

הלכות פורים

I. ארבע פרשיות

Chazal instituted the reading of four פרשיות on the שבתות surrounding the month of Adar. During a leap year, these פרשיות are read during שני שנים. On each of these four שבתות, there are a few changes to the davening:

- a. In Musaf, we skip אב הרחמים
 - b. In Minchah, we skip צדקתך
 - c. We do not make קל מלא רחמים to remember loved ones
- 1) פרשת כי תשא – We read the first six פסוקים in תשא:
 - a) It is read on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Adar. If Rosh Chodesh Adar falls on Shabbat, פרשת שקלים is read on that Shabbat.
 - b) It is read in commemoration of the giving of the half a shekel that each Jew was required to give on a yearly basis to support the fund that paid for the קרבן תמיד. This money was used in חודש ניסן, thus it was collected in Adar.
 - 2) פרשת כי תצא – We read the last three פסוקים in תצא:
 - a) It is read to remember that which Amalek did to the Jewish people after יציאת מצרים.
 - b) This is read on the second Shabbat of Chodesh Adar, which is the Shabbat before Purim. In this way, we connect the actions of Amalek to the actions of Haman who was a descendent of Amalek.
 - c) According to most poskim, this is a מצוה מדאורייתא as it says in the pasuk, זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים (דברים כד:יז). Therefore, the baal koreh must have in mind to be מוציא ציבור and the ציבור must have in mind to fulfill their biblical obligation through him.
 - d) There is some halachic debate as to whether or not women are obligated in this mitzvah. The custom in most places is that women go out of their way to hear פרשת זכור. However, if they are not able to get to shul to hear it, they certainly should read it to themselves from a חומש.
 - 3) פרשת חקת – We read the first twenty two פסוקים in חקת:
 - a) This is read the Shabbat before פרשת החודש (which is two שבתות before ראש חודש ניסן).
 - b) It is read now because in the desert the פרה אדומה was burned at a time close to Chodesh Nisan so that it could be used to sprinkle impure Jews, purifying them and enabling them to partake in the פסח קרבן. We read this פרשה as a tefila that Hashem should pour מים טהורים on us speedily in our times.
 - c) Some poskim say this is a מצוה מדאורייתא, while most poskim agree it is a מצוה מדרבנן.
 - 4) פרשת בא – We read the first twenty פסוקים in בא:
 - a) This is read the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Nisan. When Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbat, we read פרשת החודש on that Shabbat.
 - b) We read this to sanctify the month of Nisan as it says in the pasuk, החודש הזה לכם ראש חדש. Although the real mitzvah of החודש הזה לכם refers to the seeing of the new moon and testifying about it in בית דין, it is a Rabbinic mitzvah to make the month holy.

II. תענית אסתר

- 1) It is prohibited to fast or to give eulogies on Purim and Shushan Purim. It is, however, permissible to fast and give eulogies on the day before Purim.
- 2) A fast day was established on יג אדר to commemorate the fast day that was established during the times of מרדכי ואסתר. Learning from the actions of משה רבינו who fasted before the Jews went to war with Amalek, מרדכי ואסתר gathered all the Jews of Shushan on the 13th of Adar to fast and daven for their safety. We fast to remind ourselves that Hashem sees and hears every individual in his time of need. This should inspire us to do תשובה and return to Hashem.
- 3) If יג אדר falls on Shabbat, we move the fast to the Thursday before since we do not fast on Shabbat or Friday.
- 4) All healthy individuals above בר ובת מצוה are required to fast.
- 5) Pregnant, nursing mothers, and new mothers within the first 30 days of a baby's birth are not required to fast.
- 6) A חולה שאין בו סכנה is not required to fast. Even someone with a significant headache would be permitted to eat. Consult your Rav if you think you may be in this category.

III. מחצית השקל

- 1) It is customary to give three half dollars to צדקה in shul to commemorate the מחצית השקל that was given in the month of Adar during the time of the בית המקדש. Three are given because it says the word תרומה three times in פרשת כי תשא, the parsha of שקלים. It is given on erev Purim before the reading of the Megillah, unless that day happens to be Shabbat. Some have the custom to give it on the morning of Purim.
- 2) There is a debate as to whether or not this obligation begins at age 13 or at age 20. But the custom is for everyone above בר מצוה to give. Many fathers have the custom to give for their wives, younger sons and daughters. When a woman is pregnant, many husbands have the practice to give for the unborn baby as well.

IV. The Laws of Reading the Megillah

- 1) Megillat Esther must be read twice on Purim, once in the evening and once during the day.
- 2) In the evening, it must be read after צאת הכוכבים. In the morning, preferably it should be read after הנץ החמה (sunrise). However, if one has to leave home early in the morning and will not have time to read it later on, he may read it after עלות השחר.
- 3) Despite the fact that this mitzvah is a מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא, the Gemara says that women are obligated in it because "אף הן היו באותה הנס" – literally translated as "they too were involved in the miracle." There are two possibilities as to what this means:
 - a) They were also in danger and were saved.
 - b) They were the cause of the נס. The נס occurred through אסתר.

There is מחלוקת ראשונים whether or not women have the obligation of מקרא (to read) as do men, or perhaps their obligation is only לשמוע, to hear, the Megillah.

- a) Most poskim assume that they are only obligated לשמוע. This is because the reason they are obligated to hear the מגילה is אף הן היו באותה הנס, and therefore, they should help publicize the miracle; this is accomplished by joining the ציבור to hear the Megillah.
 - For this reason, if a woman does not have a man to read for her, or even if a man is reading for a group of women, the bracha is changed to לשמוע מקרא מגילה.
 - For this reason, a woman cannot read the Megillah for a man. His obligation is מקרא, to read the Megillah, and she has a lesser obligation. The rule in mitzvot is that someone with a lesser obligation cannot fulfill a mitzvah for someone with a greater obligation.
 - A woman can read the Megillah for another woman who has no man to read it for her.
- 4) Technically speaking, the Megillah can be read either standing or sitting. However, when a minyan is present, the one reading the Megillah should stand, showing כבוד to the ציבור.
- 5) The baal koreh should read every word from the Megillah, and should not recite any words by heart.
- 6) What is the halacha if the Megillah is found to be missing words or letters?
 - a. If the missing words/letters are from the opening or closing pesukim, then the Megillah is פסול and a new one must be used.
 - b. If it is not from the opening or closing pesukim, the Megillah remains kosher and one is allowed to continue reading from it if another Megillah is not available.
- 7) If you are listening from a Tanach and not from a kosher Megillah, you should not say the words along with the baal koreh.
- 8) Talking is not permitted between the time the baal koreh makes the brachot and the time he begins to read. Furthermore, talking is not allowed during the reading of the Megillah. If a person missed even a single word, he must hear the entire Megillah read again.
- 9) The Megillah has to be read in the proper order. If someone skipped a word by mistake, he must return to the place where he made the error and continue from there. He cannot simply add the part he missed at the end.
- 10) Although it is best to understand the Megillah, one is yotzai the mitzvah even if he does not understand it.
- 11) It is proper for the baal koreh to read the list of Haman's ten sons in one breath. In some shuls, the baal koreh pauses for a moment and every individual listener recites the ten sons names in one breath as well.
- 12) The Megillah used for the ציבור should be folded like a letter while being read publically and not rolled up like a scroll..

- 13) When Haman's name is read, we stomp our feet and make noise in order to blot out his name. Caution should be taken that this does not cause people to miss hearing actual words of the Megillah.
- 14) The Baal Koreh recites three brachot prior to reading the Megillah:
- על מקרא מגילה
 - שעשה נסים לאבותינו
 - שהחיינו – this is recited at night and it is repeated again in the morning since the reading in the morning is considered the main fulfillment of מצות מקרא מגילה.
 - When the baal koreh recites שהחיינו in the morning, he and the ציבור should have in mind to include the other mitzvot of the day: משלוח מנות, וסעודת פורים
 - If he forgot the brachot, he is still yotzai the mitzvah.
 - The bracha recited at the end of the Megillah is only recited in the presence of a minyan.
- 15) It is proper to bring children to shul to hear the Megillah to train them in mitzvot observance. However, children who are too young and will interrupt those listening, should not be brought to shul.
- 16) One should not eat at all before hearing the Megillah. This is true both at night and in the morning. At night, even though the fast has ended, one should not eat at all until after the Megillah is read. If someone really does not feel well, he can take a small drink and a small snack.

IV. Additional Tefilot on Purim/ כבוד פורים

- על הנסים is added to שמונה עשרה and ברכת המזון both at night and during Purim day. It is not said on שושן פורים unless one lives in a city where the Megillah is read on שושן פורים, i.e. ירושלים.
 - If one forgot to say על הנסים, he does NOT repeat the ברכת המזון or שמונה עשרה.
- הלל is not recited on Purim.
- תחנון ולמנצה are not recited on Purim and Shushan Purim.
- We read the Torah on Purim morning. The portion from the end of פרשת בשלח is read, beginning with "ויבא עמלק..." This reading has special significance as it is the only Torah reading that contains only nine פסוקים. This emphasizes that as long as there is an עמלק (or people like עמלק), the סוף of ה' is not complete.
- It is proper to dress in one's Shabbat clothes on Purim; both at night and during the day. It is also customary to dress up in costumes.

V. מתנות לאביונים

There is a mitzvah on Purim to give charity to the poor. This is based on the pasuk כימים אשר נחו בהם היהודים מאיביהם והחודש אשר נהפך להם מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב, לעשות אותם ימי משתה ושמחה, ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים (מגילת אסתר ט:כב)

- The רמב"ם writes: It is better to give more gifts to the poor than to spend more on one's Purim seuda or on sending משלוח מנות to one's friends, for there is no great and glorious joy like the joy of gladdening the hearts of poor people, widows, orphans....One who gladdens the hearts of these unfortunate people

is comparable to the Divine presence. Therefore, on Purim, this mitzvah is even more important than the משלוח מנות וסעודת פורים .

- 2) The minimum requirement is to give food or money to **two** different people. If food is being used, it should be “ready to eat food.” Similarly, one can give clothing that can be worn by the poor person on Purim.
- 3) The minimum amount should be enough to allow the poor person to buy a decent meal. The amount in contemporary U.S. currency is approximately 3-5 dollars to each of the two recipients.
 - This minimum may not be taken from maaser money since one may not use maaser money for obligatory mitzvot. However, once you have given to two people, any additional צדקה you give on Purim can be taken from maaser funds.
 - It is considered more praiseworthy to give smaller amounts of money to more poor people than to give larger amounts to fewer people.
- 4) One should give צדקה freely and generously on Purim. Therefore, although we generally should be selective and be sure that those seeking our צדקה really need it, on Purim, one should not be selective in giving. Anyone who claims to be poor and stretches out his hand and asks to be given צדקה, must be given something.
- 5) The mitzvah is to give the gifts during the daytime. Gifts given the night of Purim do NOT count for this mitzvah. (although they are still nice acts of צדקה.).
- 6) If you send money by mail or messenger before Purim so that it arrives to the poor person on Purim, according to most Poskim you have fulfilled the mitzvah. To be safe, it is best to also give two minimal gifts on Purim as well.
- 7) If you send the gifts on Purim, but they are not received until after Purim, you have not fulfilled the obligation.
- 8) Women are obligated in this mitzvah. Children should be trained to do this mitzvah.
 - Technically speaking, married women can fulfill their mitzvah with the money that their husbands give; however, it is best for married women to give at least the minimal amount on their own.

VI. סעודת פורים

1) There is a requirement to have a festive feast on Purim. This is based on the pasuk כימים אשר נחו בהם היהודים מאיביהם והחודש אשר נהפך להם מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב, לעשות אותם ימי משתה ושמחה, ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים (מגילת אסתר ט:כב)

The mitzvah is to have the seuda during the daytime. Therefore, it is important to remember that:

- a) Although it is customary to eat at night as well, a meal eaten the night of Purim does not count towards this mitzvah.
- b) The meal should begin early enough on Purim day so that the majority of the meal is eaten before sunset.
- c) If Purim falls out on Friday, the meal should preferably begin before הצות היום (halachic midday). However, it may be eaten until the end of the ninth halachic hour of the day (approximately 3:30 p.m.)

- 2) Even if the seuda extends into the night, one may still say in על הנסים ברכת המזון since the beginning of the seuda was in the daytime.
- 3) Women are obligated in this mitzvah.
- 4) It is appropriate to learn Torah before beginning the seuda. This is based on the pasuk ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה, and Chazal teach us that אורה is Torah. Similarly, the seuda should be filled with divrei Torah and שירות ותשבחות לה'.
- 5) There is a mitzvah for men to drink wine at the seuda until they do not know the difference between ארור המן וברוך מרדכי. Although there are different opinions as to how to define this, we assume it means that a man should drink a bit more than he is normally accustomed to. Many poskim suggest taking the drink and then taking a short nap since while sleeping, one cannot distinguish בין ארור המן וברוך מרדכי. One should not become drunk to the point that he is not in control of himself. Furthermore, there is no mitzvah to drink other alcoholic beverages. Additionally, the mitzvah exists during the seuda itself, not during the other parts of the day. Unfortunately, many people use this as time to get drunk inappropriately and claim it is in the name of halacha; this is not the proper Torah outlook.

VII. משלוח מנות

There is a requirement to give משלוח מנות based on the pasuk לעשות כימים אשר נחו בהם היהודים מאיביהם והחודש אשר נהפך להם מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב, אותם ימי משתה ושמחה, ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים (מגילת אסתר ט:כב)

- 1) One is required to give משלוח מנות to at least **one** friend.
- 2) It should include at least **two** different foods which are ready to be eaten on Purim. It is appropriate to include foods that can be eaten at the seuda. A drink can be counted as one of the foods.
- 3) Women are obligated in this mitzvah. Although it is perfectly acceptable for an entire family to send משלוח מנות to another family, the רמ"א writes that boys should not give משלוח מנות to girls and vice versa.
 - Technically speaking, married women can fulfill their mitzvah with their husbands; however, it is best for them to give at least the minimal amount on their own.
- 4) Preferably, one should utilize a messenger to give the משלוח מנות. The messenger can be anyone, even a small child.
- 5) If Purim occurs during the twelve month period of mourning for one's parents, the mourner sends משלוח מנות, but others do not send משלוח מנות to the mourner.