

# HOW TO PURIM

Read the Megillah, eat, drink, sing, drink, discuss or playact Purim story, drink, read Megillah again, drink, give money to the poor, drink, eat, drink, give Mishloach Manot, drink, eat, drink, sing, drink, sleep, wake up with Excedrin Headache #6.

## READING THE MEGILLA

This is one of the four Rabbinical commandments fulfilled twice during the holiday. Interestingly, we call it "reading" the megillah when what we really do is "hear" the megillah (from the mouth of the one person reading it). Hearing isn't really enough and it's imperative to read the text along with the chanter of the Megillah. In fact, many people customarily read along personally from a "kosher" megillah (no - it doesn't chew its cud - it is flawlessly written on parchment) similar to that used by the cantor.

The reading of the Megillah can last anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour and a half. What factor causes the variance? Simply the reaction to the name "Haman." If the crowd goes wild every time the name Haman is read (which happens in most services) the reading can get drawn out. The point of this custom is to "beat" or take revenge on Haman. We boo, hiss, beat, and curse Haman.

## MISHLOACH MANOT

The second of four Purim-related commandments, this custom could be literally translated as the delivery of a portion (of food). It entails sending 2 types of food to one person. Anything beyond that is extra-credit (or extra-expense, depending on how you look at it).

## MATANOT LE-EVIONIM (GIFTS FOR THE POOR)

Sometimes, when eating, drinking and being generally merry, we tend to forget about those who can't afford the best type of vodka. Or those who "absolutely" can't afford vodka at all. Incorporated into the body of four laws pertaining to Purim is this - one must give a monetary gift to at least two poor Jewish people. Now, realistically speaking, how easy is it to step out of your front door and plop a few dollars in the hand of the first two poor Jews you see swaggering down your street? And who is to say that the person you give will really accept the money (being too proud to take it)? The solution in many communities (or local synagogues) is the central collection idea: Everyone gives on Purim into the hat and it is redistributed to those in need. This way, the givers and the receivers remain anonymous (to each other) which is one of the highest forms of charitable distribution (according to Maimonides). Maimonides also said in relation to Purim: "It is better for a man to increase gifts to the poor than to enlarge his feast and to increase gifts to his friends. For there is no greater and more wonderful joy than to make happy the hearts of the poor..."

## Drinking, mordechai, and haman

Yes, we all know of the "mitzvah" (but it's not technically a commandment) to get drunk on Purim. It is common to say that we are to drink until we do not know the difference between "Blessed is Mordachai" and "Cursed is Haman." While many like to take the easy route and get trashed on Wild Turkey, vodka, or Jack Daniels (or all three plus), the truth is that wine should be the preferred choice.

First of all, you are less likely to see it again (get my drift?). Second, the Purim story in Megillat Esther is intrinsically bound with wine: In the beginning, Vashti was beheaded because she refused to appear at the King's wine-based indulgence. In the end, Haman's final downfall also took place through wine. And I'm sure that someone somewhere took a drink in the middle too...