



Magen Avot

PURIM UPDATE

Dear All,

With Purim now two weeks away, here is an update regarding plans for Megillah reading at Magen Avot this year.

Although we have chosen to close the shul for services at the present time, there will be a Megillah reading at night and in the morning for those who wish to attend. This is after careful and considered discussion and consultation with medical experts. The decision considers both the fact that:

- a) current lockdown restrictions do allow for the opening of places of worship and
- b) significantly, medical guidance that we have received indicates that the risk of opening shul is minimal, so long as **all the mitigants** listed below are strictly adhered to.

Additionally, it is important to note that by the time of Purim, the estimated rate of infection in this area will be lower than it was previously when services were routinely taking place.

Nonetheless, we recognize that any social interaction does carry an element of risk and therefore **nobody should feel any pressure to attend**. The service provided by the shul will be done in the most Covid-secure manner possible to provide the choice for each individual to attend should he/she wish but there is certainly no compulsion to do so. From a Halachic perspective too, for some individuals it may be preferable to come to shul, whilst for others it will be preferable to stay at home.

Mikrah Megillah

There is a Halachic obligation for men and women to hear the Megillah in its entirety both during the night and day of Purim. Under normal circumstances this must be fulfilled through hearing it read aloud from a kosher scroll. The London Beth Din has ruled that those for whom this is not possible this year due to Covid restrictions may suffice with listening to a zoom livestream. The options are thus as follows:

1. One who is in possession of a Kosher Megillah and able to read from it should do so at home. (For assistance in reading, this video contains a slow reading of the Megillah with pauses in between pesukim so that one can read along: <https://youtu.be/0wDyzZ827q4>)
2. The Megillah readings at Magen Avot (at night and in the morning) will be limited to **30 people**. **Masks** must be worn over the mouth and nose and 2M+ distance always maintained. There will be strictly **no congregating** before or after the reading and entrance and exit will be staggered to ensure this. Doors and windows will be kept open to achieve maximum **airflow**. The reading of the Megillah will not be accompanied by Tefillah (neither Maariv nor Shacharit) to keep time to an absolute minimum. There will therefore be no interruptions of booing or any other noisemaking whilst Haman's name is being read. Anyone who is currently ill with coronavirus, is displaying symptoms, is required to self-isolate for any reason, or does not feel safe to attend SHOULD NOT come. In line with US guidance, given the disproportionate risk of serious illness or mortality with increasing age, those aged over 70 are asked not to attend. Likewise, those over 50 are reminded about the additional age-related risk and asked to factor that into their decisions about attendance. If you are interested in attending, pre-booking is **essential**, and a sign-up link will be distributed shortly. Please note that (in accordance with US guidelines) children under age 11 may not attend this year's Megillah readings.
3. Shabbat Walk are arranging Megillah readings outside people's homes for those who are unable to leave (flyer with details to follow).
4. Anyone who is unable to hear the Megillah in person or has any hesitancy about attending should stay at home and may listen to a live zoom stream of the Megillah reading in shul. I stress that this dispensation is for the current circumstances only; but may be fully relied upon if one feels it is applicable to them. There is NO PRESSURE for anyone to attend shul over Purim if they do not feel safe to do so.

Further guidance about the other mitzvot of Purim, as well as details of other exciting virtual events will follow shortly. Whilst we will not be celebrating this year in the normal manner, we hope and pray that we will all merit to fulfil the words from the Megillah that we say in Havdala each week: ליהודים הייתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר – כן תהיה לנו! "The Jews had light and joy, and gladness and honour." – and so may we!

Rabbi Kenigsberg and the Magen Avot Executive