



Taanis Esther

Taanis Esther is observed this Thursday, March 24th, the 11th of Adar. [As this year the 13th of Adar falls on Shabbos, the fast is observed 2 days earlier.] This day commemorates the fast day that was conducted when the Jews prepared to battle their enemies on the 13th of Adar. This fast reminds us that Hashem is attentive to our sincere prayers and responds to our *teshuvah*. Activities such as haircuts, showers and music are permitted, unlike other fast days during which many *poskim* limit such activities.

Shacharis: The *shaliach tzibbur* alone says *Aneinu* as a separate *berachah* in his *Chazaras HaShatz*. Following *Chazaras HaShatz*, *Selichos*, *Avinu Malkeinu* and *Tachanun* are recited, followed by *Kerias HaTorah* (*Vayechal Moshe*).

Machatzis HaShekel: There is a widespread minhag to donate 3 half-dollar coins in commemoration of the *Machatzis HaShekel*. Some give the coins before *Minchah* while others give them afterward. *Maaser* funds should not be used. Customarily, each person deposits money to 'redeem' the three coins from the *tzedakah* plate, then contributes them back to the plate for *tzedakah*. One should make sure that his bar mitzvah-age sons fulfill their obligation. Many have the custom to give on behalf of minor sons. Some give on behalf of the women and girls of their household as well. Some *poskim* advise not to say "These coins are for *Machatzis Hashekel*" during the process (as they are actually just a *Zecher Machatzis Hashekel*), as this could be interpreted as assigning to them a status of *hekdesh*.

Minchah: The *Kerias HaTorah* of *Vayechal Moshe* and the *haftarah* of *Dirshu Hashem* are leined. Individuals who are fasting include *Aneinu* in the *berachah* of *Shomea Tefillah*, and the *chazzan* recites *Aneinu* as a separate *berachah* in *Chazaras HaShatz*. *Bircas Kohanim* is said. *Nusach Ashkenaz* recites *Sim Shalom*. *Avinu Malkeinu* and *Tachanun* are recited (these are omitted only when Taanis Esther is Erev Purim).

Purim

Purim begins on Motzaei Shabbos, the 14th of Adar, March 23rd. Both men and women are obligated to fulfill the four *mitzvos* of Purim (see below). There is a custom to celebrate the night of Purim with a small *seudah*. Purim is a Yom Tov, and it is appropriate to wear nicer (or even festive) clothing and to avoid work and unnecessary or time consuming *melachos* for the entire day.

Al HaNisim: *Al HaNisim* is added to *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Bircas HaMazon*. If omitted, one does not repeat the *tefillah*. If one remembers before the completion of the *tefillah* he may recite it in *Elokai Netzor*, or as a compensatory *Harachaman* toward the end of *Bircas Hamazon*.

Mikra Megillah: Although a *megillah* is not *muktzeh*, it may not be brought to shul on Shabbos for the purpose of using it on Motzaei Shabbos. Therefore, *Maariv* is typically delayed to allow sufficient time to bring items to shul after the *z'man* (and after saying "*Baruch Hamavdil...*"). *Havdalah* is generally recited upon returning home from Shul (as it is not said before *Maariv*). (A woman [or one not in shul etc.] may listen to *havdalah* prior to hearing *megillah*.)

Following *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Maariv*, *Megillas Esther* is leined. The *baal korei* unrolls the *megillah* and folds

it as if it were a letter. He recites the three *berachos* having in mind to be *motzi* everyone with the *berachos* and the reading. Following the *leining*, the *baal korei* recites the *berachah* of *Harav Es Riveinu*. All follow with *Asher Heini* and *Shoshanas Yaakov* before continuing with *Vihi Noam* and *v'Ata Kodosh*. *Havdalah* is recited after returning home. A woman may listen to *havdalah* prior to hearing *megillah*. *Asher Heini* is not recited after the Purim day *Megillah* reading.

Shacharis: Many congregations add *Krovetz l'Purim* in *Chazaras HaShatz*. *Tachanun* is omitted. *Kerias HaTorah* of *Milchemes Amalek* (end of *Parashas Beshalach*) is followed by *Kerias Megillah* (see above). *Lamenatzei'ach* is omitted. Many recite Psalm 22 at the conclusion of davening. One who missed hearing the *leining* of *Parshas Zachor* on the previous Shabbos may fulfill his obligation with this Torah reading.

Four Mitzvos of Purim

Mikra Megillah: One must focus and hear every word of *Megillas Esther*. As this level of concentration can be difficult to maintain, some advise that those with a kosher *megillah* should read along with the *baal korei* (while being careful not to disturb others). Alternatively, following the text with one's finger can help maintain concentration throughout the reading. One should have in mind to be *yotzei* the *keriah* and the *berachos* recited by the *baal korei*. Additionally, during the daytime recitation, one should have in mind that the *Shehecheyanu berachah* applies as well to the other three *mitzvos* of Purim day (*Mishloach Manos*, *Matanos Levyonim* and *Seudas Purim*). When the *Megillah* is read for women, the *berachah* of *Lishmoah Megillah* is made instead of *Al Mikra*. A child mature enough to listen to the reading is obligated. Those who bring younger children as well should take care that they do not disturb others.

Matanos Levyonim: "It is preferable to spend more money on gifts to the poor than on one's *seudah* and *mishloach manos*, as there is no greater joy than making the poor and less fortunate happy" (*Rambam - Hilchos Purim 2:17*). On Purim day, each man and woman must give to two needy people the monetary equivalent of a small meal. An 'individual in need' is classified as someone who is struggling to cover his day-to-day expenses. *Maaser* funds may not be used for the obligatory amount. One should ensure that his wife and bar/bas mitzvah children fulfill this mitzvah (one can simply ask the *gabai tzedakah* to acquire the money on behalf of his wife or child and provide it to a needy recipient on their behalf). It is proper to train one's chinuch age children in this mitzvah, although the obligation regarding minors is a matter of dispute. Throughout the day, one should give freely to any needy individual who solicits without examining their legitimacy, just as Hashem performed the miracle without examining our merits and deeds.

Mishloach Manos: On Purim day, both men and women must give at least one *mishloach manos* containing two ready-to-eat items (not necessarily of two separate *berachos*). The items should preferably be of a respectable nature. While a couple may send jointly, they should then give to more than one recipient. A primary reason for *mishloach manos* is to promote friendship and also to ensure that all have food for the *Purim seudah*. One does not give *mishloach manos* to an *aveil*, although one may give to the *aveil's* family. An

aveil should give *mishloach manos* of a simpler nature and should give to fewer people than usual.

Seudas Purim: Men and women are obligated to partake in a festive meal that should include meat and wine, together with the joyous participation of friends and family. Many *poskim* rule that one must eat bread. It is proper to learn Torah before the meal. The objective of this *seudah* is to celebrate and publicize the miracles and praise Hashem. The *Beur Halachah* (695:2) cautions that if excessive drinking will cause one to lose out on another mitzvah (e.g. *Bircas HaMazon*, etc.) or to act inappropriately, one should not drink. At a minimum, the beginning of the meal must occur before sunset; *al Hanisim* is added in *Bircas HaMazon* even if the meal extends after nightfall. One who is intoxicated to the extent that he won't recite the words properly or may repeat words, should not daven *Maariv* until he is more sober; he may recite *Bircas HaMazon b'dieved*, although it is better to wait until he is more sober.

Shushan Purim

Shushan Purim is on Monday, March 25th. There is an *inyan* of *simchah* on Shushan Purim. *Tachanun* and *Lamenatzei'ach* are omitted. (Those in *Yerushalayim* celebrate Purim on this day.)

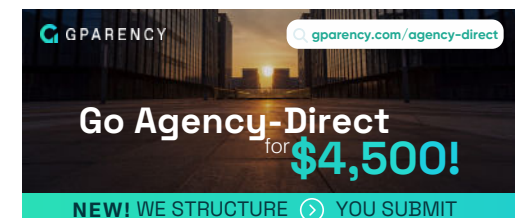
For the Purim Seudah

The *Shulchan Aruch* (690:16) rules, based on the *Yerushalmi*, that one must say, "*Arur Haman, baruch Mordechai...arurim kol ovdei kochavim beruchim kol Yisrael*" - "Accursed be Haman, blessed be Mordechai... accursed be all the idol-worshippers, blessed be all the Jews". What is the meaning of this proclamation which we include in *Shoshanas Yaakov*?

The *Rambam* (at the end of his introduction to *Yad Hachazakah*) explains *Chazal's* instituting a new mitzvah of *Kerias Megillah*, writing that its purpose is not only to recognize the great miracles of the past, but also to engender the belief through these miracles of "Which great nation is there that has a G-d so close by as is Hashem, our G-d whenever we call out to Him" (*Devarim 4:7*). The *Vilna Gaon* (*Aderes Eliyahu - Devarim*) explains that the difference between *Baruch* and *Arur* lies in the end result. Although *Mordechai* may have suffered through exile and difficult periods of leadership, he ultimately emerged successful and is considered "*Baruch Mordechai*". *Haman*, despite being one of the most powerful men in his day, ended with a terrible downfall, thus "*Arur Haman*". We proclaim in *Shoshanas Yaakov*, "*Teshuasam hayisah lanetzach, vesikvasam bechol dor vador*", the salvation they saw had eternal impact, and their hope and belief in the Almighty remains with us until today. Purim teaches us that despite hardships, those who cling to Hashem ultimately emerge blessed and on top.

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