

Why do we give mishloach manot on Purim and how does that act relate to disability inclusion?

The Sages teach that the act of giving mishloach manot on Purim enhances unity and friendship among the Jewish people. Further, doing so may be understood as a way of directly countering Haman's attack on the Jews, whom he described as "scattered and divided." The gifts we give strengthen our bonds with each other and with our community.

Several organizations now prepare mishloach manot, an effort that requires many volunteer hours but also presents an opportunity to involve volunteers with diverse passions and talents. Those with a variety of disabilities (physical disabilities, learning disabilities, chronic health conditions, intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illness, etc.) may readily engage in baking hamantaschen, organizing gift baskets, writing notes for the baskets, and/or delivering the mishloach manot. As a wonderful baker with Autism shared, "It's so important to feel like you are a contributing member of the community."

Purim's association with gift giving also serves as a reminder to examine what gifts each individual has to offer. As we seek out and utilize the talents, skills, and expertise of individuals with disabilities, we further both their connection to our organizations and their sense of belonging. In Exodus, 25:2 G-d tells Moses to "accept gifts... from every person whose heart so moves him" in order to build the Tabernacle. So, too, must we engage the precious gifts of each person to build a holy community.



Purim Activity for ALL Ages

Fill your mishloach manot basket with your own gifts and talents

Mishloach manot (gifts of goodies) are part of the Purim tradition. Giving deepens connections and brings us closer to each other. But not all gifts need to be things you buy or things you can hold. What gifts, talents, or skills can you offer to others? Are you a good listener? Do you like to make people laugh? Do you play an instrument? Do you enjoy talking on the phone? Are you good with technology? Do you like to draw, paint, cook, bake, or garden?

Fill the basket with your unique gifts by writing or drawing them in the empty basket below. Then, share your basket with others, offer to do something for another person using one of your gifts, and/or have a discussion about the talents we all offer.

