---------|
| Shabbat HaGadol * |          |         |  |         |
| Friday            | March 30 | 6:05 PM |  | 6:57 PM |
| Saturday          | March 31 | 9:00 AM |  |         |

**\* Happy Anniversary to the entire Kehillah Mishpacha!**

|   |         |         |  |         |
|---|---------|---------|--|---------|
| Shabbat Pesach (The First Seder is on Friday evening) |         |         |  |         |
| Friday  | April 6 | 6:00 PM |  | 7:04 PM |
| Saturday  | April 7 | 9:00 AM |  |         |

*Be sure to see the upcoming Pesach mailing for holiday service times!*



**Proclaiming the Holiday of Purim ..... Megillat Esther 9:1-4**

*Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them.) The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Achashuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordechai fell upon them. For Mordechai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.*

~

**The Holiday in Overview:**

**Its Meaning, Words and Practices**

*(Drawn from the writings of Rabbi Stanley Asekoff, of Congregation Bnai Shalom in West Orange, NJ)*

The start of the month of Adar (this year, Adar begins on February 24) is a reminder to commence the merrymaking in anticipation of the holiday of Purim. This famous Rabbinic statement indicates the wonderfully happy overtones attributed to the entire month of Adar.

**SHABBAT ZACHOR** (March 3 this year). The Shabbat immediately prior to Purim is called Shabbat Zachor (the Sabbath of Remembrance) because, on this Shabbat, it is customary to read a special section from the Torah (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) that instructs us to remember what the Nation of Amalek did to the Jewish People as they were fleeing from Egypt - they attacked them and attempted to destroy them, singling out the rear of the column of marchers where the elderly, frail, and weak were gathered. God says that He will surely wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens. This is read prior to Purim because of the tradition that Haman was descended from Amalek, along with a special Haftorah Zachor haftorah (I Samuel 15:2-34) which discusses G-d's command to King Saul to destroy the people of Amalek.

**TA'ANIT ESTHER** (The Fast of Esther, Wednesday, March 7). It is customary to observe a daytime fast (from sun-up to sun-down) on the day before Purim (or if it falls out on Friday, to observe the fast two days before Shabbat) in commemoration of the Fast observed by Queen Esther prior to her appearance before Achashuerus to intercede with him in behalf of her people.

**MEGILLAT ESTHER** (The Scroll of Esther) is the Biblical book containing the story of Purim. We actually read the story in the synagogue on Purim from a parchment scroll, being very careful to rattle the graggers whenever the name Haman is mentioned, but only then. The mitzvah is to hear all of the words of the megillah.

**MACHATZIT HASHEKEL** (The half-shekel). This refers to the half shekel that was collected in ancient days for the upkeep of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is a reminder of the custom that

developed and is mentioned in Megillat Esther of giving gifts of money to the poor on Purim. *(It is the KCT long-standing custom mid-way through the Megillah reading, that all attendees - men, women and youngsters - contribute exactly one dollar, not more, not less, as our fulfillment of this precious custom.)*

**RA'ASHANIM** (Graggers) are noise makers used during the reading of the Megillah every time the name of Haman is mentioned to fulfill the Biblical statement that God would wipe out the name of Amalek from under the heavens. The Hebrew word for gragger is *Ra'ashan*.

**MATANOT LA'EVYONIM** (Gifts for the poor). In ancient Persia, the Jews celebrated Purim by giving gifts to the poor, from which is derived the custom that we should put at least two coins of the realm into at least two different tzedakah "pushkes" at the conclusion of the reading of the Megillah.

**MISHLOACH MANOT** (Sending food gifts) to friends is a Purim tradition also derived from the Megillah. We read that the Jews of Persia celebrated Purim by sending such gifts to their friends. On Purim day, we send at least two plates containing at least two different kinds of foods to at least two friends. Some make this gift even more elaborate, in baskets with decorations, and several additional types of foods and drink.

**PURIM GELT** (Purim money) refers to the custom of giving two coins to any child who brings Mishloach Manot to our homes on Purim day. Chanukah gelt is derived from Purim gelt and in recent years, the latter seems to have been gaining in popularity.

**SHUSHAN PURIM** Shushan was the capital city of Persia. Because the Jews of Shushan were saved one day later than all the other Persian Jews, and consequently celebrated Purim one day later, it has become customary that all Jews living in cities that had walls surrounding them in the days of Joshua celebrate Shushan Purim. So the Jews of Jerusalem, for example, celebrate Purim one day later.

**DRESSING IN COSTUME** on Purim has become a venerable custom. Why costumes? As a reminder that although God's presence in the Purim story was not mentioned, He was there, in disguise, so to speak, and it was He who helped Esther and Mordechai save the Jews.

**OZNAY HAMAN** (Haman's Ears in Hebrew and in Yiddish HAMANTASHEN - "Pockets of Haman") are the three cornered pastries containing a variety tasty fillings, such as mon (poppy), apricot, cherry, and prunes. They remind us of the three cornered hat worn by Haman, the villain of the Purim story. The original name for this pastry was "muntashen", "mun" being the Yiddish word for poppy seeds, The Hebrew name "Oznay Haman" is taken from the older name "Haman Ohren" (Haman's ears).

**SE'UDAT PURIM-THE FESTIVE PURIM MEAL** is a special, celebration meal eaten late on Purim Day close to sunset and continuing through until dark. It commemorates the festive meals that took place in Shushan, the capital of Persia, on Purim Day when the Jews were saved from Haman's plot of destruction.

## To Remember . . . And Not To Forget

The special Shabbat which precedes Purim, Shabbat Zachor, derives its name comes from the opening word of the special maftir reading "Zachor." Deuteronomy 25:17-19: *Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt-how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!*

### Are Jews Still Commanded to Blot Out the Memory of Amalek?

*By Rabbi David Golinkin, President of the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem.*

On Purim, we are rightly appalled by the fact that Haman wanted to destroy the Jewish people. Yet we seldom notice that we were commanded to do Amalek, in Exodus 17, which we read on Purim morning, and Deuteronomy 25, which we read on

In the Haftarah of *Shabbat Zachor*, the Prophet Samuel orders King Saul to "attack Amalek, spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses!" (I Samuel 15:3). In other words, we are instructed to commit genocide. This is morally problematic in and of itself; it is doubly problematic after the Holocaust.

During the biblical period, we were attacked by many peoples. What was so awful about Amalek's attack? Why blot out the memory of Amalek, as opposed to other peoples who have attacked us throughout history?

Some rabbis say that Amalek deviated from the norms of war. They attacked a defenseless bunch of slaves on the road, just for the sake of attacking them. They had nothing to gain from the attack since the Israelites had just left Egypt; it would lead neither to improving their reputation as warriors nor to significant spoils. It was an unjust war motivated by hatred.

Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Sofer (Hungary, 19<sup>th</sup> century) emphasized the words "undeterred by fear of God" (Deut. 25:18). If Amalek attacked the Israelites immediately after God redeemed them from Egypt with signs and wonders, it shows that they had no fear of God. That is why Exodus says that with Amalek from generation to generation (Exodus 17:16). It is, so to speak, a war between God and Amalek.

Despite the biblical commandment to blot out the memory of Amalek, a number of rabbinic sources express clear discomfort with this commandment, which led to allegorical interpretations of the commandment to destroy Amalek. The Zohar says that Amalek is Samael or Satan, while in Barcelona (ca. 1300) there were commentators who said that Amalek means *Yetzer Hara*, or the evil inclination. In other words, we are commanded to blot out Satan, or *Yetzer Hara*, not a physical people called Amalek.. Indeed, the commandment to blot out Amalek is omitted entirely by two of the most important codifiers of Jewish law -- Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher in his *Tur* (Spain, ca. 1340) and Rabbi Yosef Karo in his *Shulhan Arukh* (Safed, 1556).

Nonetheless, there were many important rabbis who ruled that Amalek still exists and that we are still commanded to remember their deeds and to destroy them. This was the opinion of Maimonides in his *Sefer Hamitzvot* and *Mishneh Torah* and of Rabbi Pinhass Halevi of Barcelona in his *Sefer Hahinukh* (13<sup>th</sup> century). Indeed, many rabbis identify Amalek with a specific people such as the Christians and the Armenians. Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik and others say that anyone who hates the Jewish people is from the seed of Amalek e.g. the Nazis, the Soviets, Nasser and the Mufti. More recently, Rabbi Jack Riemer has written that the Muslim fundamentalists are Amalek.

Personally, I identify with the discomfort expressed above regarding the commandment to destroy an entire people, despite the gravity of their original deed. I agree with the many rabbis throughout history who eliminated this mitzvah from their codices or who said that there are no longer any Amalekites in the world. We have seen above just how dangerous it is to identify your current enemy with Amalek. The identification changes from country to country and from place to place and it is even used by Christians against us!

Though it would seem that the Amalek story is entirely negative in nature, I would like to conclude with two positive, ethical lessons which we can learn from the Amalek passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

In *Pesikta d'rav Kahana*, Rabbi Banai explained that Amalek's attack was a *punishment* for unethical behavior. Thus, the message of the story is not hatred but *repentance*. In order to prevent another Amalek, we must behave ethically.

Finally, we shall cite Prof. Nehama Leibowitz. What was the dreadful sin of Amalek, as opposed to other peoples who fought with Israel? Because only of him is it written: "undeterred by of God". In all four biblical passages which use this expression, the litmus test for "fear of God" is the attitude to the weak and the stranger. Amalek is the archetype of the Godless, who attack the weak because they are weak, who cut down the stragglers in every generation.

In our day, this is perhaps the most important message of the Amalek story -- not hatred of Amalek but aversion to their actions. In the State of Israel, there are many strangers and stragglers -- new immigrants, foreign workers, as well as innocent Arabs and Palestinians. Some Jews learn from the story of Amalek that we should hate certain groups. We must emphasize the opposite message. We must protect "the stragglers" so that we may say of the State of Israel: "surely there is fear of God in this place".

~

## **The 60-Second Megillah**

*Adapted from "One Hour Purim Primer," by Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf.*

### **CHAPTER 1 -- KING ACHASHVEROSH THROWS A PARTY**

A lavish six-month celebration marks the third year in the reign of Achashverosh, king of Persia. Queen Vashti refuses the king's request to appear at the celebration and display her beauty for the assembled guests. The king's advisors counsel that Vashti be replaced with a new queen.

### **CHAPTER 2 -- ESTHER BECOMES THE QUEEN**

Across the Persian Empire, officials are appointed to identify beautiful candidates to succeed Vashti as queen. A Jewish girl, Esther, the niece of Mordechai, is brought to the capital of Persia as one of the candidates. Mordechai tells Esther to conceal her identity. Esther is chosen to be the queen. Mordechai learns of a plot to overthrow the king. Mordechai informs Esther, Esther tells the king, and the plotters are hanged.

### **CHAPTER 3 -- THE RISE OF HAMAN**

Achashverosh appoints Haman to be his prime minister. All bow in homage to Haman. Mordechai consistently refuses to bow to Haman. An enraged Haman vows to kill all the Jews of Persia. Haman prevails upon Achashverosh to destroy the Jews. A royal edict is disseminated throughout Persia. The 13th of Adar is designated as the date to exterminate all the Jews and plunder their possessions.



### **CHAPTER 4 -- ESTHER'S MISSION BECOMES CLEAR**

Mordechai tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of public mourning. Mordechai sends a copy of the decree to Esther and asks her to intercede with the king. Esther replies that to approach the king without being summoned is to risk death. Mordechai tells her that she has no choice. Esther tells Mordechai to ask the Jews to fast and pray for three days before she will approach the king.

### **CHAPTER 5 -- ESTHER'S STRATEGY, HAMAN'S FURY**

King Achashverosh receives Esther and grants her virtually any request. Esther's request: that the king and Haman join her at a banquet. After the banquet, Haman sees Mordechai who once again refuses to bow. Haman's wife, Zeresh, suggests that Mordechai be hung, and the gallows are prepared.

### **CHAPTER 6 -- THE REVERSAL BEGINS**

The king can't sleep and asks to hear the royal chronicles. For the first time, the king learns of the assassination plot that Mordechai had revealed. That same night, Haman comes to see the king about hanging Mordechai. Before Haman can speak, the king tells Haman to honor Mordechai by dressing him in royal garments, to place him on a royal stallion and to personally lead him through the streets of Shushan, capital of Persia.

### **CHAPTER 7 -- REVERSAL OF FORTUNE**

At the second banquet, Esther reveals her identity and announces that she and her people are about to be murdered. Esther identifies Haman as her arch enemy. The king has Haman hung on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordechai.

### **CHAPTER 8 -- THE REVERSAL IS COMPLETE**

Mordechai is named prime minister to replace Haman. A second royal edict is promulgated empowering the Jews to fight and kill anyone who would try to harm them.

### **CHAPTER 9 -- THE HOLIDAY OF PURIM IS ESTABLISHED**

On the 13th of Adar, a day that had been designated for Jewish destruction, the Jews are victorious over their enemies. The 10 sons of Haman are hung. The 14th and 15th of Adar are designated to celebrate the salvation. These are the days of Purim. Mordechai initiates the Purim practices -- consisting of a festive meal, the exchange of gifts of food, and the giving of monetary gifts to the poor.

### **CHAPTER 10 -- MORDECHAI AND PERSIA**

Persia, with Mordechai as prime minister, flourishes. The role of Mordechai in the history of the Persian empire is recorded in the king's chronicles.



## Unmasking the Purim Heroes: Were Mordecai and Esther assimilated Jews?

*Written by Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, and extracted from his book, "The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays." Rabbi Greenberg is the founding president of CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and a former president of the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation.*

Today, Purim is a quintessential Jewish holiday. To every little boy and girl who masquerades on Purim, Mordecai and Esther are arch-heroes of Jewishness. But a good case can be made that Mordecai and Esther, too, may have been quite integrated in Persian life and that Purim is the holiday brought to you by assimilated Jews.

What kind of Jews were Mordecai and Esther? Obviously, the answer has to be a speculation, and their record of saving the Jews speaks for itself. Still . . .

First, there is the matter of their names. Esther's name probably is derived from Ishtar, a Babylonian goddess, and Mordecai's name from Marduk, a Babylonian god. Equivalent names today might well be Mary and Christopher. Of course, committed Jews in open societies also adopted Gentile names. My parents, Orthodox Jews, wanted an Anglo-Saxon name for their little son, Yitzchak--so they named me Irving. But Christopher?!

Then there is that Miss Persia contest. Esther was entered into a competition to become queen by marrying a Gentile king. Imagine that the president of the United States gets divorced and there is a nationwide beauty contest whose prize is marriage to the president. What kind of Jewish women would enter? Not likely Hasidic girls or graduates of Stern College [the women's college of Yeshiva University].



*Esther approaches King Achashverosh*

The Megillah tells us that, at Mordecai's instruction, Esther did not reveal her people or her origins while she lived at the king's court. What did she eat? Did she go to the mikvah [ritual bath]? The Rabbis of the Talmud recognized the problem, and while some claim Esther had secret arrangements to keep Shabbat and kashrut, others conclude that she did not act very Jewishly.

It is also interesting that neither Mordecai nor Esther had any family, at least as far as the Megillah reveals. (A midrash suggests that they were married to each other, but that is another story.) One of the "crazy" reversals of the Purim story is that the Jewish characters seem to be living alone while the Haman types had the strong family ties.



Adaptation was the key to a Jew's ability to rise, and often it was the price of admission. Thus, the "court Jews" (to whom the community turned, over the later course of Jewish history, to intercede with the ruling powers when Jews were in trouble) were typically half-Gentile in their ways of living. When Mordecai asked Esther to plead with the king, she vacillated at first – just the reaction one would expect from a marginal Jew who was reluctant to lose her place in society.



***Reputed tomb of Mordechai and Esther in the Persian capital of Hamadan (present-day Iran)***

Mordecai did stand up to Haman, but his refusal to bow does not make him a traditional Jew. "Non-Jewish Jews" such as Spinoza, Freud, and Marx used their outsider status as a source of creative insight to become critics of the Establishment. It is equally plausible that--like Leon Blum of France and Benjamin Disraeli of England, whose marginal Jewishness led them to work for a new political order--Mordecai also opposed Haman's emerging tyranny. When the resentment he generated focused not on the issues but on the Jews, the anti-Semitism-induced "shock of recognition" followed. At that point there was one of three choices: to be craven and yield, to ignore the Jewish issue, or to accept one's Jewishness as a decisive fact and take up Jewish cause and fate.

Mordecai and, after some initial hesitation, Esther responded not only by defending their principles but by reaching out to all Jews and rallying the community to self-defense and self-affirmation. They saved the Jewish people and wrote a glorious page in Jewish history. Perhaps it is no accident that the Purim holiday they and the folk fashioned is off-beat. These "born-again" Jews contributed a vital new element to the total Jewish religion and celebration.

The above analysis is deliberately provocative, even overstated. On balance, the evidence points to Mordecai's and Esther's being devoted Jews; usually it takes that type to risk their lives to save their people. The rabbinic tradition very strongly insists that they were observant Jews. Note that when Esther was in trouble, she asked the Jews to fast and pray. Esther's Jewish name is Hadassah; she possibly lived in two worlds, with the name Esther on her diploma and the family calling her Hadassah at home.

Still, even if Mordecai and Esther weren't assimilated, many of their friends and allies in the war against Haman were, as the Rabbis indeed set forth.

The point of this exercise is to underscore one of the deep lessons of Purim: Never write off assimilated Jews. They come out of the historical closet in the greatest crises and when they are least expected.

## Purim Foods

*Written by Rabbi Robert Goodman, and reproduced from his book, "Teaching Jewish Holidays: History Values and Activities". Formerly the rabbi of Congregation Beth Shalom in Brandon, FL, Rabbi Goodman serves as a consultant to the Boards of Jewish Education in Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Milwaukee.*

**The most well-known Purim pastry is associated with the villain of the story!**

Many customs related to eating special foods have developed around Purim. The most famous Purim food is **hamantaschen** [Yiddish for "Haman's pockets"] which is known in Hebrew as *oznay Haman*, meaning "Haman's ears." In addition to eating hamantaschen filled with poppy seeds, fruit, cheese, or jellies, other foods are also traditional for Purim.



A special Purim challah, known as keylitsh [kulich] in Russian, is sometimes made. This challah is oversized and extensively braided. The braids on the challah are intended to remind people of the rope used to hang Haman.

Kreplach are customarily eaten whenever "beating" takes place: before Yom Kippur when men have themselves flogged [rarely done in modern times], on Hoshanah Rabbah when the willow branches are beaten, and on Purim when Haman is beaten. The kreplach consist of triangular pouches of dough filled with chopped meat. They are eaten as a separate dish or served in soup.

Bean dishes are also eaten. They include salted beans boiled in their jackets, and chickpeas boiled and seasoned with salt and pepper: This is meant to remind us that Esther would not eat anything at the court of King Ahashuerus that was not kosher, so she mainly ate peas and beans. A similar idea is expressed regarding Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:12).

Among Sephardic Jews, it is a custom to wrap pastry dough around a decorated hard-boiled egg to create the shape of a Purim character or an animal. After baking, these artistic creations (Folares) are displayed with pride and eaten with delight.

~

## Chocolate Hamantaschen

*Triangular chocolate pockets with chocolate ganache filling*

*Victoria Sutton is a freelance chef in New York City, and is a Barnard College graduate as well as a*

holder of the Grand Diploma in Classic Pastry Arts from the French Culinary Institute. This is her recipe for Chocolate Hamantaschen.

Ingredients . . . Yields about 24 Hamantaschen

*Chocolate Pâte Sucree:*

3/4 cup granulated sugar  
4 oz butter, softened  
1 teaspoon almond extract (optional)  
1 egg  
1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour  
1/3 cup cocoa  
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
3-4 Tablespoons heavy cream

*Chocolate Ganache Filling:*

8 1/2 oz dark chocolate, chopped  
8 oz heavy cream  
dash of salt  
Rum to taste

Directions . . .

*To Prepare Sucree:*

Cream butter, sugar, salt, and almond extract if using until light and fluffy. Add egg and mix until incorporated. Combine flour, cocoa powder, and baking powder. Add to butter mixture in two stages, alternating with the heavy cream. More or less cream might be needed depending on the consistency of the dough. Turn dough out onto plastic wrap, and form a flattened disc. Chill for at least one hour.

*To Prepare Ganache:*

Over a double boiler, heat cream and chopped chocolate. When chocolate is mostly melted, lightly whisk until ganache is smooth and shiny. Whisk in rum and salt. Chill for several hours.

To form hamantaschen: Roll chilled chocolate sucree to slightly more than 1/8 inch thick. Using a round cutter or glass rim dipped in flour, cut circles of about 3 inches in diameter. If adding dried fruit or nuts, sprinkle a small amount in the center of the cut discs.



Remove ganache from fridge, and using either a small ice-cream scoop or by hand, form about 1 inch round balls and place in center of sucree circles. Carefully fold in the edges to form a triangular shape, and pinch the corners to seal. Ensure there are no gaps or tears in the dough, to prevent filling from oozing out during baking.

Bake hamantaschen on greased cookie sheets at 350 F for about 15 minutes, until crust is baked through. Ganache will liquify during baking, but will set as hamantaschen cool.

## Purim and its Four Mitzvot: The Sending of Gifts( Mishloach Manot)

The four mitzvot associated with Purim are:

The Reading of the Megillah (Mikra Megillah)

The Festive Purim Meal (Seudat Purim)

Sending Gifts (Mishloach Manot)

Gifts to the poor (Matanot l'Evyonim)

*This explanation is extracted from The Book of Our Heritage by Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov*

### Mishloach Manot:

It is obligatory to send a gift which consists of at least two 'portions' to another person. Both men and women are included in this Mitzvah.

Only what is edible or drinkable without further cooking or preparation, is considered a 'portion.' One may therefore send cooked meats or fish, pastry goods, fruit, sweets, wine and other beverages. And it is the more praiseworthy to send portions to as many friends as possible. Even better, however, is to give more gifts to the poor than to friends.



One of the most popular food items that has been used for this Mitzvah is the Hamentash, a calorific (fattening) concoction consisting of dough shaped into the form of a triangle [with just two possibilities allowed - exactly sixty degrees in each angle or an isosceles right triangle - just kidding!], with filling of various kinds.

Even a poor person is required to fulfill the Mitzvah of 'Mishloach Manot.' If one is unable to do so directly, he may exchange his own food for that of his friend; both of whom would thus fulfill their obligations. The Mitzvah of Mishloach Manot may not be fulfilled with money, clothing and the like, but only with foods or beverages.

It is proper to send portions sufficient to convey regard for the recipient. One should not send an item so minute as to be worthless in the eyes of the poor.

If at all possible, these 'portions' should be sent by messengers, rather than to be delivered personally. And though it is said of all other mitzvot: 'It is more of a Mitzvah if done personally, than if done through a messenger,' this Mitzvah is different. Since the term, 'Mishloach Manot' (the sending of portions), is the term used in the 'Megillah' the proper procedure for fulfilling the Mitzvah, is to do so by messenger. Nevertheless, if one delivers his Mishloach Manot personally, he still fulfills his obligation.

The Mitzvah of Mishloach Manot should be performed by day.

A mourner is free of the obligation, but some hold that it rests even upon him, except that one in mourning should not send gifts which would be a source of rejoicing.



The Mitzvah of Mishloach Manot and the giving of gifts to the poor, during the days of Purim, are prescribed in order to recall the brotherly love which Mordechai and Esther awoke among all Jews. When there is inner unity among Jews, even the wrongdoers among them become righteous.

~

## **Until You Can Not Tell Mordecai from Haman . . .**

### **A lighthearted look at the source of the obligation to get drunk on Purim**

*Written by Jeffrey Spitzer, Chairman of the Department of Talmud and Rabbinics at Gann Academy, The New Jewish High School, Waltham, Mass., and a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary.*

Does Judaism encourage drinking? In reference to Purim, the Talmud states that one is to drink to the point of not knowing the difference between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai." In modern times, the sensitivity to alcohol abuse has caused this custom to lose popularity among many groups, while still remaining strong in others. In the spirit of Purim, this article looks at traditional definitions of what it means to drink too much. I urge anyone who reads this article to seek halakhic (Jewish legal) advice about the "obligation" to get drunk on Purim from someone who is a competent, and preferably sober, halakhic authority.

When it comes to drinking on Purim, the Talmud clearly understood what the scroll of Esther (the Megillah) was all about. In practically every chapter of the Megillah, someone is imbibing heavily at a drinking party. And the scroll concludes with Mordecai's instruction to the entire Jewish people to celebrate these days as "*yemei mishteh v'simchah*, days of drinking and rejoicing" (Esther 9:22).

An ambiguous law like that, however, would not be left unqualified by the rabbis. On Passover, precise amounts are defined so that one may fulfill the obligations of eating matzah and drinking the four cups of wine. So one might expect that the rabbis would define "days of drinking" in terms of the volume of wine or the number of hours one would be obligated to drink.

The rabbis of the Talmud paid close attention to the nature of the obligation. On Passover, the four cups of wine are for joy and for sanctification, but they also have symbolic associations with the expressions that God used for Israel's redemption. On Purim, however, the wine (or liquor) is not symbolic. It is functional. Consequently, the nature of the obligation is not defined by volume, but rather, by the effect upon the drinker.

## **How Drunk Is Drunk? . . .**

"Rava said: It is one's duty *levasumei*, to make oneself fragrant [with wine] on Purim until one cannot tell the difference between 'arur Haman' (cursed be Haman) and 'barukh Mordekhai' (blessed be Mordecai)" (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 7b).

What degree of drunkenness is meant by this? The word *levasumei* is sometimes translated as "get mellow;" others simply say "drink." The word *levasumei*, however, is from the same root as *besamim* (fragrant



spices, like those that are smelled during Havdalah at the conclusion of the Sabbath). Minimally, one must drink so that others would smell it, although if they are also drunk, who would be able to check? Maximally, one must become, to use a technical term, "stinking drunk."

Most people assume that one must become so befuddled that one can no longer distinguish between the most wicked of people and the most righteous. Some, however, have noted that the two phrases, "*arur Haman*" and "*barukh Mordekhai*" have the same numerical value according to the traditional counting of the Hebrew letters called gematria (502). This point is somewhat obscure. Are we to assume that people are sober enough to calculate the gematria of these phrases, but drunk enough to get the words confused because they have the same gematria? However puzzling, this seems to be the opinion of the 17th century halakhist R. Abraham Abele ben Hayyim haLevi Gombiner.

### Alcohol and Swordplay Don't Mix . . .

Perhaps the Talmud tells the following story in order to provide some degree of clarification of Rava's requirement to get drunk: Rabbah and R. Zeira got together for Purim Seudah (the feast on the afternoon of Purim). They got very drunk, and Rabbah got up and cut R. Zeira's throat (literally, Rabbah butchered him). The next day, Rabbah prayed on R. Zeira's behalf and brought him back to life. A year later, Rabbah asked, "Would you like to have Purim Seudah with me again this year?" R. Zeira replied, "One cannot count on a miracle every time." (Megillah 7b) Cute story, but what does it have to do with how much one is supposed to drink? Traditional interpreters have four basic approaches. The most eminent sources, including the Rosh, the Tur, and Yosef Karo, simply quote Rava's statement that one "becomes fragrant" without any reference to the story of Rabbah. Presumably, R. Zeira had a hard night, but why should that spoil the party for everyone else?!

The opposite approach is attributed to the late 11th-century North African halakhist Rabbenu Ephraim ibn Avi Alragan, "Based on the story of Rabbah getting up and slaughtering R. Zeira, we reject the statement of Rava, and it is wrong to act in such a way" (quoted by the Ra"n, ad. loc.). Maimonides, however, replaces the "can't tell the difference between Haman and Mordecai" standard with one that is more easily appraised:



How does one fulfill the obligation of the Purim Seudah? One should eat meat and prepare as nice a meal as one can afford and drink wine until one becomes drunk and falls asleep from drunkenness. (Laws of Megillah 2:15)

Falls asleep? Many contemporary halakhists see Maimonides as limiting the application of Rava's "can't tell the difference..." rule; one only has to get drunk enough to fall asleep. This reading is strange. Rigorous double-blind controlled testing reports that one loses the ability to count up gematria significantly quicker than one passes out in a drunken stupor. Nevertheless, if



Maimonides, who was, after all, a doctor, says that one hasn't fulfilled one's obligation until one is out cold on the floor, then maybe that should be the standard. Of course, from a public health perspective, going to sleep is preferable to picking up a sword (or car keys).

Maimonides' reading finds substantial support in the comments of the 16th-century Talmud commentator R. Samuel Eliezer ben Judah haLevi Edels, better known as the Maharsha. The Maharsha understands the story of Rabbah and R. Zeira as an example of figurative language:

It is surprising to explain this as if Rabbah actually committed this crime, but rather, it is as if Rabbah butchered him. That is to say, Rabbah urged R. Zeira to drink too much until he got sick and almost died... The words "brought him back to life" in both the Bible and the Talmud can simply mean healing. If the Maharsha's reading underlies Maimonides' ruling that one should drink until one passes out, then perhaps, against the opinion of Rabbenu Ephraim ibn Avi Alragan, the story of Rabbah and R. Zeira is meant to be indicative of normative practice (the drinking, not the swordplay).

As the Italian commentator, R. Hizkiyah ben David DaSilva points out, if the story of Rabbah were meant to indicate that Rava's rule had been rejected, then why would R. Zeira refuse to join Rabbah the following year? Clearly, R. Zeira expected that Rabbah would continue to drink heavily on Purim (Peri Hadash). Following this line of reasoning, the point of the story is that one should get drunk until one is "dead to the world." Hopefully, one also has a friend who can nurse one back to sobriety, or at least back to consciousness.

### **When Not To Drink on Purim . . .**

More recent halakhic commentators have been somewhat more limited. The 18th-century codifier, R. Abraham ben Yehiel Michal Danzig wrote:

Since the entire miracle of Purim came about through wine, our sages obligated us to get drunk, or at least to drink more than what we are used to, in order to remember the great miracle. However, if one knows oneself, and is likely to neglect the performance of a mitzvah [commandment], such as washing one's hands before eating bread or making a blessing over food before and after eating or that one might forget to pray or might act in a light-headed way, it is better not to get drunk. (Quoted in Be'ur Halakhah 694, s.v. "Ad")

Don't get so drunk that you forget to perform any mitzvot. And count among those mitzvot the contemporary obligation to have a designated driver. Cars can be like Rabbah's sword, and one cannot count on a miracle.

~

### **Some Interesting Facebook Pages and Groups**



Log on to Facebook, and search for . . . "**Purim**" (WikiPedia's page), "**Dressing Up On Purim**", "**Tomb of Esther and Mordechai**" and several for "**Queen Esther**". The good news . . . there seem to be none for Haman!

~

## Strange Facts About Purim

*From Kehillat Israel in Lansing, MI*



Megillat Esther is the only book in the Tanach where there is no occurrence of any form of God's name. (*Shir haShirim*, the Song of Songs, also does not mention God's name, but Song 8:6 contains a word that when divided into two words forms one of the less common forms of God's name: *Yah*.)



All the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in one verse of Megillat Esther, in Esther 3:13. Also, the longest verse in the Bible appears here. It has 43 words in Hebrew (which translate to about 90 English words); see Esther 8:9.



Of all of the books of the Tanach, Megillat Esther is the only book of which no copy or even a fragment has been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.



The Hebrew word *mishteh*, meaning "banquet," occurs 20 times in Megillat Esther. It appears only 20 additional times in the rest of the Tanach. Those Persians loved to party!



The Talmud tells us to celebrate Purim so thoroughly that one can't tell the difference between "Blessed be Mordechai" and "Cursed be Haman" (*b. Meg. 7b*). According to *gematria*, the numerical value of the Hebrew letters in each of those phrases, *baruch Mordechai* and *arur Haman*, is exactly the same, 502. (*Editors: But be sure to read the essay directly above!*)



And there is this silly one . . .

5772 The year according to Jewish calendar  
- 4709 The year according to Chinese calendar  
1063 Total number of years that Jews went without Chinese food!  
. . . which is clearly NOT a fact! Because how could Jews go that long?

~

### Purim Songs . . . For The Young of All Ages!

#### ***A Wicked, Wicked Man . . .***

O once there was a wicked, wicked man, and Haman was his name, sir  
He would have murdered all the Jews, though they were not to blame, sir.

Oh, today we'll merry, merry be,  
Oh, today we'll merry, merry be,  
Oh, today we'll merry, merry be,  
And nosh some hamentaschen.

And Esther was the lovely queen, of king Achashverosh.  
When Haman said he'd kill us all, Oh my, how he did scare us.  
Oh, today . . .

But Mordechai her cousin bold, said: "what a dreadful chutzpa!  
If guns were but invented now, this Haman I would shoot, sir."

Oh, today . . .

The guest of honor he shall be, this clever Mr. Smarty,  
And high above us he shall swing, at a little hanging party.

Oh, today . . .

Of all his cruel and unkind ways, this little joke did cure him,  
And don't forget we owe him thanks, for this jolly feast of Purim.

Oh, today . . .

*Editors' note: You may wish to seek out the lyrics and music for other "Purim standards" like **Ani Purim**, **Chag Purim**, **Ze Hayom Purim**, **Shoshanat Ya'akov** (described elsewhere in this booklet), **HaRa'ashan** (the Noisemaker), or **Utzu Eitza** (Make Your Plans!) . . . OR perhaps, have your family write your own!*

~

### **Chag Purim Sameach!**

*And the celebration continues . . .*

**In the "Eighteen in Eighteen" Commemoration  
of the Kehillah's Special Anniversary Year**



~ **The KCT Wine Tasting and Cheese Party** ~

*March 10 at 7:30 PM*

~ **Tikkun L'Eyl Shavuot and Shavuot Kallah** ~

*Starts Saturday evening, May 26*

*Continues Sunday-Monday, May 27-28*

*Scholar-in-Residence: Rabbi William Berman*

~ **The "Chai Celebration" Gala Dinner** ~

*Wednesday evening, June 13*

**KEHILLAT CHOVEVEI TZION**

**SETAUKET, NY**