

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*

**TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY**

By: Rav Moshe Taragin

[www.vbm-torah.org/archive/metho67/13metho.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/metho67/13metho.htm)

**SHIUR #13: IS MEGILLAT ESTHER PATTERNED AFTER A  
SEFER TORAH?**

The *Megilla* is referred to as being both a *sefer* (book - *Megillat Esther* 9:32) and an *iggeret* (letter - *Megillat Esther* 9:26). The gemara in *masechet Megilla* (19a) notes this paradox when exploring the manner by which the various leaves or plates of a *Megilla* are sown. The first term evokes a parallel to a halakhically prepared scriptural work (as opposed to printed matter), which would require binding by sinews from kosher animals only. The latter term suggests a more informal status, with no particular stipulation for binding materials. The compromise struck by the gemara demands that a *Megilla* contain a minimum of 3 sinews of a kosher animal, since it is considered a *sefer*. However the rest of the *Megilla* may be bound by cloth straps or strings since it is also referred to as an *iggeret* - a name which downplays the comparisons to scriptural documents. There is some debate amongst Rishonim as to the exact placement and function of these 3 sinews from a kosher animal, yet it is clear that a minimum number of sinews is sufficient to capture the flavor of a *sefer*. The remaining pages may be attached with other materials since a *Megilla* is basically a letter (*iggeret*) rather than a formal scriptural scroll.

This is the basic reading of the gemara - one which views a *Megilla* as a generic text with certain scripture-like applications and conditions. In fact, the same gemara demands inks and parchments typically employed for scriptural preparation (*doyo* as ink and *kelaf* or *gevil* as parchment). These laws are derived from a separate source thereby adding to the list of 'scriptural'

requirements for a *Megilla*. Given its inclusion within the canon of Scripture and the requisite *halakhot* of Scripture which apply to *Megillat Esther*, it is only natural that it be prepared in the same fashion that Scripture is prepared. Given its reference as *iggeret*, a slight compromise is struck allowing binding with different materials.

## PARTIAL SEFER TORAH STATUS

The Ramban develops a different principle, endowing *Megillat Esther* with a partial status of *SEFER TORAH*. The Ramban takes the word 'sefer' as an allusion to a *Sefer Torah* and views the *Megilla* as a cross between a *Sefer Torah* and an *iggeret*. The fact that the gemara demands proper inks and parchments merely reinforces his notion that a *Megilla* possesses a partial *Sefer Torah* status. A gemara in *Megilla* (16b) convinces him of this concept: the gemara demands that a *Megilla* text be 'graphed' with engraved outlines known in halakha as *sirtut* (literally engraved indents in the actual parchment indicating the division of lines). The gemara derives this rule from a phrase in *Megillat Esther* (9:30) which refers to the *Megilla* as '*divrei shalom ve-emet*' striking a comparison between a *Megilla* and '*amitah shel Torah*' (the Truth that is Torah). Just as a *Sefer Torah* (according to most Rishonim) must have engraved outlines, similarly must a *Megilla*. This further convinces the Ramban that a *Megilla* possesses a quasi-Torah status.

The Ramban establishes a litmus test to determine whether the *Megilla* should conform to standards of a *Sefer Torah*. Internal or structural elements should be patterned after a *Sefer Torah*: the materials of writing, engraved outlines and manner of binding separate pages should all resemble a *Sefer Torah*. Nevertheless, the actual execution of the mitzvah - READING the *Megilla* - is NOT patterned after a *Sefer Torah*. For example, the reader from the Torah must be standing whereas the reader of a *Megilla* may sit. Similarly, the Ramban believes, a *Megilla* is not read as a scroll but rather as an unfolding text - similar to a letter or any other large informal text. Yet another area of discrepancy between a *Sefer Torah* and *Megilla* is the manner of reading. Whereas Torah text is read carefully, with proper sentence punctuation, an *iggeret* or letter - and consequently a *Megilla* too - is read without concern for punctuation. Even if the

musical cadence ceases before the actual sentence concludes, the reading is valid since this mirrors the informal manner of reading a letter.

In fact, the Ramban cites the Rambam who believes that a *Megilla* parchment does not have to be prepared with *kavana lishmah* (appropriate intent) as a *Sefer Torah's* parchment requires. The *lishmah* demand mandates a level of cognitive intent to install *kedushah* during parchment preparation. As this addresses the type of PARCHMENT and not the actual TEXT, the fidelity to *Sefer Torah* is suspended. The actual text must resemble a *Sefer Torah* but, both the manner of reading, as well as the type of background parchment deviate from the strict standards of a *Sefer Torah* (to capture the role of letters and letter writing in the story of the *Megilla*). The Ramban, himself, disagrees with the Rambam arguing that the parchment may be considered intrinsic to the actual text and would warrant preparation in a manner similar to the preparation of a *Sefer Torah*.

#### FULL SEFER TORAH STATUS

A more extreme stance is adopted by various other Rishonim. They take the analogy to *Sefer Torah* literally and impart the full range of *Sefer Torah* laws to *Megillat Esther*. The most prominent is Rabbenu Tam cited by the Mordechai and the Rif. One consequence of this analogy is the invalidation of a *Megilla* upon which illustrations or *berakhot* were drawn. Many communities had a custom to decorate the *Megilla* by drawing *Megilla*-related scenes on the margins. Similarly, the *berakhot* recited prior and subsequent to the recital, were also reproduced on the *Megilla* scroll. Even though the Rashba allows this practice (further highlighting the informal *iggeret*-like nature of the *Megilla*), the Mordechai - presumably operating under the influence of Rabbenu Tam, prohibited such additions for they would compromise the requisite status of *Sefer Torah* within the *Megilla*.

Another student of Rabbenu Tam - the Shiblei Haleket - asserted the full comparison to *Sefer Torah* and demanded several sub-textual elements necessary in a *Sefer Torah*. For example, the letters of the *Megilla* must be autonomous and unattached to adjacent letters (*mukaf gevil*) while the classic crowns affixed to specific Torah letters must also be incorporated in a *Megilla*.

These textual features assure a full status of *Sefer Torah*! Presumably, according to Rabbenu Tam, the parchment of a *Megilla* would be prepared with *lishmah* intention similar to the parchment of a *Sefer Torah* (see the *Beit Yosef Orach Chayim* 691).

Yet another similarity between *Megilla* and a *Sefer Torah* is developed by the Maharik who requires that a *Megilla* be written by verbally reading a word from an extant *Megilla* and proceeding to transcribe the word. A *Sefer Torah* must be written in this manner and evidently, according to the Maharik, so must a *Megilla* since it resembles a *Sefer Torah* in every detail - intrinsic and extrinsic.