



### **Taanis Esther**

Taanis Esther is on Thursday, March 13th, the 13th of Adar. This day commemorates the fast 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* discourage 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 three half-dollar coins as a remembrance of the *Machatzis HaShekel* donated yearly during the month of Adar. Some people give these coins before Minchah, while others do so 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 l'Machatzis HaShekel*), as this could be interpreted as assigning to them a status of *hekdes*.

**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*, as well as *Bircas Kohanim*. *Nusach Ashkenaz* recites *Sim Shalom*. *Avinu Malkeinu* and *Tachanun* are omitted as it is Erev Purim.

### **Purim**

Purim begins on Thursday night, Motzaei Taanis Esther, March 13th, the evening of the 14th of Adar. 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. One should avoid work - including 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 completing the *tefillah* or *Bircas Hamazon*, he may recite it in *Elokai Netzor* or as part of the *Harachamans*. In both of these cases, one should say *Harachaman hu yaaseh lanu nissim v'niflaos k'shein she'asisa lavoseinu bayamim haheim bazeman hazeh, bimei Mordechai v'Esther* etc....

**Mikra Megillah:** Following *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Maariv*, *Megillas Esther* is *leined*. The *baal korei* unrolls the entire *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. Everyone listening must also have in mind to *beyotzei* with the *berachos* and *laining*. Following the *leining*, the *baal korei* recites the *berachah* of *Harav Es Riveinu*. All then say *Asher Heini* and *Shoshanas Yaakov*. *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*. Maintaining such concentration can be challenging, therefore some advise that those with a kosher *megillah* should read along with the *baal korei* (while being careful not to disturb others) or follow the text with one's finger. One should have in mind to be *yotzei* with the *keriah* and the *berachos* recited by the *baal korei*. Additionally, one should have in mind that the daytime *Shehecheyanu berachah* applies as well to the other three *mitzvos* of Purim day (*Mishloach Manos*, *Matanos L'evyonim* 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 to do so. Those who bring younger children should take care that they do not disturb others.

**MATANOS L'EVYONIM:** "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 *gabbai 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 extent of a minor's obligation is a matter of dispute. Throughout the day, one should give freely to any needy individual who solicits without examining the legitimacy of their cause, just as Hashem performed the Purim 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. If a couple is sending jointly, they should 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 (some say that an *aveil* gives to only one recipient)..

**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.

As it is Erev Shabbos the meal should preferably begin before Chatzos (approximately 1:05 PM NYC region) in order to have an appetite for the later Shabbos *Seudah*. If this is impractical, then one should ensure that the meal begins before *Teisha Sha'os* (the end of the ninth hour) which is approximately 4:03 PM in NYC. After this point,

although one must still begin this obligatory meal, one must be sure not to overeat in order that he have an appetite for the Friday night *seudah*.

If the meal extends until sunset, then one must pause and say Kiddush. This is known halachically as *Poreis Mapah Umekadeish*. All challah should be covered. If one already drank wine, then the *beracha* of *Borei Pri Hagafen* is omitted. A new *beracha* is not made on the challah either. One must eat another *kezayis* of challah, preferably two *kezaysim*. In this case *Retzei* is recited, but not *Al Hanisim*.

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. The purpose of the *seudah* is to praise Hashem by celebrating and publicizing the miracles of Purim. The *Biur 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.

### **Shushan Purim**

Shushan Purim is on Shabbos, March 15th. There is an *inyan* of *simchah* on Shushan Purim. *Av Harachamim* and *Tzidkas'cha* are omitted.

**PURIM MESHULASH:** In Yerushalayim, Purim is observed on Shushan Purim. When it falls out on Shabbos, Purim is celebrated over three days and referred to as *Purim Meshulash*. *Kerias Megillah* and *Matanos L'evyonim* take place on Friday. On Shabbos the *leining* for Purim is read as *maftir* and the *haftarah* of Parashas Zachor is *leined* (again). *Al Hanisim* is added in *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Bircas Hamazon* on Shabbos only. On Sunday, *Mishloach Manos* is distributed and the Yom Tov *seudah* is held.

### **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 that Chazal instituted this "new mitzvah" of *Kerias Megillah* 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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