

PURIM

INTRODUCTION TO PURIM

Introduction to Purim

Purim commemorates the saving of the Jews in the Persian Empire from Haman's plan to wipe them out completely. The story is a classic example of how God intervenes in human history in a hidden manner. The essential element was that the Jews were saved from physical destruction/death (contrast with Chanuka, where the Jews were not being threatened with physical death but with the destruction of their religious beliefs and practices).

Halachot

- Giving charity to poor people.
- Giving gifts of ready-to-eat food to friends.

REASON To promote friendship and a feeling of community.

- Reading the megila of Esther at night and the next day.
- Eating a festive meal.
- Giving three half-dollars (or whatever the local unit of coin currency is where you live) to charity in commemoration of the half-shekel, which was given by all Jews to the Temple when it stood in Jerusalem.

NOTE This is not actually an observance of Purim, but it has become traditional to give the 3 half-dollars on Purim.

Widespread Customs

- Dressing up in costumes.
- Making noise during the reading of Haman's (and his wife's) name in the megila, in order to wipe out their names.
- Drinking more wine than normal.

NOTE Jewish women are required to fulfill all of the commandments of the holiday, just as men are, since the women were also saved.

PURIM: AD DLO YADA

Getting Drunk Ad Dlo Yada

The idea of getting drunk ad dlo yada is that, even when optimal mental functions are impaired by alcohol, a person's essence is on such a high spiritual level that he or she can see God's hand in the actions of the evil Haman just as in the actions of the good Mordechai.

NOTE Jews should never get drunk, even on Purim, but they should drink a little more than they normally would.

PURIM: COMMANDMENTS

Purim: Commandments

There are four mitzvot for Purim:

1. Shalach Manot (Gifts of food to promote friendship)

Send to one person at least two readily edible foods that will be appreciated by the recipient. Sending gifts of food (mishlo'ach manot) must be done on Purim day. The earliest time to send mishlo'ach manot is after hearing the morning megila reading (so that the commandment of giving gifts to friends is also covered by the blessing of she'hecheyanu over the megila).

2. Gifts to Poor People

Give some money to at least two poor people or to a fund designated to give to poor Jews on Purim. The earliest time in the day to give gifts to the poor on Purim is daybreak.

3. Hearing the Megila Twice (evening and morning)

- If you miss hearing a word or even syllable of the megila on Purim, say it to yourself and then catch up to the reader.
- If you are not near a minyan and do not have a megila scroll, you should read the megila from a book. But you will not have fulfilled the commandment of reading the megila and so you do not say any of the blessings.

4. Eating at a Purim se'uda.

- The minimum amount to eat and drink for a Purim meal is at least 1.3 fl. oz. (39 ml, or 1/6 cup) of bread, any amount of meat (if you enjoy meat), and some wine (any amount more than you normally drink).
- The earliest time you may eat the Purim meal is from daybreak; the latest time you must begin is before sunset. You must eat at least 1.3 fl. oz. (39 ml, or 1/6 cup) of bread and some wine (and meat if you enjoy it) before sunset. You may continue your meal after sunset as long as you ate the bread before sunset.