



Preparing for Purim 5781

25 & 26 February 2021

משנכנס אדר מרבין בשמחה

Our Rabbis teach us that when the month of Adar arrives, we increase our simcha/joy and celebrations, though we have to look back to last Purim to find the last opportunity we celebrated together properly. It is devastating to see how the world has changed 1 year later. Therefore, although we should follow our sage's obligation to increase our personal simcha, we must minimise our communal celebrations. May this be a zechus/merit to end this awful pandemic.

I have highlighted below how we plan to fulfil our obligations this year. Please note the advice and rulings are only for THIS YEAR, Purim 2021 5781. Please also note in some cases we are relying in leniencies which should only be used this year.

Most important and it goes without question that all government guidelines must be adhered at all times, as we are all obligated to do our best to not only protect our own lives, but to safe guard the lives of others.

Shabbat Parshat Zachor – 20th February

Every Jewish person has a Torah obligation to hear the reading of Parashat Zachor, which records Amalek's attack on the Jewish people on their way out of Egypt, in order to fulfil the mitzvah of remembering Amalek and obliterating their name. This mitzvah is best accomplished by listening to Parashat Zachor read from a kosher Sefer Torah with a minyan. This year, without shul open, or even if shuls are open, where attendance is low, people should be careful to read the correct verses Devarim 25:17-19, from a Chumash at home on Shabbat morning.

Zecher l'Machatzis HaShekel – Remembering the Half Shekel

During the time of the Temple, people shared in public sacrifices by donating a half shekel to be a participant of the Temple activities. Today when we sadly are no longer able to do so, the custom is to donate 3 half coins of the realm (50p x3 here in the UK), in remembrance of this. Some do this on behalf of each member of the family. It is not necessary to actually directly lift the coins to fulfil this custom. You can donate funds to any charity, just make sure to testify at the time of giving that these funds are zecher l'machtzis hashekel.

Fast of Esther – Thursday 25th February

Anyone who is healthy should fast as usual. If you are ill in any way or are finding fasting difficult, you should not fast. No one diagnosed with COVID, even with mild symptoms, should fast, so as not to put any unnecessary strain on their health. If attending a late megilah reading it is permitted to have a light snack beforehand, otherwise one should wait to eat until hearing the megilah.

Megillat Esther

Both men and women are obligated to hear megilah, both at night (after 6:14pm) and during the day (after 6:53am and before Shabbat commences at 5:20pm).

We have organised zoom megilah readings for our community. This is not an ideal way of listening to the megilah, but we must put our safety first, and the Beth Din have issued guidance that we can rely on the most lenient opinion this year. Our Evening reading will be on Thursday 25 at 6.20pm and our morning reading will be on Friday 26 at 8.00am. There will be later readings on USTV. Please note that during the zoom reading, we will not be pausing when the name Haman is read out.

Purim Shpiel

In the evening of Purim, we normally gather together once the megilah has been read, to eat and enjoy entertainment. This year, although not in person, we will be having entertainment performed by members of our community, kindly and expertly produced by Russell Kett. Please join us at 8.30pm on zoom.

Purim Seuda (Meal) - Friday 26th February

The mitzvot of Purim are to enhance the simcha and celebration of the day for yourself and those around you. Therefore, one of the obligations of the day is to have a festive seuda. The minimal requirements are that hamotzi should be made and an additional food be added. The seuda can be any time of day, however this year when Purim is a Friday, it is preferable that the meal starts before halachic midday which is around 12.15pm. Would have invited the whole community to join our Family Levene Brunch Purim Seuda at 11.30am on Zoom.

Mishloach Manot

The mitzvah of Mishloach Manot requires every Jewish adult to send at least two items of ready-to-eat food to another Jewish adult household. This must be done during the day of Purim (not at night-time). Although many of us enjoy giving gifts to lots of people, this is not the halachic requirement.

This year I would encourage everyone to totally minimise gift giving. Please note the minimum obligation to send to only 1 person/household and consider donating extra charity in place of the gifts you would normally distribute.

Matanot la'evyonim

Every person is required to give gifts or money of at least a nominal sum to two needy people on Purim day. This can be prearranged for someone to distribute on your behalf. Normally we collect money both in advance and also on the day of Purim itself, and then distribute it. This year we will have to make donations in advance. Please do send in your charity donations to The United Synagogue or to GIFT through the following links.

<https://myus.theus.org.uk/events/63598/buy-gift-donate-purim-in-a-box>

<https://www.jgift.org/purim/>

May all these extra measures, relying on leniencies and minimised celebrations, be a merit for this pandemic to be over very soon, and may we see everyone in good health.

Purim Sameach

Rabbi Marc Levene