

MISHLOACH MANOS - THE GIFT OF UNITY

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

For most of us, this year Purim begins on Saturday night, March 22, 1997. As mentioned in vol. 1 # 77, one of the commandments we have on Purim is that of "Mishloach Manos." We are required to send two items of food to one person on Purim. A number of different reasons are put forth as to why we send gifts of food to each other on Purim.

The Terumas HaDeshen explains that our happiness on Purim is to be expressed through festive feasts. However, there unfortunately are many who are not able to prepare feasts for Purim due to their financial circumstances. Therefore, the Terumas HaDeshen writes, we all send gifts of food to each other. This way, all will definitely have food with which a feast can be conducted. Furthermore, the Chasam Sofer writes, as we do not want to embarrass the poor, the rich give poor gifts, and the poor gives gifts to the rich. All the members of the nation of Israel give indiscriminately to their brothers and sisters so all can celebrate Purim properly, without any shame.

Another reason given is the one put forth by Rav Shlomo Alkabetz. Haman described the nation of Israel to Achashverosh as a "people scattered abroad and dispersed amongst the people." Some commentators explain that Haman was pointing out that the Jewish nation was vulnerable because they did not all get along: there were disagreements and disputes among them so that in their hearts they were scattered and dispersed. In the end, when the Jews were given the opportunity to attack their enemies before Haman's decree became effective, they were a united force. To foster feelings of closeness, kinship, and love, we send gifts to each other on Purim. This way, every year, we show that we care for our fellow Jew and want to establish and maintain unity throughout the Jewish nation.

A third reason is given by the Chasam Sofer and the Rebbe from Ostrovtza. During the reign of Achashverosh and specifically during the grand party that he threw, many Jews bowed and worshiped idols out of fear. Yet, no one Jew knew if his co-religionist was acting like an idol worshiper solely out of duress or if he or she had truly left the faith. Came the time when the Jewish nation was saved from their destruction, and the picture was much clearer. To illustrate that each Jew believed that the other was true to G-d and to Judaism, everyone sent gifts of food. By accepting the gifts, each Jew displayed his trust of his brother, thereby forging a new degree of trust, understanding, and unity.

The common denominator of these reasons is that Mishloach Manos serves to bring us closer as a people. This may occur by helping others celebrate as we do. This may occur through random acts

of kindness and gift giving. This may occur through acceptance of our brethren. We must be sure to take advantage of this fantastic opportunity we have to unite the Jewish people. Shalach Manos is not a gift we should be giving exclusively to friends. We should be giving this gift to the new person we noticed in shul last week who recently moved into the neighborhood. We should give this gift to the people whom we have had disagreements with. We should give this gift to the needy, the widowed, divorced, orphaned - any person who deserves our help and attention. Purim should be a time of joy for all, and a time when all experience this joy together as one.

Mishloach Manos is a means to this end.

For questions, comments, and topic requests, please write to [Rabbi Yehudah Prero](#).
