One of the mitzvos of Purim is to eat a seuda (meal). This obligation is stated in the Megillah1: “The Jews should celebrate the day of Purim as a day of happiness and feasting.” In the following paragraphs we will discuss some of the halachos and minhagim of the Purim seuda.

Why We Have a Purim Seuda
We have the Purim seuda in order to commemorate the miracle of Purim. The miracle of Purim came about through the seuda that Esther made for Achashveirosh and Haman. Therefore, the Purim seuda serves as a reminder of the miracle of Purim which occurred through a seuda. The intention of the Purim seuda is to foster feelings of praise and thanksgiving to Hakodosh boruch Hu for the salvation of the miracle of Purim.2 The Pri Megadim3 writes that it is important for one to have these intentions in mind when eating the Purim seuda.

Who Is Obligated To Partake In the Seuda
Both men and women are obligated to partake in the seudas Purim.6 Although women are generally exempt from mitzvos asheh sh’haman grama (positive time-bound mitzvos), they are nevertheless obligated in all the mitzvos of Purim, since they too were saved through the miracle of Purim.7

The Correct Time to Eat the Seuda
The Shulchan Aruch8 writes that one cannot fulfill this mitzvah by eating a meal at night. The Megillah states, “ותֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה יִמֵּשֶׁר לָפֶּ הלִישׁ עָלָיו יֵשׁ - days of feasting and happiness, from which Chaza”9 derives that the Purim seuda must take place by day. The Rema10 adds that, “One should still be joyous and have a small seuda on the night of Purim.”

Although one may eat the Purim seuda any time during the day, the Rema11 writes that the custom is to eat the seuda in the afternoon after one daven Mincha. The Mishna Berura12 explains that this is because people are generally busy all morning with the mitzvah of mishloach manos and only begin eating the Purim seuda after Mincha. The Rema14 adds that it is important to begin the meal before it gets dark because “one must ensure that the majority of the meal takes place during the daytime; not like those who are accustomed to begin the Purim seuda in the afternoon after one mincha and Yom Tov. Furthermore, the verse states that “Purim is a day of feasting and happiness,” and a feast can only be with bread.”15 Accordingly, one should be careful to eat bread by the Purim seuda in order to conform to the stringent opinion.20

Meat. The Rambam16 writes, “In order to properly fulfill the mitzvah of the Purim seuda one must eat meat.” The requirement to eat meat can be derived from the verse in the Megillah20 which states “the day of Purim is celebrated as a day of feasting and happiness.” “Happiness” refers to eating meat, as it brings a person to happiness.23 Some who finds it difficult to eat meat can fulfill his obligation by eating chicken instead.24

A Lavish and Joyful Meal. The Rambam25 writes that “one should prepare a lavish meal” for the Purim seuda. The Meiri26 writes that “on the day of Purim one is obligated to have a lot of food and drink, to the point where nothing is lacking.” The Mishna Berura27 writes that one should eat the Purim seuda with family and friends, since one cannot be truly joyous when he eats alone.

Eating seeds. The Rema28 writes that “it is customary to eat seeds on Purim to commemorate that miracle that occurred to Daniel.” Nevuchadnetzar, the king of Bavel, ordered Daniel to serve in his palace. Daniel resolved in his heart not to eat from the king’s food, and requested that he be given only seeds and water. The officers were concerned that if Daniel only ate seeds his health would deteriorate. Yet, a miracle occurred and after ten days Daniel’s appearance was healthier than the other officers.29 We remember Daniel as he is mentioned in the Megillah as the messenger of Esther, under the name Hasach.30 Furthermore, the Mishna Berura31 points out that Esther followed the example of Daniel and ate only seeds while in the palace of Achashveirosh. In order to commemorate the commitment of Daniel and Esther not to eat non-Jewish foods, and the miracle that they merited, we eat seeds on Purim as well. Many people follow this custom by filling their hamantaschin with poppy seeds. Some poskim32 write that all vegetables are included in this custom, not only seeds.

Learning Torah before the Seuda
The Rema33 writes, “Before beginning one’s Purim seuda, one should involve himself in Torah learning. This is hinted in the Megillah34 where it states, that after the miracle of Purim: “רְאוּ הַמָּמָרָה וּרְאוּ הַמִּצְפָּה - there was light and happiness to the Jewish people. The word “light” refers to the Torah, (and “happiness” refers to the Purim seuda).” Therefore, one should involve himself in Torah learning immediately before the seuda. One does fulfill this halacha with learning done earlier in the morning.36 Learning before the meal helps ensure that the Purim seuda will be filled with divrei Torah, and not frivolousness.37 The Mishna Berura38 writes that “although it is important to eat the Purim seuda with family and friends, one must ensure that the joy during the meal is a joy of divrei Torah.” The Kaf Ha’Chaim39 writes that, “Inviting guests is only recommended if they will discuss divrei Torah and praises of Hakodosh boruch Hu. However, if inviting guests will lead to idle talk, or certainly if it will cause inappropriate speech, it is better that one eat the Purim seuda alone.”

Receiving Al Ha’Nissim
On Purim we recite the prayer of al ha’nissim during Birchas Ha’Mazon.40 The Mishna Berura41 writes that there is a dispute amongst the poskim whether someone who omitted al ha’nissim must repeat Birchas Ha’Mazon. This dispute hinges on whether or not one is obligated to eat bread at the Purim seuda.42 The Mishna Berura43 rules, that based on the principle of safeh berachos Hashelak (we are lenient regarding reciting questionable berachos) one should not repeat Birchas Ha’Mazon if al ha’nissim was omitted.

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1 Esther 9:19  2 Aruch ha’Shulchan 695:1  3 Pri Megadim 695:1 [in Mishipitzos Zavah]  4 Shulchan Aruch 695:1 [in Mishipitzos Zavah]  5 See Aruch ha’Shulchan 695:18 (Kovetz Halachos (Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky) pg. 125 note 5)  6 See Aruch ha’Shulchan 695:19 [in Mishipitzos Zavah]  7 See Mishna Berura 689:1  8 8 Shulchan Aruch 695:1  9 Esther 9:22  10 Gemara Megillah 7b  11 695 (in the introduction to simon). See Mikdash Yisroel, Purim 285  12 See Mishna Berura 695:12 (based on Gemarah Megillah 13a)  13 See Mishna Berura 695:13  14 See Mishna Berura 695:14  15 See Mishna Berura 695:12 (based on Gemarah Megillah 13a)  16 A Lavish and Joyful Meal. The Rambam25 writes that “one should prepare a lavish meal” for the Purim seuda. The Meiri26 writes that “on the day of Purim one is obligated to have a lot of food and drink, to the point where nothing is lacking.” The Mishna Berura27 writes that one should eat the Purim seuda with family and friends, since one cannot be truly joyous when he eats alone.

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8 Shulchan Aruch 695:1  9 Esther 9:22  10 Gemara Megillah 7b  11 695 (in the introduction to simon). See Mikdash Yisroel, Purim 285  12 See Mishna Berura 695:12 (based on Gemarah Megillah 13a)  13 See Mishna Berura 695:13  14 See Mishna Berura 695:14  15 See Mishna Berura 695:12 (based on Gemarah Megillah 13a)  16 A Lavish and Joyful Meal. The Rambam25 writes that “one should prepare a lavish meal” for the Purim seuda. The Meiri26 writes that “on the day of Purim one is obligated to have a lot of food and drink, to the point where nothing is lacking.” The Mishna Berura27 writes that one should eat the Purim seuda with family and friends, since one cannot be truly joyous when he eats alone.

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2nd fulfils his obligation with family and friends, since one cannot be truly joyous when he eats alone. The Mishna Berura43 rules, that based on the principle of safeh berachos Hashelak (we are lenient regarding reciting questionable berachos) one should not repeat Birchas Ha’Mazon if al ha’nissim was omitted.
Ad D'lo Yudah: Is There A Mitzvah To Get Drunk on Purim?

The Gemara[44] writes: “A person is obligated to get drunk on Purim ad d'lo yudah bein anur Hanan l’brachar Mordechai – until he is in a state that he cannot differentiate between the words “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai.” The Mishna Berura[45] explains why there is a special mitzvah to drink wine on Purim: “Chazal instituted a mitzvah to drink on Purim, since all of the miracles occurred through wine. First, Vashti was expelled from her position as queen at the party of Ahasveriroth through wine, and was replaced by Esther. As the verse states “when the king’s heart was happy with wine, he commanded to bring Vashti”. The downfall of Haman also came through the party that Esther made, as the verse states “The king and Haman came to drink with Esther”. Therefore, Chazal instituted that one drink wine on Purim, in order to commemorate and remember the miracle of Purim.”

There is much controversy amongst the poskim whether one should get drunk on Purim, and to what extent. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the different opinions amongst the poskim regarding this issue.

The opinion of the Shulchan Aruch – Ad d’lo Yudah. The Shulchan Aruch[46] rules that “One must get drunk on Purim to the extent that he cannot differentiate between the words “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai”.” Indeed there were great tzadkim who got very drunk on Purim.[47] Many of the earlier poskim[48] question the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch. How can there be a mitzvah to get so drunk on Purim when the Torah in so many places considers getting drunk disgraceful and harmful? As the Orchos Chaim[49] writes “There is no greater sin than getting drunk, as it leads to many terrible sins.” How then can Chazal require one to get very drunk? Accordingly, other poskim disagree with the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, and give different explanations regarding the mitzvah of drinking wine on Purim:

1) Magen Avraham – The gematria (the numerical value). The Magen Avraham[50] explains that when the Gemara states that one must drink until he can no longer differentiate between the words “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai” it is not meant to be taken literally. The Gemara does not mean that one should get as drunk as the drunkenness of Lot. Rather one must drink enough that he can no longer perform the mathematical operation necessary to calculate the gematria of “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai” (they both equal 502). When one drinks to this point he has drunk enough to fulfill his obligation.

2) Rema – take a nap. The Rema[51] rules that “One need not actually get drunk on Purim. Rather, one should drink a little more wine than he is used to (yosef m’miludo), and then take a nap. Since someone who is sleeping he cannot differentiate between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai” he fulfills this obligation. The Mishnah Berura[52] and Aruch ha’Shulchan[53] write that one should follow the ruling of the Rema.

3) Rabbeinu Ephraim- we do not rule in accordance with this Gemara. Rabbeinu Ephraim[54] writes that although the Gemara states that one must get drunk to the point of ad d’lo yudah, we do not rule in accordance with this Gemara. He explains his position as follows. After the Gemara states the halacha of ad d’lo yudah it recounts the following story:

One year, two great Torah scholars, Rabba and Rav Zeira, ate the Purim seuda together. During the seuda, Rav Zeira got drunk and killed Rav Zeira. Rav Zeira prayed that Rav Zeira be brought back to life, and a miracle occurred and his prayers were answered. The following year Rabba again invited Rav Zeira for the Purim seuda, but Rav Zeira declined the invitation implying that one cannot assure that a miracle will occur every year. Rabbeinu Ephraim concludes that the Gemara recounts this story to indicate that we do not follow the halacha of first Gemara of ad d’lo yudah. Nevertheless, even Rabbeinu Ephraim agrees that although the halacha of ad d’lo yudah was rescinded, the halacha of drinking wine on Purim still applies, and one should drink more than he is used to, and reach a state of happiness at his Purim seuda.[46] To summarize: There are different opinions as to how much one should drink on Purim. The Shulchan Aruch seems to rule that one must get very drunk on Purim to the point of ad d’lo yudah. Indeed there were great tzadkim who got drunk on Purim like the drunkenness of Lot. However, many poskim[55] rule that it is inappropriate to get this drunk. Rather one should drink more than he is accustomed to, and reach a state of happiness at his Purim seuda. Other poskim[56] rule that one should drink more wine that he usually does, and take a nap. The Rema[57] concludes: “Both someone who drinks a lot, and someone who drinks a little (are acceptable), as long as one’s intentions are teshuva Shamyani (for the sake of Heaven).”

Drinking in a way that leads to Ahavas Hashem. The purpose of the mitzvah of drinking on Purim is to bring one to higher levels of Ahavas Hashem (love of G-d). As the Chaye Adam[58] writes:

“Since the miracles of Purim occurred through wine, Chazal established that one get drunk, or at least to drink more wine than usual. However, if drinking too much will lead to degrading certain mitzvos – such as netilas yadayim, birchas ha’mazon, teffilah, kalah roshei levityo, [or embarrassing a fellow Jew] – it is better not to get drunk. All of one’s actions should be done l’shem Shamayim (for the sake of Heaven).” Certainly if getting drunk would, G-d forbid, lead to putting one’s life in danger it is forbidden to get drunk.

The Mein[59] writes:

“There is no mitzvah on Purim to get drunk in a way which leads to levity and foolishness. Rather, one should drink in a manner that leads joyfulness, through which one can attain love of Hashem, and praise Him for the miracles He performed for us.”

What to drink?

Some poskim[60] rule that one must specifically use wine to fulfill the mitzvah of ad d’lo yudah, in order to commemorate the miracles of Purim which occurred through wine.[61] Additionally, since the Jewish people sinned by drinking wine of a non-jew at the party of Ahasheviros, we (in some measure) fix that sin by drinking wine at the seudas Purim.[62] However other poskim[63] rule that although it is preferable to drink on Purim with any alcoholic drink.

When to drink

One should drink wine during the Purim seudat[64] as the Rambam[64] writes, “One should eat meat, set a lavish meal, and drink wine (during the seuda).” However, some poskim[65] rule that one may fulfill this mitzvah even before the seuda begins.

Switching Locations during One’s Meal

It is common for someone to interrupt his own Purim seuda in order to join or visit a friend’s seuda. Yet, leaving the location where one recited a beracha can create halachic issues regarding hilkos berachos. Still, the Rema[66] writes that one who ate bread at his own seuda may continue eating at his friend’s home. However, the Mishna Berura[67] adds that l’chatchilo one should have in mind when he begins his seudah that he may ultimately continue his meal in another location.

Davening Maavir When Drunk

The Shulchan Aruch[68] rules that one who drank wine (or other alcoholic beverages), and is in a state that he can no longer “speak in front of the king” (i.e. his speech is slurred or repeats words),[69] may not daven Maavir.[70] The Shulchan Aruch[68] writes that if one does daven in such a state, his prayers are considered an abomination. However, someone who is in a state that he is able to “speak in front of the king” may daven Maavir and recite Birchas ha’Mazon.[71]