

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY

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Kriat Ha-Torah on Purim

The gemara in Megilla (21b) cites the principle that whenever the Torah is read in public a minimum of ten pesukim must be read. This principle is adhered to in every instance of kri'at ha-torah with one exception – the reading from the Torah on Purim morning. On Purim we read the episode of the war with Amalek detailed in the last section of Parashat B'shalach and the story is recounted in 9 pesukim. Tosafot note this deviation and question why this Torah reading is allowed to 'break the rule.' In fact, Tosafot is merely citing the Yerushalmi which first raises the question. The two answers, which the Yerushalmi provides, will form the topic of this shiur.

One answer offered by the Yerushalmi is that since an entire topic has been encompassed in less than 10 pesukim, we may read less. On the surface this suggestion seems questionable. If indeed there exists an objective requirement of 10 pesukim for every kri'at ha-torah why should the integrity of the story allow a reduction of that requirement. Evidently we must reassess the purpose and meaning of the 10-pasuk requirement. The first step is to locate the source for this requirement.

The gemara in Bava Kama (82a) describes kri'at ha-torah as an institution which was generated by Ezra upon the return of the Jewish people from Bavel. The gemara questions this as the source since we are already told of Moshe instituting kri'at ha-torah every Monday, Thursday and Shabbat during Mincha in the desert even before matan Torah. The gemara replies that although Moshe originated the practice, Ezra updated kri'at ha-torah and added several new requirements. Moshe merely required three pesukim to be read either by one person or by three people (each reading one pasuk). Ezra demanded that three people read a total of ten pesukim. The source for the 10-pasuk requirement was Ezra's takana or more appropriately Ezra's update of Moshe's takana. What did Ezra see in the 10-pasuk requirement? Was it merely a formal requirement - a quantitative addition or did it represent a fundamental change in the experience of kri'at ha-torah?

The Rav TZ"L addressed this very point in one of his Yahrzeit shiurim (Shiurim L'zecher Abba Mori volume 1). The Rav claimed as far as Torah She-bikhtav - the written word of Hashem - there exist two mitzvos or two types of

experiences. The 'conventional and central experience can be referred to as learning and understanding.' The second type of mitzva can be defined as 'reading Hashem's revealed word as a way of coming into contact with Him.' It is not the comprehension per se but the very reading and listening itself which is paramount. This was the essence of Moshe's takana. As it was instituted prior to Har Sinai, we were not yet commanded to study Torah. Moshe however noticed the national melancholy or depression, which set in after having strayed from kri'at yam suf (during which the entire nation perceived the open presence of Hashem) and not being in contact with Hashem for three days. The pasuk which describes this episode states that the nation went three days without finding water to which the gemara adds that water refers to spiritual sustenance – Torah. Moshe noticed that quite apart from actually learning or understanding Torah, the spiritual health of a person or of the nation depends upon constant encounter with the presence or word of Hashem. To address this concern Moshe instituted that no three days should ever pass in the which Torah would be read in public. His goal was however as the Rambam describes (Hilkhot Tefilla 12;1) 'shemi'at ha-torah' (literally listening or hearing without necessarily understanding).

Ezra's adjustments were not merely cosmetic; he broadened the experience to include a public 'learning experience' and not merely a public 'reading of Hashem's word.' The proof that Ezra overhauled the very experience can be detected from his adding targum to kri'at ha-torah. Not only must the Torah be read but explanations in the form of the relevant sections of the oral traditions would be inserted after each pasuk (see Nedarim 33b). Obviously Ezra intended to lend to kri'at ha-torah an element of public learning and not just public reading . Though there is meaning and purpose to reading Hashem's word even when not understanding, when it comes to Torah Sheb'al Peh reading without understanding is meaningless. Evidently if Ezra insisted on a Torah Sheb'al Peh element to kri'at ha-torah he aimed to transform it into a learning experience.

The Rav TZ"L noticed the same intentions in Ezra's demanding that 3 people read from the Torah. This symbolized the actual experience of learning which depends on give and take and can best be performed by many. Moshe's institution of reading and listening could be executed by one person reciting Torah. Ezra's concept of learning Torah could best be realized by multiple participants.

Finally the increase in the amount of pesukim to be read also reflected the change in the texture of the kri'at ha-torah experience. Three pesukim reflect the minimum amount of sentences to be considered meaningful text . A person who has read less than 3 pesukim has not read a significant block of text just as one who has

not eaten a ke-zayit of matzoh has not eaten a meaningful volume of food. Two of the proofs the Rav TZ"L offered appear in the context of the gemara's discussion in Megilla (21b-22a). The gemara maintains that a person reading from the Torah has to read at least 3 pesukim from a parasha (paragraph) which he has begun; he cannot begin a new parasha and read only two pesukim. Alternatively he may not stop reading if there are only 2 pesukim remaining until the end of the parasha; he must leave 3 pesukim in the parasha for the next in line. These two halakhot indicate that less than 3 pesukim is not considered significant text by Halakha. If I begin a parasha I must read a significant 'shiur' (quantity) of text, and I must also leave a significant amount of text for the next person in line. Since Moshe intended to institute the reading of text he only demanded 3 pesukim.

Ezra however focused upon kri'at ha-torah as a learning experience. The standard became to study a TOPIC rather than just read sentences. To standardize the notion of TOPIC, Ezra developed a quantitative requirement. Less than 10 pesukim do not constitute a topic; not enough sentences have been read to address an issue. Only through reading 10 pesukim has a topic been studied. The Mishna in Rosh Hashana (33a) cites two positions as to how many pesukim of each of the three Rosh Hashana themes (malkhiyut/royalty, zichronot/remembrance, and shofarot) must be recited in Mussaf. According to Rav Yochanan ben Broka, for each theme 9 pesukim must be read – 3 from each section of Scripture (remember that less than three do not constitute a significant body of text). Yet the Rabanan argue and demand that a tenth pasuk be added within each theme . How might we understand this demand to round of the number to 10? The Rabanan might argue that less than 10 pesukim do not form an integrated topic. Ezra as well demanded 10 pesukim to allow a complete topic to be studied at every public reading.

Having located the source of the ten-pasuk rule and seeing this rule within the context of Ezra's overall intentions we now understand the answer to the Purim reading. Ezra did not demand 10 pesukim from a formal standpoint. In general less than 10 pesukim do not provide a comprehensive topic. In the case of the war with Amalek the Torah chose to limit the discussion to 9 pesukim – 9 pesukim which form a complete 'inyan' or topic. Ezra's demand has effectively been met. Normally we must read ten but when an entire inyan is contained in less than 10, that number is sufficient.

Another answer offered by the Yerushalmi is that since we are reading 'siddura d'yoma' - a topic pertaining to the day of Purim - we do not have to follow the number requirement of Ezra. How might we understand this approach? Just because we are

reading a Purim topic rather than a generic one (as we do on Monday, Thursday and Shabbat mincha), why do we not have to meet a numeric as well?

We might suggest an approach based loosely on another concept which the Rav TZ"l developed in a separate Yahrzeit shiur. He claimed that kri'at ha-torah on Yom Tov is an independent experience and is not integrated into the Monday, Thursday and Shabbat mincha (every three day cycle). In fact the mishna in Megilla (30), after listing the various sections to be read on Yom Tov, cites a separate pasuk as the source for these readings. Their purpose is not just to learn/read in public but rather to celebrate the day by reading its relevant sections from the Torah, to create an environment of 'Yom Shabbaton' or 'Yom Atzeret' - a day not only in which work is suspended but during which we gather to draw closer to Hashem and to study His Torah. Without kri'at ha-torah part of the theme or spirit of the day would be deficient. Evidence to the independence of this Yom Tov cycle of readings is the fact that portions we read on Yom Tov are repeated when the weekly schedule reaches those sections. We don't skip reading parashat Emor (during the week of Emor) simply because we read those sections on Sukkot. Evidently each reading cycle is independent, serving different purposes. If indeed the Yom Tov readings are not part of Moshe's original takana one may wonder whether Ezra updated this system as well and whether his requirements apply only to the Monday-Thursday cycle or to all readings. We might suggest that any Torah reading which is part of the Yom Tov cycle was not addressed by Ezra and is not affected by Ezra's demands. We might be allowed to read less than 10 pesukim during a Yom Tov reading but not during the 'weekday' reading.

Which cycle does the Purim reading belong to however. On the one hand, the mitzva to read parashat Amalek on Purim is listed in the same mishna which details the Yom Tov readings. Alternatively the pasuk cited by that mishna (Megilla 30) as the source of Yom Tov readings seemingly did not include the Purim reading . The mishna cites the pasuk "Vayidaber Moshe et moadei Hashem el Bnei Yisrael" (Moshe relayed the festivals to the Jewish people) - that he also relayed to them the mitzva of reading from the Torah on each festival. Evidently Moshe could have commanded them to read on Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot but not on Purim since the festival did not yet exist. Might the Purim reading be part of the weekly cycle – to read every third day or whenever we gather in public and not part of the Yom Tov cycle which was established prior to the existence of Yom Tov? If indeed Purim is part of the weekly cycle we would have to read 10 pesukim; if it would be part of the Yom Tov cycle we would not be so required. To this question Tosafot responds: by reading a relevant Purim topic and not merely the generic weekly topic we can infer that the Purim

reading is part of the Yom Tov cycle and not in any way adjusted by Ezra's takana. Hence we are not required to read 10 pesukim.

There is a fundamental difference between the two answers discussed above. According to the first answer by reading an integrated topic we are fulfilling the spirit of Ezra's takana even though we haven't read 10 pesukim. According to the second approach we do not fulfill his takana but are not required to, since the Purim kri'a is part of a cycle, which was not addressed by Ezra.

Purim Same'ach

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