

Rabbi Zamore's Message for March, 2015

The Mitzvot of Purim: Lessons for Every Day

When we think of Purim, our minds are instantly filled with joyful memories. We readily think of Purim carnivals, silly costumes, boisterous Purim plays, shouting at Haman's name, and delicious hamantaschen. With all of that merrymaking, it is easy to overlook that we are actually fulfilling mitzvot, commandments. Our tradition tells us that there are four commandments associated with this holiday. They are: reading (or hearing) the Megillah, *Mikra Megillah*; having a festive Purim meal, *Seudat Purim*; sending Purim gifts to each other, *Mishloach Manot*; and sending gifts of food to the Poor, *Matanot l'Evyonim*. Building the framework of our holiday, these four mitzvot also create a solid model for everyday Jewish living.

The mitzvah of reading the Megillah draws us back to Purim's primary text each year, allowing us to delve into the narrative anew and to learn continually from it. This commandment reminds us that Jewish learning never stops. Even when we think we know the story inside out, we must reread it annually from the original text. So it is with all of Jewish learning, we must return to our primary sources and read them for ourselves. At every stage of life, we will discover new insights and teachings; we will see our tradition in a new light.

Judaism is never held at arm's length to be interpreted by another. Rather, our texts are open and accessible to all. And we are so fortunate to live in a time with so many Jewish resources. Studying the Megillah, weekly Torah portion, or any other Jewish topic is just a click away.

Seudat Purim, having a Purim meal, reminds us that our food ways connect us. Enjoying hamantaschen together as a community may sound like a simplistic act, but it is actually a powerful one. Eating together to express our Jewish identity is an important part of building community. Making the time for one another is the heart of community. Therefore, the oneg is an important extension of the Purim festivities, just as it is a vital part of all of our gatherings. Eating a cookie together can seed a relationship and build a community.

Sending Purim food gifts can be a very elaborate undertaking in some communities. While the minimalist approach to this mitzvah is probably preferable, its core lesson should be lived to the fullest extent. Jewish community does not just take place in the synagogue. At Purim we send each other festive holiday foods to ensure that every person can participate in the holiday. All year round, we must keep an eye on each other, noting when a fellow congregant has not been present in a while or appears to be burdened with worries. All year round, we must reach beyond those present, gently inviting neighbors and colleagues into our community. Notice the invitation did not say become a member. We must create low pressure opportunities for others to

experience the Jewish community. Membership should organically grow out of connection.

The final mitzvah of Purim is, unfortunately, greatly overlooked. As we enjoy the indulgences of the holiday, we must share our abundance with others. Purim should be only one of many times we support the needy. As we dream of new costumes and unique hamantaschen recipes, we must plan to give to tzeddukah. Of course, the amount should reflect what is financially comfortable. However, please consider giving money or food donations to an organization like [Mazon](#), which applies the Jewish value of feeding the hungry to both immediate hunger needs and long term hunger solutions for all peoples, or support your neighborhood feeding program.

These four Purim mitzvot teach us the best lesson of all – living our commandments can be fun, draw us closer together, and help others. Certainly, a winning combination!

Wishing each of you a Purim filled with joy!

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Mary L. Zamore

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