

EXCERPT

BODY & SOUL: THE TORAH PATH TO HEALTH, FITNESS AND A HOLY LIFE

CHAPTER 12



AMONG THE HOLIDAY HEALTH HURDLES, THE GOLD MEDAL FOR THE greatest annual test surely goes to Purim. Besides being a day of unique indulgence, Purim also includes the uplifting yet challenging mitzvah of *mishloach manos* - to shower each other with lots of food. This sounds like a set-up for incredible *taavah*/self-control challenges. The best way to avoid a *taavahdig* Purim starts with learning the parameters of the mitzvah:

PURIM

The Ideal Mishloach Manos

One must send to a friend two portions of meat or food, as it says, “And the sending of portions (*mishloach manos*), each person to his friend” (Esther 9:19): two portions to one person. And anyone who sends to more

friends is praiseworthy. If he has nothing to send, he can trade with his friend, this one sending his meal to that one, and this one sending his meal to that one, so that they can fulfill, “and send portions, each person to his friend.” *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 695.4*

This means food fit for immediate consumption.

Mishnah Berurah 695.20ⁱ

What does it mean for *mishloach manos* to be fit for consumption? If you send your friend the world’s most lovely, thoughtful, beautifully-wrapped gift, but your friend wouldn’t eat it, you possibly didn’t fulfill the mitzvah, at least not in the ideal manner.

Aruch HaShulchan is of the opinion that quantity also matters:

It appears to me that for this mitzvah, it isn’t sufficient to gift food in the amount of a *kezayis* or *revi’is*, for we need a “generous portion,” for this is the meaning of the term *manos*, such as a slice of meat fitting to honor someone; that it should be a nice thing. And those people who send small portions have not fulfilled their obligation. *Aruch HaShulchan 695.15*

So table-worthy but tiny food packages to dozens of friends also may not fulfill the mitzvah, certainly not in the ideal manner.

Moreover, note the subjective factor: “Fitting to honor someone; that it should be a nice thing.” Does it honor an alcoholic to send them a bottle of wine? Similarly, if your friend is diabetic, would it honor them to send them something loaded with sugar? Can any harmful food be “fit for consumption,” let alone “fit to honor”?

i. Quoting *Ba’er Heiteiv*, quoting *Maharil*.

Therefore, someone conscious of both the mitzvah and the science of healthy eating might possibly avoid high-sugar and high-trans-fat *mishloach manos* that please the palate but provide poor nutrition and probably don't fully honor the human being one is trying to honor (especially when such food is potentially harmful).ⁱ

Consider the Talmud's three examples of *mishloach manos*:

Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah sent to Rabbi Oshaya the leg of a third-born calf and a jug of wine.... Rabbah sent to Mari bar Mar via Abaye a sack of dates and a cupful of toasted wheat..... The other sent him back a sack of ginger and a cupful of long peppers. *Megilla 7ab*

These are tasty and nutritious gifts, fit for consumption and fitting to honor. We propose that the mitzvah of "portions of meat, or foodstuffs" should be something that they will be good for their body as well as their soul.ⁱⁱ

Fortunately, it's easy to make *mishloach manos* gifts both tasty and healthy. For example:

Less healthy	↔	Healthier
white bread	↔	whole-grain bread
cake from a mix	↔	sugar-free muffins
white flour cookies	↔	whole grain cookies
milk chocolate	↔	dark chocolate
potato chips	↔	sweet-potato chips

i. See Rav Shlomo Kluger, *Chokhmas Shlomo*, who wonders if sending a food item that the sender himself would not eat fulfills the mitzvah.

ii. In fact, there are two opinions on the primary purpose of *mishloach manos*. According to the way many learn the *Rema*, the primary purpose of the mitzvah is to increase love and peace, which may perhaps be fulfilled with just about anything that is reasonably respectable, even if the recipient refuses the gift. According to *Terumas HaDeshen*, one fulfills the mitzvah only with food truly destined for the Purim table. A scrupulous person would try to accomplish both. Moreover, some hold that this *Rema* is only speaking *bidieved* (post hoc).

sweeten with sugar	↔	sweeten with dates
fried potatoes	↔	baked potatoes
regular brownies	↔	brownies made with less sugar, whole wheat, etc. ⁱ
candy	↔	nuts
packaged popcorn	↔	home-popped popcorn
fruit juice	↔	fruit
beer	↔	wine
soda	↔	nearly any alternative is better

If there are young people in your life, Purim is an opportunity to discuss the ethic of health-promoting versus health-harming food. Encourage them to show their friendship by giving foods that are both tasty *and* healthy.ⁱⁱ

Perhaps this perspective on Purim can add a dimension to the idea that Purim's holiness compares to that of Yom Kippur: while Yom Kippur's holiness is achieved through total abstention from food (and other things), Purim's is achieved through enjoyment of food and drink while avoiding *achilah gasah*.ⁱⁱⁱ

* Some suggest going so far as to lace the brownies with something healthy like black beans! Hiding food inside of food honors the Purim spirit and the bean flavor will blend in.

ii. For further ideas, see pp. 273-275.

iii. This teaching is based on *Vayikra/Lev 23:27*; see *Yalkut Shim'oni, Mishlei 944*; *Tikkunei Zohar 21*; Rav Tzaddok HaKohen (see p. 9ff), *Pri Tzaddik, Shemos and R'sisei Laila, 58*; Maharal, *Ohr Chadash, Hakdama; Pachad Yitzchak, Purim 21*; see Ch. 15 below.