



# One Reader or Two

אִז יִבְדִּיל מֹשֶׁה

*Then Moshe set aside*

(4:41)

Q

There was a *talmid chacham* with a beautiful voice who would read the *Megillah* masterfully every year for his shul. One year he had heart surgery, and he did not have the strength to read the entire *Megillah*. To forfeit his post of reading the *Megillah* would cause him great emotional pain. Should he be allowed to make the *berachos* on the *Megillah*, read one or two chapters, and then step aside and let someone else finish the job, or is it better to find a replacement who could read the *Megillah* in its entirety?

A

The *Rema*<sup>22</sup> states that it is fitting that the same person blow all of the *tekiyos* on Rosh Hashanah, as one who starts a mitzvah is instructed to finish it. The *Mishnah Berurah* comments that in shuls where the *minhag* is to divide the *tekiyos* among several people, they may keep their *minhag*, because “the Jews are holy, and have great love for the mitzvot and therefore we will not take away the opportunity from those who wish to take part in the mitzvah.” Maybe we could compare *Megillah* to *shofar* and allow the *Megillah* to be read by two people in order not to deprive the *talmid chacham* of his mitzvah.

Nevertheless, perhaps someone else should read the entire *Megillah* from beginning to end, for the *Mishnah Berurah* writes, “If the reader lost his voice in the middle of the *Megillah*, the opinion of the *poskim* is that his replacement need not start the *Megillah*

22. *Orach Chaim* 585:4.

from the beginning, as repeating the *Megillah* would be difficult for the congregation.”<sup>23</sup>

The *Sha'arei Teshuvah* adds that if the first reader had read only a few *pesukim*, it is not so burdensome to begin again. Also, if the congregation is agreeable to hear the *Megillah* again from its beginning, and Purim is Motza'ei Shabbos, it is better to read it again. If Purim is on a different day of the week, and the congregation is fasting due to Taanis Esther, they may be lenient.

We learn from this that it is desirable that the *Megillah* be read by one person. However, perhaps since we do allow the *Megillah* to be read by more than one person in a case where repeating the *Megillah* would be difficult for the congregation, maybe the pain of a sick *talmid chacham* is also sufficient reason to allow multiple readers. וצ"ע.

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## It's Not Easy Being Green

וְלֹא תִתְאַוֶּה בֵּית רֵעֶךָ

*You shall not desire your fellow's house*

(5:18)

Q

Pinchas has a wonderful study partner in yeshivah and Pinchas would like to learn with him during their intercession as well. For some reason, his partner can learn with him only in his home. The problem is that the home in question is a luxuriously decorated

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23. See *Sha'arei Teshuvah*.

mansion and every time that Pinchas is there, he is overcome with feelings of jealousy and desire. Does the learning justify putting himself into a situation that severely tests his character?

*A*

Although the final commandment of the *Aseres HaDibros, Lo Sachmod*, is not violated unless one actually attempts to acquire his friend's objects,<sup>24</sup> jealousy and desire are certainly negative attributes. Nevertheless, this is not a valid reason to prevent them from learning together. If one would have to be concerned about such issues, one could not walk to shul lest he see something improper. Alternatively, how could one study with a partner at all, lest their conversation stray to forbidden speech?

The Chofetz Chaim<sup>25</sup> explains a difficult Gemara to shed light on this issue. In *Maseches Chullin*<sup>26</sup> it states: Which profession should one pursue in this world? He should make himself as if he were a mute. The Gemara continues: One might think that one should make himself a mute when it comes to Torah study as well. (The Gemara concludes that, on the contrary, we *are* to speak in Torah.)

How could the Gemara entertain such a possibility? Is the Gemara suggesting that a person should never learn Torah? Rather, explains the Chofetz Chaim, it refers to someone who, by learning with a partner, will have to face the test of speaking forbidden speech. And even so, the Gemara concludes that one should still learn Torah with his partner and the Torah will protect him from sin.

So too, in our case, Pinchas should learn with the *chavrusa*. Beforehand, he should learn *mussar* to remind him of the words of our Sages that teach that running after materialism is the destruction of man, and he should *daven* to Hashem that he be saved from being tested.

24. See *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 359:1.

25. *Shemiras HaLashon, Sha'ar HaTevunah*.

26. 89a.

In a similar vein, the *sefer Lev Chaim*<sup>27</sup> says that even if speaking words of Torah in public may cause the speaker to think highly of himself and become haughty, that should not prevent him from speaking. He should still speak, while trying to control himself to do so for the sake of the Torah and not to glorify himself.

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## Guard Your Tongue

וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם

*And you shall speak of them*

(6:7)

Q

The Gemara *in Yoma*<sup>28</sup> states in the name of Rava, “One who engages in idle speech is in violation of a positive commandment, as it says, *Vedibarta bam*, ‘and you shall speak about them (words of Torah).’” “Them” implies that one may not indulge in idle speech.

The *Sfas Emes* asks: Why did Rava find it necessary to infer the prohibition of idle speech from a *pasuk*? If a person has a constant mitzvah to speak words of Torah, any idle speech is automatically in conflict with the positive mitzvah to study Torah. Even without the inference, from the *pasuk* itself it is implicit that one may not speak idle words, as doing so does not allow him to learn.

A

Perhaps Rava’s inference is relevant in a situation where one may not learn Torah; for example, in an unclean place, if one is in mourning, or one is resting for his

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27. Vol. III, 102.

28. 19b.

health and needs to take a leave from Torah study. Even though one may not study Torah, one should still not engage in idle speech.

One of the 48 qualities necessary to acquire Torah is minimizing conversation.<sup>29</sup> Some commentaries<sup>30</sup> explain that this actually means to engage (minimally) in conversation in order to rest the brain. Even under such circumstances, one should speak about things that have purpose, and are not idle.<sup>31</sup>

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## True Chinuch

וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבָנֵיךָ

*You shall teach them thoroughly to your children*

(6:7)



**Shimon sat down in shul** to learn with his son on Shabbos afternoon. Someone came into the shul from the adjoining room, where there was a *minyan* for *Minchah*. He told Shimon that they had already taken out the *Sefer Torah*, and that they needed someone to read for them from the Torah. Shimon was unsure if he should oblige. On the one hand, he was already involved in a mitzvah, and was exempt from engaging in another mitzvah. On the other hand, there was a question of embarrassing the Torah, as well as *tircha d'tzibura* (for the *minyan* would have to wait for someone to read for them). Should he

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29. See *Pirkei Avos* 6:6.

30. See *Orchos Yosher*, Chapter 2, in the name of the Vilna Gaon.

31. Editor's Note: This question is also addressed in *Sefer Chofetz Chaim* (Introduction, *Mitzvos Asei*, *Be'er Mayim Chaim* 12). He explains that the Gemara seeks to infer that when one speaks idle talk, he not only violates the obligation to study Torah during that time, but is also actively violating a commandment against idle speech.

continue learning, or go read the Torah on behalf of the *minyán*?

A

The *Rambam*<sup>32</sup> rules that if one has the opportunity to do a mitzvah that cannot be done by someone else, he should interrupt his learning to go do the mitzvah.

In our case, since reading from the Torah is also *Talmud Torah*, and additionally involves doing kindness for the congregation, it therefore has priority to Shimon's own learning. However, since Shimon is learning with his son, he is also involved in the mitzvah of teaching one's child.<sup>33</sup> In addition, during the time that it takes him to walk to the adjoining room, his son will not be learning at all. Perhaps under such circumstances, Shimon should decline.

The Gemara in *Berachos*<sup>34</sup> tells the story of R' Eliezer who came to shul and found that they were missing one person for the *minyán*. R' Eliezer freed his *eved Cena'ani* to allow him to join the *minyán*. Although normally one is not allowed to free an *eved Cena'ani*, the Gemara explains that for the sake of a mitzvah involving many people it is permitted. In our case as well, Torah reading is a mitzvah involving many people, and perhaps it has priority over Shimon's personal mitzvah.

In truth, there is a difference. Freeing an *eved Cena'ani* is a negation of a positive command.<sup>35</sup> The Gemara permits doing so to allow many people to perform a mitzvah. However, when one is already involved in a mitzvah, and is thereby exempt from other mitzvos, there is no difference whether the second mitzvah is more important or not, since he is exempt anyway.

Although the *Mishnah Berurah*<sup>36</sup> writes that if a *Sefer Torah* is already on the table, and there is no one else who can read for

32. *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:4.

33. *Kiddushin* 29b.

34. 47b.

35. *Berachos* 47b.

36. 66 § 26.

the congregation, one may even interrupt saying the *Shema*, that rule would not apply here, since we find that one may interrupt the *Shema* for other reasons as well, such as answering *Kaddish* or *Kedushah*, and there is no exemption of being involved in the mitzvah of *Shema*.

Nevertheless, Shimon should interrupt his learning with his son to go read the Torah. The mitzvah of teaching one's son is not only the written word, but to teach proper behavior in Torah and mitzvos. When Shimon is asked to read, he can teach his son the importance of giving honor to the Torah. Although he would love to continue their learning, now he needs to go read for the *minyan*, due to the great importance of the mitzvah. That itself will be a lesson to his son to have the proper appreciation for a mitzvah.

