

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**  
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TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY  
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Dedicated in memory of Dr. Harry Dweck.  
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## **Torah Reading at Mincha on Fast Days**

[Note: The following shiur is loosely based on ideas expressed by Rav Soloveitchik in a shiur delivered about Kri'at Ha-Torah.]

Though kri'at ha-Torah occupies a prominent position within the liturgy, there are only three occasions on which we read from the Torah during Mincha - Shabbat, Yom Kippur, and general fasts. Quite probably, the afternoon reading during Yom Kippur stems either from its nature as a fast or from its identity as a form of Shabbat (Yom Kippur is referred to as Shabbat Shabbaton). Hence, we can reduce our discussion to two different forms of Torah reading during Mincha – Shabbat and ta'anit. The source for Torah reading during mincha on Shabbat can be located in the gemara Bava Kama (82a): After witnessing the deleterious effects of spending three days without Torah study Moshe installed public reading from the Torah every Monday, Thursday and Shabbat afternoon. What is the source and essence of the mitzva to read from the Torah during Mincha of a ta'anit tzibbur?

To help locate a source, we will begin by assessing the nature of kri'at ha-Torah on fasts in GENERAL. We will then question the unique character of fasts in that the Torah is read during mincha as well.

Possibly the most appropriate starting point is a gemara in Megilla (22a) which questions the number of people who are called to read from the Torah during a ta'anit (both Shacharit and Mincha). The gemara weighs two positions. Instinctively, we should not call more than three since a ta'anit does not obligate an extra korban Mussaf. In the mikdash an extra korban Mussaf was sacrificed on Yom Tov, Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. This extra korban, and the unique kedusha of the day which it reflects, should understandably

mandate an extra 'aliya.' A ta'anit which does not enjoy this extra korban, is ostensibly not more holy than a regular day and this does not warrant an extra aliya.

However, the gemara also considers a possibility that a ta'anit deserves an extra aliya since it has a 'Mussaf tefilla' – an extra tefilla. There exists some debate regarding the identity of this extra tefilla. According to Rashi, it refers to the addition of Aneinu in Shemoneh Esrei (an extra passage added during the berakha of Shema Koleinu petitioning Hashem to accept our prayers). The Ramban in Ta'anit (15) argues and claims that the gemara refers to the tefilla of Ne'ila - an extra tefilla which was added on a ta'anit tzibbur in the afternoon. In the days of the Mikdash, authentic ta'anivot tzibbur were far more common than they are in our day. A true ta'anit tzibbur might include prohibitions which extend beyond merely eating and drinking and requires an extra tefilla during the afternoon. The only contemporary incidence of tefillat Ne'ila occurs on Yom Kippur.

Whether we accept Rashi's view or the Ramban's, the same question emerges: Why should the additional tefilla obligate an extra aliya? An extra korban logically obligates an extra aliya (or several extra aliyot on Yom Tov) since it mirrors a higher level of kedusha on those days. This kedusha is expressed partially through the extra korban and partially through the prohibition of working. Hence, it makes sense to augment the number of aliyot. However, ta'anit tzibbur seemingly has no extra halakhic level of kedusha, does not obligate an extra korban, nor does any prohibition from work apply. Why should the presence of an extra tefilla (or, according to Rashi, an addition to the Tefilla) possibly obligate an extra aliya?

The answer to this question quite possibly lies in understanding a gemara in Megilla (22b). The gemara says that any day which is 'more' than its counterpart receives an additional aliya. For example, the kedusha of Yom Kippur is qualitatively different from that of Yom Tov and hence the number of aliyot on Yom Kippur is increased from 5 to 6. Does this formula apply only to days which enjoy increased kedusha? Does the formula merely suggest that the number of aliyot reflect the hierarchy of days in terms of kedusha? If this were true, then ta'anit tzibbur would be left out in the cold since it has no increased kedusha and is excluded from the hierarchy. Alternatively, is the gemara suggesting that any day which contains ANY special, extended status deserves an extra aliya to reflect that unique experience? Generally, the

special status takes the form of higher kedusha. On fasts, however, no kedusha exists but certainly the day has a unique status which might be reflected by an extra aliya. If this latter interpretation is accepted, we have grounds to add an aliya on a ta'anit. All that remains is to identify that unique character or facet of ta'anit.

## Day of Teshuva

The Rambam in Hilkhhot Ta'anit (1:1-2) highlights a fast day as one of teshuva. The constraint upon eating is intended to focus attention upon our behavior and the resulting crisis. (Keep in mind that, ideally, a ta'anit is called in response to an actual crisis – famine, war, plague etc; our ta'aniyot based upon past tragedies are extensions of those original fast days.) Rav Soloveitchik claimed that not only is the day dedicated to teshuva but the **READING FROM THE TORAH PARTICIPATES** in that experience. Nechemia chapter 9 (verses 1-3) describes a public fast day called immediately upon the return from Bavel addressing the wide-scale intermarriage which had occurred. After confessing their sins, the public gathered for a general recital from the Torah. Evidently, the reading from the Torah forms an integrated part of the ta'anit/teshuva experience.

That kri'at ha-Torah on fasts participates in teshuva can be witnessed in the choice of what is read. Though the mishna in Megilla (30b) lists the berakhot and kelalot (the tokhacha in parashat Bechukotai), the beraita (31a) substitutes "Va-yekhal Moshe" (from parashat Ki Tisa) as the selected reading. Though the tokhacha graphically describes our penchant for errant behavior and the tragedies which will ensue, parashat Ki Tisa actually describes the first teshuva process. It might be more suitable to promote the process of teshuva.

The role of kri'at ha-Torah within teshuva can also be deduced from a fascinating dispute between the Tana'im about the number of aliyot. The gemara cited earlier considers **ADDING** an aliya due to the extra tefilla. There exists a dispute among the Tana'im (22b) even about the minimum number of three aliyot. According to Rav Yosi, the minimum three are called on every ta'anit. According to the Tana Kama, however, three are only called if a ta'anit occurs on Monday or Thursday – since they would be called even if it were not a ta'anit. If, however, a ta'anit occurs on Tuesday only one person is called to read from the Torah. How might we

define kri'at ha-Torah on fasts in a manner which would justify calling LESS than three?

Quite possibly, this position also reflects the unique nature of reading from the Torah on a ta'anit. Standard kri'at ha-Torah is an exercise in learning from the Torah in public. Reading from the Torah on a ta'anit, however, is meant to catalyze the process of teshuva. As such the reading of the haftara may be seen as more effective in this aim and hence more central to the day. Unlike the portion from the Torah which describes our historical sins, and records the first public teshuva, the chapters from Nevi'im actually exhort us to perform teshuva. In fact, one of the basic features of Nevi'im is the constant chastising which we receive from the prophets as they admonish us and urge us to repent. If teshuva is the order of the day and the purpose of reading from Scripture, we might accent the reading of the haftara in place of reading from the Torah. This might be the position of the Tana Kama. Essentially, the reading from the Torah is merely the prelude to the more crucial reading from Nevi'im. Halakha still demands that every reading from Nevi'im be preceded by a reading from the Torah (see the gemara - 23a).

Since the Torah reading is only a preamble, one aliya suffices. Even Rav Yosi who required the standard 3 aliyot might have viewed teshuva as the ultimate goal of our public reading. In addition, he might also have highlighted the reading of the Nevi'im over reading from the Torah. However, the basic structure of Torah reading must be retained even if that reading merely introduces the reading of Nevi'im and three aliyot must be called.

#### SUMMARY:

We have suggested that Torah reading on fasts contributes to the environment of teshuva which constitutes the true purpose of the day. This might be reflected in the section which is read as well as the number of aliyot. Ironically, the same concept - that the reading should promote teshuva - might mandate an extra aliya (given the added role which teshuva plays) or might tolerate a reduction in the number of aliyot (the position of the Tana Kama).

This concept might also be reflected in a famous question raised by R. Akiva Eiger. Can someone who is not fasting (even for legitimate reasons) be called to an aliya on a ta'anit? Why should such a restraint be placed?

Someone who flaunts the community by rejecting the ta'anit certainly does not deserve an aliya but what about someone who has a valid heter (permission not to fast – for example a health issue)? Quite possibly, if we view the reading as part of the teshuva process we might better understand this halakha. The teshuva of a ta'anit is performed through fasting and the reading is integrated into that experience. Though we might not blame someone who is excused from the fast, he might not be best suited to broker the teshuva by representing the tzibbur in reading from the Torah. Had kri'at ha-Torah on fasts been merely incidental to the day, we would not adopt such a limitation.

Recognizing a ta'anit as a day dedicated to teshuva and the kri'at ha-Torah as an integral part of that repentance, we might better understand the extra aliya. If extra aliyot are not merely the product of EXTRA KEDUSHA but also of EXTRA OR EXTENDED EXPERIENCES, fasts (as well as Yom Tov) might enjoy an extra aliya. In general, kri'at haTorah is merely an opportunity to study Torah in a public setting. For this experience three aliyot suffice. However, on fasts the reading from the Torah plays an additional role - it prompts the teshuva process. The gemara itself, when questioning the number of aliyot on a ta'anit, might have been questioning the criteria for adding aliyot. Does only Yom Tov receive extra aliyot due to its ascending levels of kedusha indicated by korban Mussaf? Or does any day with unique experiences and SUPPLEMENTARY or EXTENDED roles for kri'at ha-Torah receive extra aliyot to reflect the transformed experience? If the latter were true, then fasts would easily qualify for extra aliyot. [The fact that today we do not add an aliya on a ta'anit does not disprove our understanding of an extended function of kri'at ha-Torah on ta'anit; it merely implies that this extended role is possibly not enough to require extra aliyot.]

## Mincha

Having designated the unique element of kri'at ha-Torah on ta'anit we might return to our original question: Why does ta'anit warrant reading from the Torah during mincha? In general, we recognize Mincha-time as the critical moments of teshuva during a ta'anit. The pasuk in Ezra (9:5) declares this when Ezra writes "During the Mincha time I arose from my ta'anit, tore my clothing, bowed on my knees, spread my hands upward to Hashem my God." After all, the extra tefilla of Ne'ila can only be recited in the afternoon, further confirming the afternoon as the crucial period for tefilla and teshuva. If kri'at

ha-Torah were truly part of the teshuva process, it should certainly be performed in the afternoon as well.

In fact, according to some positions, kri'at ha-Torah of ta'anit is performed ONLY during Mincha. The gemara in Megilla (30b) describes the schedule for ta'anit "half the day was designated for public moral inventory, the next quarter for reading from the Torah and Nevi'im and the final quarter for pleading for mercy." The impression from the gemara is that kri'at ha-Torah was only performed in the afternoon and not in the morning during Shacharit. Of course, Halakha does not accept this ruling [see, for example, the Lechem Mishneh in his comments to the Rambam Hilkhhot Ta'anit (1:17)]. However, some vestige of this gemara remains in that we only recite a haftara during Mincha and not during Shacharit. If indeed haftara from Nevi'im plays a more crucial role in promoting the teshuva, it might be better recited in the afternoon - the period of the day designated for teshuva.

In conclusion, although we do not accept the opinion of adding an aliya on a ta'anit, the principle which motivated that position still holds true: The day is one devoted to teshuva. Kri'at ha-Torah on ta'anit gives expression to this theme of promoting teshuva. It is thus logical that we read not only the Torah, but the haftara too, at Mincha, which is the height of the teshuva aspect of the day.