

LAWS OF PURIM



Parshas Zachor – On the Shabbos before Purim we read a section from the Torah, (Devarim 25:17-19) which reminds us of Amalek’s surprise attack upon the unsuspecting B’nei Yisroel. Haman, a descendant of Amalek continued in the cruel ways of his ancestors by dedicating his life to the destruction of B’nei Yisroel. The **Torah** obligates us, men and women, to listen to the reading of Parshas Zachor every year, to remember the nefarious deeds of Amalek. There is a “mitzvas asei” to remember the wickedness of Amalek and a “mitzvas lo sa’asei”, not to forget.

Taanit Esther – Thirteenth of Adar - The fast begins at alot ha’shachar (dawn) and ends at tzeit ha’kochavim (nightfall). The fast commemorates the fasting and prayers that B’nei Yisroel observed preceding their battle against Haman and their enemies. If Purim occurs on a Sunday, the fast is moved earlier, to the preceding Thursday.

Machatzis Ha’shekel – In the days of the Bais Ha’Mikdash, a collection was made during the month of Adar to pay for the communal sacrifices brought throughout the year. Every Jew contributed their half shekalim to the fund. We commemorate this practice by donating three half-dollars to charity. This is done on Tanit Esther or Purim. The custom is to say “zecher l’machatzis ha’shekel” when we perform this mitzvah.

Megillah – We read the Megillah on Purim, both during the evening as well as during the day. Both men and women are obligated in this mitzvah. We recite three brachot before we read the Megillah, (Al Mikrah Megillah, She’asah Nissim and Shehecheyanu) and one bracha after the Megillah reading (Harav et Reeveinu). It is a mitzvah to hear the brachot and every word of the Megillah. When we hear the chazan recite the Shehecheyanu bracha in the morning before the reading, we should have in mind the reading of the Megillah as well as the mitzvot of Matanos Le’evyonim, Mishloach Manos and Seudas Purim.

Matanos Le’evyonim – It is a mitzvah to give charity to at least two poor people on the day of Purim. According to most authorities, this mitzvah is more significant than Mishloach Manos.

Mishloach Manos – It is a mitzvah to give two different ready to eat foods to a friend, as a gift, on the day of Purim. (Mishloach Manos are not sent to mourners during their year of aveilus). One should endeavor to give mishloach manos not only to relatives or friends but also to those that we do not get along with. It is an excellent way to dispel the claim of Haman HaRasha that we are a divisive people.

Seudas Purim – The Yom Tov meal on the day of Purim – one is supposed to wash and bentch over bread as we do on all Yomim Tovim. The seudah should not begin before chatzot (midday) and not later than shkiah (sunset). Preferable, most of the meal should be completed while it is still day. When Purim occurs on Erev Shabbos, it is preferable that the meal should be eaten before Chatzot, so as not to detract from our evening Shabbos meal.

Al Hanisim – This prayer is included in both the Shemoneh Esreh and Birkas Ha’mazon during the night and day of Purim. If omitted, we need not repeat these prayers.