

## The Fast of Esther

The Fast of Esther is held on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar ... this year, **Wednesday, March 23**.

The Fast of Esther is observed in commemoration of the Fast observed by Mordecai and Esther and all Israel. On that very day, the enemies of the Jews had planned to subjugate and destroy them. The opposite, however, occurred and the Jews ruled over their enemies.

The acceptance of this Fast on the part of Israel for later generations is alluded to in the Scroll of Esther: 'And as they accepted upon themselves and upon their children, the matters of their fastings and their cry' (Esther 9).

The Fast is called by the name of Esther because it was she who first requested the observance of a fast, of Mordecai: 'Go and gather all the Jews who are found in Shushan and fast over me, and do not eat and do not drink three days, night and day; and I and my maidens will also fast thus.' (Ibid. 4)

As a "Minor Fast" it is observed from sunrise to sundown.

## What is Purim?

More than 23 centuries ago, when the Persian Empire dominated the civilized world, an evil chamberlain, Haman, devised a diabolic plot to annihilate the Jewish people. But on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Adar, our people were delivered from the wicked Haman's decree. Each year on Purim, we celebrate our victory amid feasting and merriment. Purim is not only our most joyous festival, it is also a day of great significance — a day whose lessons remain relevant for all times.

At first reading, the Megillah (Scroll of Esther) which recounts the miracle of Purim, seems more like an epic tale of espionage and suspense than Sacred Scripture. In fact, throughout this carefully woven story of evil ambition and palace intrigue, we do not find the name of God mentioned, even once! Yet, within the intricate details of the Megillah, we can detect the unmistakable hand of Divine Providence. The closer we look into the events of man, the more we discover that every "coincidence," every seemingly insignificant event, is precisely arranged by the hand of the Almighty.

When Haman denounced the Jewish people to King Ahashuerus, he argued that "there is one people, dispersed, and divided among the nations . . . and their laws are different from those of any other people." What Haman did not realize, however, was that his very "accusation" held the key to our redemption and ultimate victory over his evil plan. We are "the people" and by strengthening our unity and adhering to the Torah and mitzvot, we survive and flourish. Enemies may arise in every generation to attack and destroy us, but when we affirm our unique heritage and hold fast to our essential character as Jews, we will always prevail.

Mordecai, the Jewish leader of his time, succeeded in uniting his people to defeat Haman. The Megillah tells us that he "did not bend his knee, nor bow down." He refused to compromise the eternal values of the Torah, even at the risk of his life. The lesson to us is clear: Only through closer adherence to our sacred heritage can we ensure our own survival. Purim is celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Adar, or in the case of a leap year, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Adar II. This year, Purim falls on the evening of **Wednesday, March 23 - Thursday, March 24**.

### PURIM MITZVAH LIST

WHAT	WHEN	WHY
Fast of Esther	Wed. 13 Adar II Mar. 23, 2016	To commemorate the three days Esther and the Jewish people fasted before she approached the King without permission. The original fast occurred on Pesah and since we may not fast on a holiday such as Pesah, we commemorate the fast on a day when the Jews fought their enemies - a day of battle on which they surely also fasted.
Listening to the reading of the entire <b>Megillah</b> , including the three brochos preceding it.	Once on Wednesday evening, Mar. 23 and again the next day, Mar. 24 (14 Adar II)	To commemorate the great Purim miracle in accordance with the <b>mitzvah</b> of <b>Chachamim</b> (wise rabbis). The <b>shehechianu brochah</b> recited during the day also refers to the <b>mitzvos</b> of <b>Mishlo'ach manos</b> , <b>matanos lo'evyonim</b> and the Purim fast (see below).
Sending two types of ready-to-eat food to at least one friend. These gifts should be sent by a messenger.	During the day Thurs., Mar. 24	To symbolize the spirit of unity which kept the Jewish people together in the face of the threat from Haman and his cohorts.
Giving a gift to each of at least two poor people.	During the morning, preferably after the reading of the <b>Megillah</b> .	These gifts are a special <b>mitzvah</b> , not to be included in the amount of money a person may set aside for charity during the rest of the year. The custom on this day is to give unquestioningly to any and all who ask for aid.
Eating a feast to celebrate the holiday.	Purim Day, when we are no longer busy with Mishloach Manot.	To commemorate the parties Esther made for Haman and Achashveros. We also drink <b>ad-d'lo-yodah</b> until we can't tell between Haman and Mordechai, because Esther served drinks at these parties.
Reciting the special prayer of thanks Al Hanissim.	In the <b>bentching</b> and in the <b>Amidah</b> on Purim (Wed., Mar. 23 & Thurs., Mar. 24) itself.	We express gratitude to Him Who controls our destinies and guards our lives.