

From an article in the Ottawa Jewish Bulletin written by Rachel Gray

People tend to think that the time for gift-giving in the Jewish calendar is at Chanukah. In truth, there is no mitzvah to give gifts on Chanukah, although there is a custom to give money. We are, however, obligated to give gifts, specifically parcels of food, on the holiday of Purim. The origins of this practice stem all the way back to Mordechai of Megillat Esther fame, as it says: Mordechai... enjoined the [Jews] to make the fourteenth day of the month of Adar...as days of feasting and joy, and the sending of portions one to another, and gifts to the poor." (*Megillat Esther* 9: 20-22).

The rabbis teach a further reason for the giving of Mishloach Manot. When Haman sought to destroy the Jewish people he said to King Ahasuerus "There is a certain people scattered and separate among the peoples throughout all the provinces of your kingdom..." (*Megillat Esther* 3: 8). Our vulnerability lay in our being fragmented as a people. Therefore through the practice of giving gifts to one another and helping the needy on Purim we build community and demonstrate our unity.

And what better way to bring out this idea of community than a community-wide Purim basket delivery operation that involves volunteers in coordinating orders, packing the baskets and of course delivering the baskets to homes throughout the city on Purim day itself?

Here's how it works. You fill out a form indicating your chosen recipients. JET sends one elegant goody-filled basket to each recipient along with a scroll listing all the people who contributed to the gift. Over 20 years ago when JET Mishloach Manot first began, 60 people sent baskets to 250 recipients. Last year, over 200 people placed orders and baskets were delivered to almost 1200 people across the entire city. More than 100 volunteers were involved in this grand production.

The dramatic increase in numbers is testimony not only to the success of the scheme itself, but also to JET's underlying mission: to bring people closer to their Jewishness through Torah education. When Esther Goldberg receives her basket, she's thrilled with the chocolates and delicious hamantashen; she's touched by the fact that Solly and Molly Korngold were thinking of her this year. But more than that, she gets the message that it's Purim. A dimly remembered custom takes on a vibrant meaning. She's now participating in a practice as old as the holiday itself. JET has changed the face of Purim in Ottawa!