

# HALOCHOSCOPE <sup>TOI</sup>

A group would like to share the reading of the *Megillah*. Each will take a turn to read some of it. Is this an acceptable way to perform this Mitzvah? Is it still preferable to have one person read the whole Megillah while the others follow along? If all of them have Kosher Megilos, may they all read it aloud together?

The issues:

(A) A Kosher *Megillah*

(B) *Pirsumei Nisa*, publicizing the miracle; reading the Megillah with a *Minyan*

(C) *Shomeia Ke'oneh*, hearing someone else is as good as reading oneself

(D) Concentrating when two people are reading the same thing

(A) A Kosher *Megillah*

The *Sifrei Kodesh*, books of the *Tanach*, have an elevated level of sanctity. This applies if they were written properly. They must be written on parchment with the proper ink in the proper characters and with correct intent. In addition, all the letters must be present, exactly as the *Mesorah*, tradition, has been transmitted. Each letter must be intact, and none may be touching others. [Literally, each must be surrounded by clean parchment.] The same Sefarim may be printed and studied out of. However, the sanctity of the printed Sefer is less than that of the Sefer that was hand-written with all the requirements. In order to fulfil Mitzvos associated with their public reading, the Sefarim must be on the highest level of sanctity. Thus, a Chumash is insufficient for *Krias Hatorah*. The same is true of *Mikra Megillah*, reading the Megillah on Purim. Incidentally, the same is really true of other readings, though they are not viewed as independent Mitzvos of the same caliber as *Krias Hatorah* and *Mikra Megillah*. Thus, ideally, *Haftarah* and *Eicha*, and even the other Megilos should be read from a parchment scroll. In many communities this has been revived.

There is a basic difference between *Krias Hatorah* and *Mikra Megillah*. The entire reading from the Torah must be read from the actual words. A *Baal Kriah* may not recite it from memory. The Poskim debate whether one or two words may be recited from memory, provided that an entire episode was not recited from memory. We follow those who require every word read. Thus, if a mistake is found in a Sefer Torah, the word can not be read from the text, since it is "not there". If it was read this way, then a new Sefer was used without the mistake, we usually repeat the word that had been recited "by heart". Under certain circumstances we do not repeat

the part that might have been read by heart, relying on the lenient view. Mikra Megillah is more lenient. Up to half of it may be recited not from the text. However, an entire episode may not be recited this way.

Therefore, if a Megillah has smudged words or broken or touching letters, it is still kosher, provided there is no complete episode that will need to be recited by heart. If one does not have a kosher Megillah he should listen to the reading of one who has one. He fulfills his obligation through Shomei'a Ke'oneh (see section C). He may assume that the Baal Keriah is careful to fulfil the ideal, reading every word. The listener should follow along with a printed text. If he misses a word while listening, he should quickly read it from his unkosher text, but make sure to keep up with the Koreh. Thus, he is mixing the Keriah of the Koreh, and his own recital by heart. However, the Poskim say he should not try to read the whole thing with. Inevitably, he will not be able to hear the Koreh properly, and will wind up reciting it by heart. [See Megilah 17a 18b, Poskim. Tur, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 690:3, 691, commentaries.]

#### **(B) Pirsumei Nisa**

The object of *Mikra Megilah* is *Pirsumei Nisa*, to publicize the miracle that took place. The Talmud debates the requirement for a *Minyan*. In one view a *Minyan* is always essential for the proper fulfillment of the Mitzvah. In the other view it is only essential when it is being read early. This occurred in Talmudic times when the fourteenth of Adar fell on any day other than Monday or Thursday. Villagers did not know how to read the Megilah themselves. They went in to larger towns to have it read for them by an expert. To make this arrangement work without disrupting the larger town's food supply and the villagers' schedules, the Rabbis instituted an earlier time to read it for the villagers. They would anyway go to town on Mondays and Thursdays, which was a market day. Therefore, the villagers did not need to come in specially on Purim morning. On these occasions they were required to read it with a *Minyan*. On Purim itself, in this view, a *Minyan* was not essential. The debate on reading it early applies nowadays, if one leaves on a trip, and will have no access to a Megillah. He is permitted to read it before leaving as of the eleventh of Adar. A rarer application is when Purim falls on Friday. In Yerushalayim they should read it on Shabbos. It is never read on Shabbos, it is pushed back to Erev Shabbos. They would require a *Minyan*.

The Poskim debate the meaning of this Talmudic debate. In one view it is indeed a debate over whether there is a basic need for a *Minyan* to fulfil the Mitzvah. We follow the ruling that without a *Minyan* one fulfills the Mitzvah anyhow. In the other view these two opinions themselves agree that without a *Minyan* one can still fulfil the Mitzvah. The debate is on whether there is a Mitzvah to try to find ten people for it. There is no restriction against reading it without a *Minyan*. The issue is whether one fulfills

his obligation this way. Therefore, if one knows that he will never get a *Minyan*, he should read it alone. The Poskim maintain that according to the views that we follow, a lone person reading it would also recite the Brocha, since he is fulfilling his obligation this way. Furthermore, less than ten people need not all read it privately, but one may read it for the others, reciting the Brochos for them as well. This is considered by some to be the preferred way, since a larger measure of publicity is attained.

This sparks a debate. If one has his private kosher Megillah, may he read along with the *Koreh*? In one view, if a group of people read together they fulfil *Pirsumei Nisa*. Even if they do not keep up with each other, it is similar to *Tefilah Betzibur*. Some people finish their silent Shemone Esrei before the others. Even he who finishes last fulfills his obligation to participate with the congregation. Thus, there is no requirement to have the Megilah read aloud by a single *Koreh*, except to exempt those who do not have kosher Megilos. The other view maintains that *Pirsumei Nisa* requires full united participation. This is only possible if one person reads it aloud and all the others listen. Reading it silently with the *Koreh* would thus be considered reading it without *Minyan*. If Purim falls on Friday, those reading in Yerushalayim would have to be sure not to read along with the *Koreh*. [See Megillah 3a (Ran) 5a, Poskim. Tur Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 690:18 687:2 688:6-7, commentaries. Chazon Ish O.C. 155:2. Moadim Uzmanim II:173. Piskei Teshuvos O.C. 690:10.]

#### **(C) Shomai'a Keoneh**

For all Mitzvos that are fulfilled by reciting something, one can either recite it himself or listen to another person reciting it. For most Brochos we do not rely on *Shomai'a Keoneh* except in the case of one who does not know how to recite it himself. This is partly because of concern that the listener will not be able to concentrate on hearing every word. Some Poskim say this is because it is always better to recite something oneself rather than through another person. This is similar to the concept of fulfilling a Mitzvah personally rather than through an agent. However, some Mitzvos are meant to be recited aloud in a gathering. In such circumstances, the idea of *Berov Am Hadras Melech*, the more the people praising Hashem together, the better, is applied. Thus, if one person recites it with all the listeners in mind, it is as though the entire congregating is reciting it as one. This is a greater form of praise. Nonetheless, there is a debate on this issue, with some Poskim maintaining that in many of these cases one should try to recite his own Brocha, overriding the concept of *Berov Am*. In the case of Megilah, one could argue that assuming that *Pirsumei Nisa* is fulfilled by reading it with the *Koreh*, one should rather do it this way than rely only on the *Koreh*. Perhaps it is actually better than nothing to divide the reading. This way each reader has a chance to fulfill part of the Mitzvah personally. In Talmudic times the Torah reading was divided between

those who were honored with an Aliyah. This was abolished to save the ignorant (who needed a Koreh to do it for them) from embarrassment. Only the first Oleh said the first Brocha, and only the last said the last Brocha. However, the reason this was abolished is because those who come in the middle might think that there is no Brocha before. Those who leave early might think that there is no Brocha after reading. Therefore, it was instituted that every Oleh recites a Brocha before and after his Aliyah. Furthermore, there is a debate about a Koreh who lost his voice in the middle of the Megilah. In the middle of an Aliyah, a new Koreh takes over and repeats the whole Aliya. The same is true if the person reading Haftarah loses his voice. In the middle of *Tekias Shofar* (if the *Tokai'a* lost his strength) the new Tokaiah need not start at the beginning. Some say that Megilah is a complete thing and one can not break it up. The Brochos before and after it also connect the entire thing. We follow this view if possible. Accordingly, they may not divide the reading. They could read it together. However, this presumes that Pirsumei Nisa is fulfilled by congregating in one place, even if the reading is not by one Koreh. [See Sh. Ar. O.C. 140:1 284:5 692: Magen Avraham 2, commentaries.]

#### **(D) Two voices together**

The Talmud does not allow two readers to read the Torah together. The reason is that it is too hard to hear two voices together. However, for Mikra Megillah it is allowed. Since the Mitzvah is dear to people, and the content is so uplifting, people make the effort to listen even if two people say it together. There appears to be a question whether this is permitted outright or just acceptable. The Mishna uses language that implies that it is not ideal, but acceptable *Bidi'eved*, if it was already done. The Talmud cites another source (actually allowing it with ten people) implying it is permitted. Most Poskim seem to follow the Talmud's version. [Maybe there is a difference between two and ten. If ten do it together it is like *Halel* sung in unison. Two readers, however, could confuse listeners or even themselves.] [See Megillah 21a-b, Poskim Tur, Sh. Ar. O.C. 690:2, Shaar Hatziyun 4.]

In conclusion, they may not divide the reading. The Mitzvah will be fulfilled by reading it together. However, the group must decide to follow those who say that Pirsumei Nisa is satisfied by congregating together. They must also decide that the idea of two voices being heard is permitted rather than just acceptable. It would appear that they may all recite the Brocha as well, though they could all listen to one designated reciter. Since they consider this a congregation, they may also recite the Brocha after the Megillah (which is only recited with a Minyan).