

One One Foot – Purim

The special Maftir of Shabbat Zachor, instructing us to remember to blot out the name of Amalek is one of the only Torah readings where it is considered a mitzvah D'Orayyta (from the Torah, itself) to attend (in both senses of being present and listening to each word). Of course it is lovely to see people in shul and concentrating on the leining every Shabbat and on Monday, Thursday and Rosh Chodesh mornings but Zachor is identified as a special case. In my shiur on Shabbat afternoon I'll be looking at some of the surrounding halachot, including what do you do if circumstances give you a binary choice between hearing Zachor on Shabbat morning or listening to the Megilla on Purim itself.

There are four essential Mitzvot of Purim; hearing the Megilla on both evening and morning; Mishloach Manot, where we give at least one gift of two pieces of ready-to-eat food to another person, Matanot LeEvyonim, where we give at least one coin to at least two poor people, who are able to spend it on the day, and Mishteh (or party). A minhag of Erev Purim is to give the Mechatzit HaShekel (1/2 Shekel). Because the word Teruma (donation) is used three times in the leining, the tradition has become to give three times the half coin of the realm (locally the 50 pence piece).

Hearing the Megilla is an imperative. Correctly every read word must be heard directly and without interruption (boos for Haman are the exception.) It must be read (from a kosher scroll) not recited from memory nor played from a recording (20th century psak) nor streamed (21st century psak). Directly means without amplification, precluding the use of microphones. Without interruption precludes all manner of intervention where our mind is distracted from the Megilla itself.

In Kinloss we offer many Megillah readings with the hope that both morning and evening everyone is able to fulfil the mitzvah in an environment they will enjoy. Our endeavour is to ensure that the mitzvah is fulfilled in each. The "Quiet Reading" (in the Deal Halls) assumes an ability to listen without fidgeting and without the need to keep kids or noisy neighbours in the next pew in check.

In the "Family Reading" in the Main Shul, we will be announcing new chapters, to assist everyone in following. There will be a screened presentation of the story. There will be the "traffic lights" to highlight the times to boo and to be silent. There will also be hundreds of adults and children with costumes and additional noisemakers, who are keen to get to the party downstairs (and for whom concentration is harder). Of course, we would like to keep this reading kosher, too. That means that we can't use microphones, edit it down or just skip to the Haman bits. If you are kid phobic or will have trouble listening over the inevitable hubbub, I'd respectfully direct you to one of the alternative (or later) readings. If you are in the Main Shul, please do assist Chazzan Eli and the Gabbaim by keeping the chatter down and managing the children so they aren't running around.

We look forward to you all joining us downstairs to break the fast after the Megillot. This year we'll be having a costume pageant for the kids (about 8.15) and we have a great magic show (for all ages) at about 8.30. Our close up magicians will continue to entertain through the evening.

The mitzvot Mishloach Manot of Matanot LeEvyonim and Mishteh all apply on the day of Purim (rather than the preceding night). Correctly, the gifts should be sent before halachic midday (about 12.07pm)

There are many differing opinions on the Mitzvah of getting drunk on Purim Day. The Gemarra (Megilla 7b) states that a person is obligated to drink until he cannot distinguish between "Baruch Mordechai" (Blessed be Mordechai) and "Arur Haman" (Cursed be Haman). It then tells the story that Rabbah became so drunk that he stabbed (and killed) his guest R' Zeira at his banquet. This is

not the paradigm we hope to emulate. The two expressions share the same Gematria (502) so according to some opinions you only need to become sufficiently tipsy that you can't do arithmetic.

According to the Rif (1013-1113) there is simply a mitzvah to drink some wine. According to the Baal Hamaor (1126-1186) the story of Rabbah's banquet comes to negate the mitzvah of drinking at all. Rambam (1135-1204) suggests drinking a little, then sleeping so that we are no longer able to focus on Mordechai & Haman. The Ravaya (1140-1225) says that getting drunk is inessential. The Bach (1561-1640) says it is not essential to be extremely drunk, but ideal to be a little more tipsy than we'd normally be before standing in the presence of Royalty. (I don't know the Cracow version of "drunk as a Lord"). The Ateret Zakenim (1620-1689) opined that we should be unable to resolve the question of which was the more important occurrence, the elevation of Mordechai or the disgrace of Haman? According to the Chayye Adam (1740-1820), if one will become boorish or unable to perform mitzvot like benching properly, one should not drink.

If one is driving – one is advised to rely on the "dry" authorities.

In many communities, excessive drinking in the presence of children and even drunken children has become seriously problematic; a health risk and a Chillul Hashem. This is not in any way the spirit of Purim. The Mitzvah of drinking is only in the context of the festive meal.

My thanks to everyone involved in setting up our Purim celebrations, arranging and conducting the leining. It is all appreciated. I'm hoping it will all be fun.

Looking forward to seeing you at one of our many Megilla readings and celebrations.

Purim Sameach

R'JL