

Purim: A Study Guide on Hunger
Our Obligation to Feed the Hungry
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Purim is traditionally a time in which Jews partake in frivolity and excessive eating and drinking. We celebrate the triumph of Mordecai and the Jews over Haman and his attempted genocide. However, underneath the light-hearted nature of the holiday are more serious themes. We are told that on Purim, we are obligated to give gifts to friends and donate food for the hungry. Additionally, we observe the Fast of Esther to remember the fast that she observed before confronting the King about Haman's genocidal decree.

We encourage you to use these Jewish texts and study questions to consider our Jewish values that speak to the issue of hunger in this country and worldwide. May our Fast of Esther inspire us to work to combat the issue of hunger.

Text 1: The Holiday of Purim

<p>And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, to enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. -Esther 9:20-22</p>	<p>ספרים וישלח; האלה הדברים-את, מרדכי ויכתב המלך מדינות-בכל אשר, היהודים-כל-אל עליהם, לקיים. ותרחוקים, הקרובים--אחשורוש תוא, אדר לחדש עשר ארבעה יום את עשים להיות פנים. וישנה, שנה-בכל: בו עשר חמשה-יום אשר והחדש, מאביהם היהודים בהם נחו-אשר לעשות; טוב ליום ומאכל, לשמחה מיגון להם נהפך איש תמנו ומשלח, ושמחה משתה ומי, אותם לאבינים ומתנות, לרעהו</p>
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1. What does the holiday of Purim entail? What are the Jews obligated to do on this day?
2. Why are the Jews obligated to give gifts or feed the poor on this day? What is the connection to the rest of Purim? What might observing this command look like this day?

Text 2: What the Poor Receive

<p>On the eve of Passover [from] close to [the time of] the afternoon offering, no one must eat until nightfall. Even the poorest person in Israel must not eat [on the night of Passover] unless he reclines. And they must give him no fewer than four cups of wine,</p>	<p>למנחה סמוך פסחים ערבי שתחשך עד אדם כליא לא לא שבישראל עני ואפלו</p>
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<p>even [if he receives relief] from the charity plate. -Mishnah Pesachim 10:1</p>	<p>שיסב עד יאכל מארבעה לו יפחתו ולא יין של כוסות התמחו מן ואפלו</p>
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1. On Passover, what are the poor obligated to receive? How are they treated in relation to the rest of the community?
2. How does this text illuminate our obligation to feed or give to the poor on Purim? What is the community's obligation to the poor?
3. What might these obligations look like in our society? How can we live out these values?

Text 3: Our Obligation

But how will saying grace create champions of the good cause? It is obvious that what is suggested to us here are peaceful struggles: the problem of a hungry world can be resolved only if the food of the owners and those who are provided for ceases to appear to them as inalienable property, but is recognized as a gift they have received for which thanks must be given and to which others have a right. Scarcity is a social and moral problem and not exclusively an economic one. That is what our text reminds us of, in old wives' tales. - Emmanuel Levinas, "Nine Talmudic Readings: Saying Grace in the Third World, p. 132

1. What kind of transformation in our attitudes towards food is this text attempting to accomplish? What does it mean to feel thankful verses entitled?
2. How would this kind of rethinking affect the way we treat the poor? How does this relate to the way we give on Purim and year-round?