

You have heard the shaylos . . .
Now learn the issues & the opinions

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by **Rabbi Shmuel Stein** at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

The Mitzvah of Reading the Megillah

In the times of Mordechai and Esther the mitzva of listening to the Megillah being read on Purim was instituted. The Gemara¹ writes that "All of the prophets were not able to add to the Torah, the one exception was the mitzva of reading the Megillah." The word Megillah means 'to reveal,' as the Megillah reveals how the miracle of Purim came about through the intervention of *Hakadosh baruch Hu*.² The Rambam³ explains that "the prophets instituted the mitzva of reading the Megillah to ensure that we remember the salvation that *Hakadosh baruch Hu* performed for us and recognize that He listens to our outcries. As the verse⁴ states, 'Is there a nation so great (as the Jewish nation), as whenever they call out to Hashem, He is close to them.' Through this recognition we praise Him." The Shulchan Aruch⁵ writes that "the mitzva of Megillah is so important that it takes precedence over learning Torah or any other mitzva of the Torah."

In the following paragraphs we will review some common halachos and minhagim of Mikrah Megillah.

When the Megillah is read

The Shulchan Aruch⁶ writes that the Megillah is read twice on Purim, once at night and again on Purim day. The Mishna Berura⁷ explains that we read the Megillah by night and by day to remind us that the miracle of Purim came about through the Jewish people crying out to Hashem both by night and by day. Nevertheless, the daytime reading is considered the main reading,⁸ as just as the other mitzvos of Purim (*seudas Purim*, *Mishloach Manos*, *Matanos l'evonim*) are performed during the daytime, the main Megillah reading is also during the daytime.⁹

Listening to every word of the Megillah reading

The Shulchan Aruch¹⁰ explains that to fulfill the mitzva one must hear every word of the Megillah. If even one word was missed, he does not fulfill his obligation.

What should one do if he missed a word. If while listening to the Megillah one missed a word being read, he must quickly read those words on his own, and catch up to where the *ba'al koreh* is up to. These words should be read loud enough that he can hear it,¹¹ yet he should be careful not disturb others that are listening to the Megillah reading.¹² This can be accomplished in one of two ways:

1. **Reading from a kosher Megillah.** If one owns a kosher Megillah he can quickly read the words which he missed in his Megillah and then continue reading until he catches up to where the *ba'al koreh* is up to. This method of catching up to the *ba'al koreh* is *l'chatchila* because in this way the individual heard all the words from a kosher Megillah.¹³
2. **Reading from a Chumash.** The Shulchan Aruch¹⁴ writes that so long as one hears most of the words (51%) from a kosher Megillah he has fulfilled his obligation. Thus, one may read the words he missed from a Chumash. Therefore, the Pri Megadim¹⁵ writes that it is important for each person to have a Chumash available during the Megillah reading so that if he misses a word, he can catch up to the *ba'al koreh* from the Chumash. This option is particularly useful for someone who finds it difficult to read accurately from a kosher Megillah (which does not have punctuation), as he may read the missed words from a Chumash.¹⁶

Daydreaming during the Megillah reading. It is challenging to concentrate on the *entire* Megillah reading without daydreaming in middle. Yet, the *poskim*¹⁷ rule that someone who daydreams during the Megillah reading and misses words of the Megillah being read does not fulfil the mitzva, because when one daydreams, he is detached from his surroundings, and it cannot be considered that he *heard* the words of the Megillah.

However, this seems to depend on how heavily one spaced out. It is possible that even while daydreaming one can still be subconsciously aware of his surroundings. Therefore, if one is still subconsciously aware of what the *ba'al koreh* is reading, we can still consider that he has heard the words of the Megillah. However, if a person is lost in his thoughts to the degree that he is unaware of where the *ba'al koreh* is up to, we must consider it as if he did not hear those words at all. In this case, he must quickly read on his own the words which he missed and catch up to the *ba'al koreh*.¹⁸

It can sometimes be difficult for someone to determine the extent of how lost he was in thought and whether he was aware of the reading of the *ba'al koreh*. Therefore, the *poskim*¹⁹ suggest that while a person listens to the Megillah reading he should follow along (in his Megillah or Chumash) with his finger on the place. So long as his finger continues to remain on the place that the *ba'al koreh* is up to he can assume that he heard all the words of the Megillah, and he has fulfilled the mitzva.

To Stand or to Sit

The Shulchan Aruch²⁰ rules that one may either stand or sit while listening to the Megillah reading. Nevertheless, the Shulchan Aruch²¹ writes that the *ba'al koreh* should stand while reading the Megillah out of respect to the congregation. The Mishna Berura²² writes that both the *ba'al koreh* and those listening must stand while the *berachos* of the Megillah are recited, because one must stand while reciting a *beracha* over performing a mitzva.²³

Parsumei Nissa: Publicizing the Miracle of Purim

The Shulchan Aruch²⁴ writes that the Megillah should be read in the presence of ten people in order to publicize the miracle. The more people that gather together to listen to the Megillah read, the more the Megillah reading is beautified as *b'rov am hadras melech* – with a larger group the King is beautified.²⁵

The Berachos of the Megillah

The Shulchan Aruch²⁶ writes that at the nighttime reading, before the Megillah is read, we recite the following three *berachos*:

- 1) "*Al Mikrah Megilla*" (for the mitzva of reading the Megillah)
- 2) "*Sh'asah Nissim*" (He performed miracles)
- 3) "*Shechechianu*" (He kept us alive)

Reciting Shechechianu at the daytime reading. It is questionable whether the *beracha* of *Shechechianu* is recited again at the daytime reading. The Shulchan Aruch²⁷ rules that since *Shechechianu* was already recited at the nighttime reading it should not be repeated during the day. Accordingly, Sephardim who follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch do not recite the *beracha* of *Shechechianu* at the daytime reading. However, the Rema²⁸ rules that *Shechechianu* is recited again at

1 Megillah 14a 2 Rambam end of sefer ha'mitzvos ha'katzer 3 Nefesh Shimshon (Rav Shimshon Pincus) Purim pp. 20,21 4 Devarim 4:7 5 Shulchan Aruch 687:2, Mishna Berura 687:7 6 Shulchan Aruch 687:1 7 Mishna Berura 687:2 8 Mishna Berura 692:2 citing Rishonim 9 Tosfos Megillah 4a d"h chayav Rosh Megillah 1:6 10 Shulchan Aruch 692:2 and Mishna Berura 690:19 11 See Shulchan Aruch 689:2 and Mishna Berura 689:5. See Kovetz Halachos (Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky, Purim, p. 89); Mikadesh Yisroel, Purim 87; Rav Shmuel Felder (Shiurei Halacha, Purim p. 10-11), that l'chatchila one must hear the words that he is reading, but b'dieved if he did not, he is still yotzei. 12 Rav Shmuel Felder (Shiurei Halacha, Purim p. 10-11) 13 Mishna Berura 689:19. The Mishna Berura writes, "Nowadays, it is appropriate for each person to have their own kosher Megila to read along quietly word for word, because the noises that people make during the Megillah reading make it difficult to hear the reading. It is therefore proper for every person to have their own Megilah, if they can afford it." However, if someone is in a minyan where he knows that the baal koreh reads clearly and it is quiet so that everyone can hear the reading there is no need to have a kosher Megillah (Mikadesh Yisroel, Purim 81) 14 Mishna Berura 690:19 see Shulchan Aruch 690:3 15 Eishel Avraham 690:7 16 Rav Yosef Veiner, Contemporary Questions p. 198 17 Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky (quoted in sefer Kovetz halachos pp. 85-89); Mikadesh Yisroel Purim, 82); Rav Shmuel Felder (Shiurei Halacha, Purim p. 9-11); In a conversation with Rav Yisroel Belsky 18 Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky (ibid); Mikadesh Yisroel (ibid). Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky (ibid) writes that because of this concern, one should have a kosher Megillah and read word for word quietly along with the baal koreh. 19 Mikadesh Yisroel (ibid); Rav Shmuel Felder (ibid). Rav Felder writes that very often women will find even using this option throughout the entire Megillah reading difficult. He quotes Rav Yichezkel Roth who suggests that perhaps since the mitzva for women is to only "hear" the Megillah (and not "read" the Megillah, as men are obligated), they are only obligated in the mitzva of parsumei mitzva, and if they spaced out by some words they still fulfill their mitzva. However, see Kovetz Halachos (ibid) that this issue applies to woman just as it does to men. 20 Shulchan Aruch 690:1 21 ibid 22 Mishna Berura 690:1 and Shaar Hatziyon 690:1 23 Mishna Berura 8:2 (as we find by the mitzvos of tzitzis, shofar and sefiras ha'Omer) 24 690:18 25 Aruch Hashulchan 690:25 26 Shulchan Aruch 692:1 27 ibid 28 Rema 692:1 29 692:2 30 692:1 31 Although the Mishna Berura does not mention that one should also have in mind the mitzva of matanos l'evyonim. However, other poskim do mention that one should have in mind for matanos l'evyonim as well (Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 1; Chai Adam 155:27; Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky ibid p. 75). See Shiurei Halacha (Rav Shmuel Felder, p. 17) for reasons why the Mishna Berura does not include matanos l'evyonim. 32 Shulchan Aruch 692:1 33 Rema 692:1 34 Although women are obligated in reading the Megillah they are not counted towards the beracha of ha'ruv aei Reivnu, as this beracha needs a tzibur (Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky in sefer Kovetz halachos p. 59)

the daytime reading, because the daytime reading is the main reading.²⁹ Accordingly, Ashkenazim who follow the ruling of the Rema recite the *beracha* of *Shechechyanu* again by day. The Mishnah Berura³⁰ adds that when the blessing of *Shechechyanu* is recited by day, one should have in mind that the *beracha* should be effective for the other *mitzvos* of the day (the *seudah*, *mishloach*, and *manos matanos l'evyonim*³¹) as well.

The Beracha of Ha'ruv es Riveinu. The Shulchan Aruch³² writes that after the Megillah is read it is customary to recite the *beracha* of *ha'ruv es Riveinu* (Blessed is He who He fights our battles). The Rema³³ writes that this *beracha* is recited only when there ten men³⁴ present at the Megillah reading.

Women and the mitzvah of Megillah

The Shulchan Aruch³⁵ rules that women are obligated to listen to the Megillah reading. The Mishna Berura³⁶ explains that although reading the Megillah is a *mitzvas aseh she' hazman grama* (a positive time-bound mitzvah) which women are normally exempt from they are nevertheless obligated in the mitzvah of Megillah, because they too were saved by the miracle of Purim and must remember the miracle that occurred.

Defining the obligation of women. The Mishna Berura³⁷ cites a dispute amongst the *poskim* regarding how to define the obligation women towards the mitzvah of Megillah. Some rule that women have an obligation to **read** the Megillah (just as men do). This can be accomplished by either *reading* themselves or by listening to someone else *read* the Megillah. Other *poskim* rule that women are obligated to only **hear** the Megillah, and not to read it.³⁸ There are several halachic ramifications revolving around this dispute, one of them is regarding what the correct *beracha* women recite before reading the Megillah, as we will now discuss.

Berachos for Women

According to the opinion that women are obligated to *read* the Megillah, the correct *beracha* to be made is “to *read* the Megillah,” just as men do. According to the opinion that women are obligated to only *hear* the Megillah, the correct *beracha* to be made is “to *hear* the Megillah.” The Mishnah Berura³⁹ rules that when the Megillah is read to a group of women, one woman should recite the *beracha* of “to *hear* the Megillah.” Accordingly, the Mishna Berura⁴⁰ adds that when a man reads for a group of women, he should recite the *beracha* “to *hear* the Megillah” for them. (He may recite the *berachos* for them even if he himself already fulfilled his obligation to hear Megillah.⁴¹) Others⁴² rule that it is preferable that when a man reads the Megillah for a group of women that one of the women listening recite the *berachos* on behalf of the rest of the group.

The Beracha of Ha'ruv es Riveinu. We mentioned earlier that the *beracha* of *Ha'ruv es Riveinu* (which is recited after the Megillah reading) is recited only when there is a minyan present at the Megillah reading. When reading the Megillah to a group of women this *beracha* is not recited.⁴³ Although women are obligated to listen to the Megillah reading they do not form a *minyan*, and therefore this *beracha* is not recited, even when ten women are present.⁴⁴

Children and Megillah

The Shulchan Aruch⁴⁵ writes that “it is a good custom to bring children to Shul to listen to the reading of the Megillah.” The Mishnah Berura⁴⁶ explains that “the purpose of bringing the children to shul is to train them in the mitzvah of *parsumei nissa*. However, the young children should not be brought to Shul as they will disturb the concentration of the other people listening.”⁴⁷ The Mishnah Berura continues “Yet in our days, due to our great sins, ‘*Vinhohapoch Hu*’ – not only do the children themselves not pay attention to the Megillah reading, they cause the adults not to hear the reading as well. These children come to *shul* to only to make noise when they bang for *Haman*. This does not fulfill the father’s obligation of *chinuch*. In fact, if the father wants to fulfill his obligation of *chinuch* he should sit his child next to him and ensure that the child listens to the Megillah. When

the name of *Haman* is mentioned the child may bang, as the *minhag*, but this should not be the main reason for him to come to *Shul*.”

Eating before Listening to the Megillah Reading

The Rema⁴⁸ rules that one may not eat before fulfilling the mitzvah of Megillah. Only when there is a pressing need may one *taste* something before Megillah reading. Women as well should not eat before they listen to the Megillah read since they too are obligated in the mitzvah of Megillah.⁴⁹ However, one may *drink* before Megillah reading.⁵⁰ Therefore:

- One may drink a coffee in the morning before he hears the Megillah.
- A woman waiting for her husband to return from *shul* on Purim night may have a drink before she hears the Megillah.⁵¹

Minhagim during the Megillah Reading

1) Banging for Haman. The Torah⁵² states “Erase the memory of the nation of Amalek.” Haman was a descendant of Amalek, and therefore the Rema⁵³ writes that the *minhag* has become to bang when his name is mentioned. The name of Haman is mentioned fifty-four times in the Megillah, corresponding to the *gematria* (numerical value) of the word אמהה (*erase Amalek*).⁵⁴ There are a number of reasons given to explain why we bang when Haman’s name is mentioned:

1. **To drown out his name:** We bang when Haman’s name is mentioned in order to drown out his name.⁵⁵ Although we must hear every word of the Megillah, by banging we show our displeasure that his name is mentioned.
2. **Waging war:** When we bang it symbolizes that we are at war against Amalek.⁵⁶
3. **Haman feels the banging:** The early commentators⁵⁷ write that when we bang by Haman’s name, Hashem actually causes Haman and his family to feel the banging in order to make them suffer.

The Rema⁵⁸ writes that one should not abolish or joke about this custom, or any other custom, as each one has reasons why it was instituted. Many great Torah leaders would bang when Haman’s name was mentioned.⁵⁹ Accordingly, a *minyan* should not institute that there be no banging when Haman’s name is mentioned.⁶⁰ However it may be requested that the banging be minimized.⁶¹ If children are banging *excessively* they should be asked to stop.⁶²

2) Reading verses out loud. The Rema⁶³ writes that there are four verses in the Megilla which the entire congregation reads out loud. They are: “*Ish Yehudi*,” “*U'Mordechai Yutzah*,” “*La'Yehudim*,” and “*Ki Mordechai*”. The *ba'al koreh* reads these verses out loud as well so that the congregation can hear them from a kosher *Megillah*.

The *Mishnah Berura* gives two reasons for this custom:

1. These verses illustrate steps towards the redemption of the Jewish people, and out of joy the entire congregation reads them out loud.⁶⁴
2. These verses are read out loud in order to keep the children who come to *shul* involved so they can pay attention during the Megillah reading.⁶⁵

3) Reading the names of the ten sons of Haman in one breath. The Shulchan Aruch⁶⁶ writes that the *ba'al koreh* should read the names of Haman’s ten sons in one breath. This is done in order to remember that Haman’s ten sons died together at one time. If the ten names were not read in one breath one does not need to repeat it.⁶⁷

In many congregations the entire congregation reads the names of Haman’s ten sons out loud. Some⁶⁸ explain that that these verses are read aloud out of joy, just like the other four verses that are read out loud. Others⁶⁹ explain the reason as follows: Although the *ba'al koreh* can generally be *motzei* the congregation with the Megillah reading, he cannot fulfill their obligation of reading the names of the ten sons of Haman in “*one breath*.” Therefore, the congregation must read these names in one breath on their own.

35 Shulchan Aruch 689:1 36 Mishna Berura 689:1 37 692:11 [See Rema 689:2 and Mishna Berura 689:8 who write that women are only obligated to hear the Megillah. While the Vilna Goan (Masse Rav 246) and Shaar Hatzion 689:16 write that their mitzvah is to read the Megillah just like men.] 38 See Kehilas Yakov (Steipler) Megillah siman 3 where he explains why men are obligated to read the Megillah while women are only obligated to hear the Megillah. 39 692:11 See also Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky ibid p. 57 where he cites many opinions that rule this way. However, if the *beracha* of “To read the Megillah” recited they have fulfilled their obligation as well. 40 692:11; see Mishna Berura 692:10 41 See Mishna Berura ibid 42 Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky ibid p. 57; Aruch Hashulchan 692:7; Minchas Yitzchok 3:53 43 Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky ibid p. 59 44 ibid 45 689:6 46 689:16-18 47 Rav Elyashiv Kuntris l'knos chachmah 48 Rama 692:4 49 Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky ibid p. 48 50 ibid 51 The Mishna Berura (692:16) seems to rule that a healthy person may not eat before Megillah reading even if he appoints a *shomer* (someone to remind him to listen to the Megillah) [as understood by Rav Elyashiv Shvus Yitzchok, Shiya V'chazara p. 311; Rav Nissin Karelitz in Yad Purim p. 68]. However, some *poskim* explain the *Mishnah Berura* differently and rule that so long as a *shomer* is appointed even a healthy person may eat before hearing Megillah [Silmas Chaim siman 104 Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky ibid p. 48]. 52 Devarim 25:17 53 690:17 54 Sefer Matamim p. 142:6 55 Chasam Sofer, on Rema (ibid) 56 Divrei Yoel vol. 2, p. 23 57 Cited in Piskei Teshuvos from Kadmonim (mentioned also by Rav Shmuel Felder, Shiurei Halacha p. 17 58 690:17 59 Chacham Tzvi brought in Mishna Berura 690:59, Steipler brought in Orchos Rabeinu pg. 43 (Chafetz Chaim, Toldos Hachafetz Chaim 3 p. 923) 60 Rav Chaim Kanievski, Sefer Piskei Shemuos p. 97 61 Ibid 62 Steipler Goan, brought in Orchos Rabeinu pg. 43 63 690:17 64 690:48 65 689:16 66 690:15 67 Rama 690:15 68 Aruch Hashulchan 690:23 69 *Ragitzava* Goan (Tzufnas Paneiach Hashmatos hilchos Geirusin Vol. 3 pg. 113)

1 Megillah 14a

2 Rambam end of sefer ha'mitzvos ha'katzer