

## **PURIM DURING MY LIFETIME**

During my lifetime I have been “oscillating” between observing Purim just on 14 Adar, or observing two days of Purim, namely on the 14 and 15 Adar, with the latter predominating. However, I have never observed Purim only on 15 Adar. In this chapter, I shall, b’ezrat Hashem, give a selection of my recollections of past Purims. For many of these recollections, further details can be found in my various autobiography volumes. These are “Seven Years at Carmel College”, “Three years in a Military Compound”, and “My Fight for Yiddishkeit”.

For the first 23 years of my life, I lived near London. In that area, there was no doubt of how many days Purim to celebrate since there was no question of there being a walled city from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun! I remember hearing the comment “What about the city of Chester which is in England?” However, the wall around Chester was built by the Romans and they were well after Yehoshua!

My earliest recollections of Purim are the hearing the Megillah read in the Edgware Synagogue by Rev. Jerry Fagan on the night of Purim and by Rev. Saul Amias on the morning. I recollect that women would attend the reading at night, but did not return for the morning reading which is in fact more important. On one year on a Purim morning sometime after my Barmitzvah, someone at that Synagogue by accident swapped my Tallit bag with almost an identical one. I was a bit upset because that Tallit bag had a sentimental value.

My first Purim in Carmel College was in 1954, when I was eleven years old. The Megillah was read in both the evening and the morning by Dr. Alexander Tobias who was one of the teachers in the Prep School. Banging was only permitted for Haman ben Hamdata and similar expressions, which does not occur many times in the Megillah. To keep the mitzvah of Mishloach Manot, in my first year due to my limited financial resources I broke a bar of chocolate into small squares (I don’t remember what the second item of food was, but it was presumably of similar size). However, one of the teachers I went to give this Mishloach Manot to, refused to accept it claiming it was insufficient! Every year there was a fancy-dress parade in which the participants were called out by name by Rabbi Rosen and they then descended the beautifully carved wooden staircase in the Main Hall. There were judges who decided on the winners. On my first Purim at Carmel, I dressed up as a pirate and I called myself Captain Blood.

My neighbours in Edgware quickly finished a packet of cereal on whose cover was the mask of a pirate. The fancy dress parade was followed by all the pupils sitting in the Main Hall, and several of them put on various acts. On least one occasion I put on an act together with a friend of mine. During the entire period that I was in Carmel College, these activities occurred year by year. I think it was my last year at Carmel that my class decided to put on the Purim Story replacing the characters in the Megillah by the teachers at Carmel and making the appropriate changes in the text. For example, the teacher Raphael Loewe became Raphael Haman, and was to sentenced to hanging but reprieved at the last moment. However, Rabbi Rosen wanted to see the script in advance, and he forbade a teacher to be hanged, and so a last-minute an impromptu change was made! Whilst at Carmel I got an idea from a pupil to write a Megillah with ordinary ink on lined paper which I did on two occasions. Of course they were not kosher megillot but it still was an achievement and I still have these two megillot.

Following Carmel, I attended London University and needless to say Purim was a regular university day. After hearing the morning reading of the Megillah, I had to rush off to University. At the period of Purim of the year 1962, the Rosen family were sitting shiva for Rabbi Kopul Rosen. My cousin who knew Kopul's brother went to visit the shiva house on Ta'anit Esther, and my mother and I went with him. We remained until the evening and heard the Megillah read there. To do this, I had to leave University early that day and I told my non-Jewish fellow undergraduates that I was going to visit the mourners, and since they did not understand what this meant, as far as I can remember, they thought that "The Mourners" was some sort of film or suchlike!

Whilst I was a Postgraduate, I was also a Demonstrator to the Undergraduates in the laboratory one afternoon each week. I should mention that during the course of the afternoon, one could be absent for half an hour as a tea break. It happened that one year that day was Purim, and I realised that I would arrive home just a half hour too late for the Purim Seudah. I therefore when eating my midday sandwiches said that this would be my Purim Seudah. However, this was fortunately not to be! When I arrived at the laboratory, I was informed that the Professor who was in charge of the laboratory was not there due to the illness of his father. I therefore came to an agreement with the Chief Laboratory technician that I was prepared to forgo my tea break and in exchange leave half an hour early, which he agreed to. I therefore managed to get home in time for the Purim Seudah. That was my Purim miracle that year!

Following my receiving my doctorate, in 1966, I went to live in Israel. Soon after I arrived there, I purchased in Tel-Aviv a kosher Megillah. The script was Sephardi, the price being cheaper than an Ashkenazi one. I cannot recollect where I was on my first Purim in Israel. The following year I heard the Megillah read in the Shul in Bar-Ilan University where I was employed. The person who read it in the evening did it so badly that people stated afterwards that no-one could have fulfilled the mitzvah by this reading. I therefore afterwards read it myself; (I had not yet learned the singing notes and so I could just read it without the trop). On the afternoon of Purim, I went to Jerusalem where Purim was celebrated a day later. On the way, I went via the Tel-Aviv bus station, a place where there are many people who hold out their hands for money. To keep the mitzvah of matanot laevyonim, I gave two of these people money. A person who I knew from London University was studying in the Hebron Yeshivah then situated in Geulah district of Jerusalem, and had rented a room in Jerusalem which also had a spare bed. In the evening I heard the Megillah in his Yeshivah. There was such a lot of noise of banging and there was even a case of someone letting off some sort of very loud firework in the middle of the Bet Hamedrash. The following morning, I went to the Kotel to hear the Megillah. I remember that at the minyan I davened at there, the person read the Megillah very melodiously.

The following year 1968 I was already a Mitnachel in Hevron where the custom was to observe two days of Purim due to the doubt of whether Hevron was a walled city at the time of Yehoshua. The evening readings, which were by Yitzchak Ganiram took place in the dining room of the Mitnachalim and in the morning, I went down with many others to the Meorat Hamachpelah where Rabbi Levinger read the Megillah in the Ulam Yitzchak, the first time in many hundreds of years that a reading had taken place there. A photograph was taken of this reading.

The Arabs bring their dead before burial to this place and carry them between the tombs of Yitzchak and Rivka. I think it was on the second day of Purim that year whilst we were davening, that the Arabs wanted to bring a dead body there. We made a line and stopped them from doing so.

There was one Purim mitzvah which I observed whilst in the memshal better than any other time in my life – that was drinking until I was unable to distinguish between “Blessed be Mordechai and Cursed be Haman.”

As at Purim 1972, I was the Director of Jewish Studies at the Jewish High School in Liverpool. A few weeks prior to this Purim, my brother had

taught me the singing notes for the Megillah and I then immediately taught myself to read the Megillah. That Purim the entire High School was assembled in the Main Hall and I read the Megillah here. The Deputy Head refused to allow any banging whatsoever. After the reading there were normal lessons for the rest of the day. One year there was some banging and the Deputy Head immediately intervened and stopped it. I was later told that it was the Headmaster who was then present had started the banging!

A few years later, the High School was divided into two for this reading with the upper forms hearing the Megillah from the teacher Michael Rothbard. This was supervised by the Deputy Head, and of course he allowed no banging. I read it to the lower part of the school supervised by the Headmaster and in contrast he allowed banging.

In the course of being at this school, I made repeated requests that Purim should be devoted to only Purim activities, and the Deputy Head said it would be “criminal” to have more time taken after the reading of the Megillah. However, in my later years at this school, I did manage to get a minimal celebration of Purim, including acting a play and a fancy dress, but this was limited by a decision by both the Governors and the Headmaster to the lower part of the school. One year the music teacher was prepared for the school orchestra to put on the “Toy Symphony” for the lower part of the school, but this was vetoed by the Headmaster since those members of the orchestra who were in the upper part of the school would miss their regular lesson! In contrast, utilising a full afternoon for the entire school for a swimming gala, and a sponsored walk, and cancelling a whole day’s lesson for speech day was permitted! There were two years when there were no lessons on Purim. The reason! One was when Purim occurred on a Sunday and the other was when it was one day before Good Friday!

On the year it occurred on Sunday, Allerton Synagogue in Liverpool invited me to read the Megillah there which I did on both the evening and the morning. Since the evening was motzae Shabbat I walked there and spoke at their Seudah Shlishit. The following morning I was taken to and from my house to the shul in a Rolls Royce car.

The year when Purim was on the day before Good Friday, was already after having turned the clocks for “summer time” and one could not read the Megillah before 20.15 hours. I read the Megillah in the Liverpool Youth Minyan which took place in the Bet Hamedrash of Childwall Synagogue. There was a lot of banging and the reading took at least an hour. We were

still reading when the Synagogue minyan had finished and the Rabbi came in and started shouting “people are fasting” (from Ta’anit Esther). Actually we had brought light refreshments for after the reading. A few days earlier my wife had given birth and was still in hospital. I had warned the hospital that I would be arriving at about ten o’clock in the evening to read the Megillah, and someone from the Shul gave me a lift in his car to the hospital. At that time, my wife discovered that there was a Jewish woman in the ward who said she had never heard the Megillah read. My wife invited her to her room (there were private rooms in the maternity ward) to hear the Megillah. My wife was due to return home from hospital on the morning of Purim, and I had planned to read her the Megillah when she returned. However, because this other woman was still in the hospital, I read the Megillah there to both of them.

The first Purim in Kiryat Arba was in 1972 and the tradition of two days Purim in Hevron spread over to Kiryat Arba. When Rabbi Dov Lior moved to Kiryat Arba in 1975, he did not agree with two days Purim in Kiryat Arba and in his opinion it should have been celebrated just on the first day, but because it was already established as such in Kiryat Arba, and that the Yeshiva boys wanted a two day Purim, it has remained as such till this very day. (I was still in Liverpool until 1978.)

In 1983, I was living in Bet Hadassah in Hebron. (This was before it was refurbished). Purim was on motzai Shabbat and the Kiryat Arba Ulpana, invited me to read the Megillah there and they would take me by car after Shabbat to the Ulpana. However, snow decided otherwise, and by motzai Shabbat the roads were impassable. I ended up hearing the Megillah read in Bet Romano in Hebron. On my way back to Bet Hadassah that night I was bitten on my leg by a dog. Fortunately, there were no horrible consequences from this bite.

For over twenty years I have read the Megillah in my Shul on the evening and morning on both days. On the first day especially, which is the main day of Purim, I introduce different tunes and different voices for the various characters in the Megillah. In this way people will not go to a partial sleep which would mean that they do not observe the mitzvah. In addition, in the first evening when I read the words “mishloach manot ish l’rayaihu” I threw two sorts of food, namely sweets and either peanuts in their shells or squares of wrapped up chocolate. There is a rush by the children to get them. When I read the words “matanot laevyonim,” I threw ten agorot coins. For many years I also read the Megillah in my apartment for women.

However, since there are now many other Megillah readings for woman in the area, due to my advancing age I no longer read to women.

As stated by the Rambam, one should spend most of one's money on matanot laevyonim and not on mishloach manot. I therefore give just packages of two item for mishloach manot to a limited number of people, and give considerably more for matanot laevyonim. Since it has to be for two evyonim, I put my money and that of my family members in two separate bags before handing it over the person distributing the money to the poor. To my part-time chavruta, I give each year "lomdisher" mishloach manot, and I ask him to give me a detailed answer whether or not I have observed the mitzvah. For example, in past years I have given him, egg shell and vitamin pills, edible peels of two fruits, salt and water, just one olive and one nut.

One year on the evening of one Purim, my wife took the fish and the meat out of the freezer for our Purim Seudah, so that it could thaw out overnight. On the morning of Purim, we heard a noise in the kitchen. Some cats had somehow got in and were have a wonderful seudat Purim with fish and meat. If one could keep the mitzvah of mishloach manot by giving the food to a cat, we would have already observed this mitzvah!

In the past I have written workbooks for the local school pupils on the mitzvot of Purim in Hebron and another workbook on the mitzvot of Purim in general. A number of years ago, the question arose in Kiryat Arba on whether in addition to Reading the Megillah on the second, whether one has to observe the other mitzvot of Purim on the second day. I researched a wrote a paper on this subject and came to the conclusion that if one wants to read the Megillah on the second day, one also has to observe the other mitzvot but on a reduced scale. This paper of mine was published in the journal "Sinai" of the Mosad Harav Kook.