

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY

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Shiur #12: Early Megila Reading for People in Small Villages
Part 2

Having previously inspected the nature of the Megila reading of the villagers (prescheduled to the proximate Monday or Thursday before Purim), we might inquire as to practical ramifications of this issue. Last shiur discussed the more general consequences of this debate. Would the issur of "lo titgodedu" apply if the Megila were read in the same town on different days (possibly a machloket between Rashi and Tosafot)? Similarly, would a subsequent Beit Din be permitted to add these keriyot or would such legislation comprise a repeal of the original decree - possibly the Bavli/Yerushalmi debate. Would there be any practical implications to this question?

The Ran raises an interesting question. Given that they are allowed to read the Megila early, when would these villagers perform the other mitzvot of Purim? The gemara itself partially addresses this issue when it investigates the day on which these villagers performed the various mitzvot of Purim. Indeed, they would distribute matanot le-eyonim on the early day on which they read the Megila. Since the indigent anticipated the day of Purim for the financial relief it would provide, it might be unethical to raise their expectations by reading the Megila and not delivering charity on that very day. By contrast, the gemara demands that the actual seuda and the celebrations of simcha surrounding the meal should only be scheduled on Purim proper (eina ela bizemana). Even though the Megila can be read early, the simcha of Purim must be experienced on the universal day. The gemara does not, however, address the question of mishlo'ach manot and whether they too can be pre-delivered on the early Megila reading day. Do we recognize the early day as a partial alternative Purim (on which the Megila is read, matanot le-eyonim distributed and mishlo'ach manot delivered), or do we view the reading as a special dispensation to villagers to read on a non-Purim date? We might add matanot le-eyonim on that day so as not to exploit poor people. We will not

however, deliver mishlo'ach manot, because we do not recognize that day as Purim – even though the Megila is being read.

The Ran's ultimate conclusion is that mishlo'ach manot are distributed on the universal Purim day because they should be given on the same day as the seuda. This Ran speaks to the nature of mishlo'ach manot and its relationship to seuda as much as it comments upon the nature of the early day of reading. The relationship between mishlo'ach manot and seudat Purim was discussed in a previous Talmudic Methodology article (1995).

Another issue arises from the gemara's discussion (Megila 5a). Rav claims that if the Megila were to be read in its proper time, it can be read even in private. The absolute need for a minyan applies only if the Megila were read in its improper time. Many explanations are supplied for the discrepancy between Megila reading in the proper schedule and one 'shelo bi-zemana.' What Rav does not define, however, is the identity of an improper reading. Many Rishonim suggest that 'shelo bi-zemana' refers to a person who lives in a walled city who reads on the 14th because he might not obtain a Megila to read on his day – the 15th. Others speak about someone who departs on a journey who can conceivably read as early as the 10th. Rashi, however, claims that by discussing 'shelo bi-zemana,' Rav was indeed referring to villagers who read early. Rav viewed this reading as 'shelo bi-zemana,' and therefore demanded ten people. Conceivably, we might argue with Rashi that village reading should be considered 'bi-zemana' since it was a rescheduling of Purim for the villagers. As a regular reading, it should not require ten people in attendance.

A third issue that might be affected by the nature of the early reading would be the question of who actually read on behalf of the villagers. Last shiur discussed the position of Rashi that the early reading occurred in the large cities because the villagers were not able to read on their own. When they gathered in the large cities on Monday or Thursday a ba'al keriya read on their behalf. Tosafot in Yevamot question Rashi's position based upon a Yerushalmi in Megila which does not allow a person living in a walled city to read for 'open-city' people on the 14th. As this is not the day during which he must read the Megila, he cannot read it on behalf of others. Similarly, someone residing in a regular city may not recite the Megila on the 15th for those living in walled cities. How, then, does Rashi allow a city resident (who is only obligated to read Megila on the 14th) to read for the villagers on the

early date? Based upon this objection, Tosafot claim that the villagers knew how to read but were allowed to read for themselves on the day they gathered IN THEIR villages anyway to hear keriyat ha-Torah. How would we defend Rashi's position allowing a city resident to read for villagers even though he is not obligated to read on that day?

We might defend Rashi by suggesting that since this keriya is not an alternate reading of the Megila on a different Purim but rather a reading 'shelo bi-zemana' (to employ Rav's phraseology), in effect it is a day on which NO ONE is OBLIGATED to read the Megila. In general, a person cannot read on a Purim that he is not celebrating; someone who will celebrate the Purim of the 14th cannot read for those celebrating the 15th and vice versa. As these early days for villagers are not considered alternate days of Purim but non-Purim days on which the Megila is read, there is no problem for a person not celebrating Purim that day; in effect no one is experiencing Purim so everyone is on equal footing.

A final issue might be detected in a fascinating Ran. Adopting Rashi's position (that the Megila was read for the villagers in the large cities by a city resident), the Ran is troubled as to how these villagers heard an evening reading. After all, they would gather in the large cities in the morning and would ostensibly have the opportunity to hear a reading at that point. The night before, however, they did not yet reach the large cities and certainly could not read in their small hamlets since they were not expert in reading. The Ran suggests that maybe the villagers were excused from the night reading just as they were allowed to read early. This is a crucial Ran regarding the nature of the night reading of the Megila. His statements suggest that the readings are not equivalent but that the day reading is more significant and the night reading may be waived in certain exigencies. However, the Ran might also be making a statement about the nature of the villagers' reading. If Purim for them were merely rescheduled we might not expand this decree to waive the night reading. Why should a rescheduling also warrant waiving half of the mitzva? Alternatively, if the villagers were essentially allowed to read on a non-Purim day – in light of their inability to read for themselves – then this takana effectively is a 'kula' a leniency which could conceivably be expanded with greater leniency - not reading at night at all. The Ran's willingness to expand the villager decree and waive their night reading might indicate that he views the move not as a rescheduling but rather as a leniency allowing them to read on non-Purim.