



MENTAL HEALTH MISHLOACH MANOT

One of the core mitzvot that make up the Purim celebration is the thoughtful and intentional gifting of food items, referred to as “mishloach manot.” On the surface, gift baskets don’t seem to carry tremendous spiritual significance, but this act of kindness is actually intrinsic to the main lesson of Purim — learning how to stick together after challenging circumstances seek to tear us apart, particularly through connecting with the people in our lives who DON’T need us.



עַל־כֵּן הַיְּהוּדִים (הַפְּרוּזִים) הִישָׁבִי'ם בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרוּזוֹת עֲשִׂים אֶת יוֹם
אַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר שְׂמֵחָה וּמְשֻׁתָּה וְיוֹם טוֹב וּמְשָׁלַח מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ

That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of merrymaking and feasting, and as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another. (Esther 9:19)

I realized this aspect of Purim when I lived in Israel and shared a cab with a stranger who, upon seeing my kippah, felt comfortable aggressively sharing his opinion of Jews with me over the course of the drive.



By Maximillian Hollander

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He told me a story about a rabbi who approached him with a gift basket on Purim — presumably a mishloach manot basket — and insisted on giving it to him. The man told me that he'd yelled at the rabbi, refusing the basket and insisting on him giving it to a poor person instead. While he didn't seem to actually be interested in an answer, he repeatedly and loudly asked me why someone would give him a gift when there are other people who may need it more than him.

At the time, I didn't know what to say, and I was a bit too intimidated by his aggression to answer anyway. But looking back, I wish I had been able to explain to him that, first, the rabbi in his story had likely already given charity that day to fulfill the mitzvah of matanot l'evyonim. (One of Purim's central mitzvot is to give charity on Purim.) Second, I would have explained the holiday's significance he was missing.



In the Purim story, the Jewish people face yet another existential threat but are saved through a series of fortunate events. [Still, while miraculous, surviving catastrophes of any kind can be an isolating experience and take a toll on our mental and physical health. Threats or perceived threats to our safety can affect our ability to function. There is no one “right” response to trauma. It can cause us to focus inward and solely on our own well-being as we try to recover](#)

[from what we experienced, or it can cause us to lose focus on ourselves.](#) We move between the daily tasks of life as our brain keeps us from thinking about the traumatic event. Of course, healing is necessary after trauma, but overdoing it can lead to more anguish as survivors either suffer in silence or neglect the suffering of others in similar circumstances. To account for that, the proscriptions of Purim make the holiday a day dedicated to crafting intentional communities and a sense of peoplehood. The practice of mishloach manot forces us to look outward, see other members of our community and express our love and care for them, strengthening our communal connectedness.



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We don't only preserve community by taking care of our most unfortunate community members when they need us; we do so by also showing the people in our lives we care about them even when they don't need us. We can't just ensure the poorest among us don't fall through the cracks; we must also strive to ensure those closest to us don't drift away. This balance between matanot l'evyonim (gifts to the poor) and mishloach manot (gifts to our friends) is what nurtures community, and community is what nurtures us in the aftermath of intense challenges and trauma.



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Activity - Mental Health Mishloach Manot

The essence of the mitzvah of mishloach manot is giving someone a gift of physical sustenance to add to their celebration of our mutual survival. Today, many of us live with similar challenges in the form of mental health conditions. “In 2019, 301 million people in the world had an anxiety disorder, making anxiety disorders the most common of all mental disorders.” ([WHO](#))

This Purim, consider sending a loved one a mental health mishloach manot package in addition to your normal gift to provide emotional sustenance. This can be anything from an offer to talk, a thoughtful letter letting them know you care about them or an unannounced visit. You can find some of our Purim-themed mental health e-cards and coupons below. If you would like, you can cut them out and send them to your friends, make your own, or you can send them virtually along with a short message. **TIP: When deciding what to give someone who is dealing with a challenging situation, you may feel compelled to ask them what they need. That question, while considerate, may actually be overwhelming for someone in need of serious help. Instead, consider giving them three options to choose from, eliminating the anxiety that comes with choosing just one of the hundreds of things someone in need of help could use from a friend.**





MENTAL HEALTH MISHLOACH MANOT



Make
Your
Own





MENTAL HEALTH MISHLOACH MANOT

ONE FREE HUG

TO _____

FROM _____



ONE LOVING PHONE CALL

TO _____

FROM _____



TO _____

FROM _____

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