



**The Hamodia Readers' Forum, March 10, 2004**

## **Has Purim Gotten Out of Hand?**

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We live in a time of excesses. All one has to do is pick up a newspaper or magazine or listen to the radio for an hour or two to see that modern society is apparently obsessed with extremes. Extreme actions and behavior seem to be the only ones that the news media feels that the public is interested in hearing about. The "ordinary" person who goes about his or her life without being involved in any sort of unusual or bizarre behavior is apparently of little interest to the general public.

We in the Orthodox community should pride ourselves on living quiet, dignified lives within the framework of Halachah. Unfortunately, it seems that the penchant of our environment towards excess has crept into our behavior and even into our religious observance. If one looks objectively at how Purim is observed in Brooklyn and other large enclaves where Orthodox Jews reside, I think that it is all too apparent that we are going to extremes. Allow me to present some examples.

- This year on Purim night which was Motzoi Shabbos some people did not hesitate to ring doorbells well past 11 PM, when certainly many young children should have been sleeping. The justification is that these people are collecting for worthy Tzadakahs. Yes, but what is the justification for waking those who are asleep?
- There were revelers who thought nothing of celebrating on Purim night by singing and/or playing loud music in the streets at times when most people would like to be sleeping and not disturbed. I was told that on one main thoroughfare in Brooklyn celebrants were heard until at least 2 AM! It is certainly a Mitzvah to be B'Simcha on Purim. However, is it appropriate to express this Simcha in a manner that impinges on others and disturbs them?
- Why must there be contests to see who can give the most elaborate Shalach Monos? Furthermore, most of the edibles in the Shalach Monos are items that are filled with sugar and are best avoided by all of us, especially our children. Why make Purim a nosh extravaganza that ends up in an orgy of overeating unhealthy foods? And then, what is done with all of the leftover nosh? More often than not, it is sent with the children to yeshiva to get rid of it before Pesach. Thus the

problem is exacerbated by having children eat this unhealthy stuff for a couple of weeks after Purim

Why can't we be yotzei the mitzvah of Shalach Monos by sending a few items to a few people who are within walking distance of our home? Isn't a card indicating that we have made a donation to a worthy Tzadakah sufficient for the rest of our friends and relatives?

- And this brings us to the hassle involved in delivering Shalach Monos on Purim day. Due to the fact that many people are out delivering Shalach Monos our streets are clogged and traffic becomes snarled. It can take hours to complete one's "rounds." Is this really a good way to spend Purim day? Again, why not deliver to a few friends or relatives who live within walking distance and send cards to the rest of our acquaintances?
- You will counter, "But we have to deliver to all of our children's Rebbeim, Morehs and teachers. If we do not, our children will be very disappointed. Furthermore, this is an important educational experience for the children." These are valid points, and it is certainly appropriate for children to bring Shalach Monos to those who devote themselves to educating them. However, why can't each yeshiva require that the Limudei Kodesh and Limudei Chol faculty be present for a designated hour or two at the Yeshiva or Bais Yaakov on Purim day? Parents could then bring their children during these times and give Shalach Monos to all of those who teach their children at the same time. While it is true that parents who have children in several yeshivas would still have to make more than one or two stops, isn't this preferable to having to drive to many homes?

I am sure that the reader can think of other "improvements" that can be made to enhance the celebration of Purim that will minimize our present "excesses." If the Orthodox community does indeed make some of the changes suggested above and some that I am sure that others will think of, then we will be able to answer the question, "Has Purim gotten out of hand?" with a resounding, "No!" However, to me it seems that without some major changes the answer will remain a definite, "Yes." If we are to be a "light unto the nations," then we must be willing to look critically at ourselves and correct our faults. This is not easy, but we should have the courage to buck the trend towards excessive behavior. If not, then we are sending a dangerous message to our children and have fallen victim to some of the negative influences of the world at large.