



Purim Guidance for Shuls and Communities

**Presented by the Orthodox Union and the
Rabbinical Council of America**

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Part I – נקהלו ועמדו על נפשם

A Community Committed to Life

The approaching Adar and Purim represent the sobering milestone of a year since the arrival of the pandemic on these shores. This year has brought devastating loss of life, immense financial struggle, and significant personal and social upheaval.

The emergence of safe and effective vaccines, accompanied by highly contagious virus variants, introduces great hope and cheer but also compels redoubled vigilance in adhering to public health guidelines as we push to stay safe and avoid further losses while aggressively supporting the nationwide vaccination campaign.

Those who have achieved immunity, including those fully vaccinated who have passed the subsequent waiting period as well as those who have recovered from the virus with a confirmed antibody response, may be able to return to some of their pre-pandemic activities. But public and communal practice and behavior, even for those fully vaccinated, should continue to reflect the standards of masking and social distancing until the pandemic is defeated to help the unvaccinated stay safe and contribute to the shared national project of saving every possible life.

The situation continues to evolve and varies significantly from region to region. As such, these recommendations and guidelines are formulated based solely on information and advice available as of February 2021. As always, shuls and communities should follow, at a minimum, the guidelines provided by local and national authorities, including the CDC and local health departments.

Regarding the celebration of Purim, we present the following guidance based on our Poskim Harav Hershel Schachter and Harav Mordechai Willig, שליט"א:

Megillah Reading: Shuls should conduct public davening and Megillah readings only with proper masking and social distancing, in accordance with local regulations and guidelines. As has been the case for many months, many shuls may find it necessary to create additional Minyanim to address capacity issues resulting from distancing requirements.

- Generally healthy individuals should attend public Megillah readings as usual, where the community is exercising the proper precautions of social distancing and masking.
- Those who are not currently ill but are not attending a public reading because they are deemed high risk should reach out to their Rabbi and community to help arrange a private Megillah reading.
- Those who are ill or have had serious exposure and must remain in isolation must not come to shul. To fulfill the Mitzvah, they should have a kosher, hand-written Megillah in hand from which they read audibly, either on their own or assisted by a reading heard electronically.
- The clear majority of Halachic authorities do not consider Halachically adequate a Megillah reading heard over the phone or online. There is however a minority opinion that does allow for this, provided that the reading is live, and not pre-recorded. Following the Halachic principle that we may rely upon minority opinions under extenuating circumstances, when no better option exists this minority opinion can be relied upon.

Seudas Purim: Purim meals and get-togethers must necessarily be limited due to the pandemic, social distancing requirements, avoidance of prolonged exposure, singing and dancing in enclosed spaces. For those who have not achieved immunity, the Purim Seudah would best be conducted within the family “bubble.”

Mishloach Manot: The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) advise that cooking or preparing food and delivering it to someone, with a mask and proper social distancing, is a very low-risk activity. When delivering or receiving *Mishloach Manot*, visit and greet guests outside the home and leave the package on the front porch or outside the apartment door.

משנכנס אדר מרבית בשמחה - Part II

Bringing Joy to Our Community

“When Adar arrives, we are to increase our Simcha (joy).” This is a yearly mandate, but it is especially compelling this year, when so many are suffering particular stress, pain, isolation, and loss. The pandemic’s necessary limitations should not deny or defeat our efforts to generate within our family, and others, warmth, lightness, and joy.

The joy of Purim is specifically expressed through extending expressions of friendship and providing needed support, *Mishloach Manot* and *Matanot l’Evyonim*. In addition to the basic fulfillment of these mandates, many use the opportunity to visit with others they do not see often, and to express appreciation in manifold ways.

In addition to enhancing our camaraderie with family and friends, the celebration of Purim provides us, as shuls, communities and individuals, the opportunity to focus on our obligation to bring warmth, lightness, and joy to the isolated, to the exhausted, and to the community, young and old. Specific ideas to consider:

- **The isolated:** Many elderly and high-risk members of our communities have not been in shul for many months. This season is an ideal time for us to reach out, check in on, and reconnect with them after an extended period of isolation. We should also help arrange for those isolated at home to properly hear the Megillah and plan appropriate and safe Purim visits to their homes.
- **The exhausted:** The professional and lay leaders of our community have borne unprecedented burdens during the past year, often inadequately recognized and acknowledged. They have been addressing life-and-death policy issues, providing material and emotional support and services, and constantly pivoting to respond to changing realities. Purim is an ideal time for us to show our appreciation – as individuals and as communities - to the medical and *Chessed* professionals and volunteers, shul rabbis and rebbetzins, school administrators, and the many other community servants who have worked untiringly to keep us all going.
- **The collective community:** Young and old have been experiencing a very difficult year on so many fronts. Each shul and neighborhood should consider creative ways and “Purim shtick” to generate smiles and laughter. Perhaps a music truck to tour the neighborhood, an outdoor carnival celebration at a local shul or school, or other extra efforts to decorate and infuse the shul and community with Purim joy and fun.

Above all, in the spirit of Mordechai's charge to Esther, אל תדמי בנפשך להמלט בית המלך מכל היהודים, we need to see beyond our personal and familial comfort, and recognize and address the struggles faced by others.

Adar is "the month that was transformed from sorrow to gladness and from mourning to festivity." It is our hope and our prayer that this transformation will once again be realized this coming month of Adar. With sincere *Tefilla*, the observance of proper mitigation strategies, and the wider administration of vaccines, this Adar will with Hashem's help be the month when we truly begin to emerge from the challenges of the past year and embrace the appropriate degree of joy and anticipation as we thereafter enter the month of Nissan and the holiday of Pesach, the month of miracles and freedom.