

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted March 20, 2008, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

THE FOUR MITSVOT OF PURIM

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When we think of Purim, we generally think of the megillah reading. That is, in fact, only one of four mitzvot with which Purim is observed. And it is the one whose date is flexible. The megillah reading slides around so that it is most convenient to the public. (Indeed, the Yerushalmi preserves the opinion that the entire month of Adar is valid for reading the megillah (Y. Megillah 1:1). The other mitzvot have to be observed on the day itself.

But as to the banquet, the date is not flexible and they observe it only on the fourteenth or fifteenth.

And they distribute gifts to the poor only on the fourteenth or fifteenth, for the poor expect gifts on those days.
(Y. Megillah 1:1)

Here is some of the interesting flavor of the Yerushalmi as opposed to the Bavli. You would imagine that the fourth mitzvah of Purim (exchanging gifts of food) would be mentioned here, either pinning down its date or giving us some leeway as to when we perform it. But it doesn't make an appearance, perhaps because the text assumes that the gifts of food are used for the Purim banquet.

The Yerushalmi also tells us of a holiday on the 13th of Adar, called Nicanor day (a paraphrase of the Y.):

What is Nicanor Day? The ruler of Greece passed the land of Israel en route to Alexandria. He said: When I come back in peace, I will break down that tower. The Jews attacked the Greek king, chopped off his hand and head and stuck them on a pole. Underneath they wrote: Here is the mouth that spoke shamefully and the hand that stretched out arrogantly. And these were set up on a pike in sight of Jerusalem. (Y. Megillah 1:4)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do think, of all the holidays, Purim has the greatest leeway in terms of time of observance? How do you do take advantage of this leeway in your community?
2. Is it possible (as some hypothesize) that Nicanor day morphed into Purim? Why might that be?
3. For fun: What brand of shoe did Nicanor wear?