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'Iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens the wit of their friend.'

- Proverbs 27:17



Introduction

Welcome to the third week of the Alyth Chavruta Project! This week, we come to the second chapter of Mishnah Megillah, and we return to a discussion of the Megillah. Having covered when we read the Megillah at the beginning of chapter 1, we now move on to the question of how the Megillah is read, how it should be written, and who may read it. In the second half of the chapter we once again see a divergence away from the Megillah and instead towards a discussion of when a number of other ritual actions can take place. Again, we might pause to consider the oral nature of these texts.

The text itself can be found here in both Hebrew only and Hebrew with translation. For those with some knowledge of Hebrew, we encourage you to attempt your own translation, but there is absolutely no expectation that you engage with the Hebrew. There is also no requirement to get to the end of the pack – we have provided more than you can get through in an hour of study, and we encourage you to focus on understanding a small amount rather than becoming confused by a greater amount. Once again, this week we have printed some of the Mishnah in a different colour so that you can skip over it if you want to and focus just on what is printed in black.

Further resources and advice on how to get the most out of chavruta can be found in our [FAQs](#). We look forward to seeing you on Thursday to share our learning with each other.

Blessing for Study

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Blessed are You, our Living God, Sovereign of the universe, whose commandments make us holy, and who commands us to devote ourselves to the study of Torah.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu la-asok b'divrey Torah.

מסכת מגילה פרק ב

א הקורא את המגלה למפרע, לא יצא. קראה על פה, קראה תרגום, בכל לשון, לא יצא. אבל קורין אותה ללועזות בלעז. והלועז ששמע אשורית, יצא:

ב קראה סרוגין, ומתנמנם, יצא. היה כותבה, דורשה, ומגיהה, אם פון לבו, יצא. ואם לאו, לא יצא. היתה כתובה בסם, ובסקרא, ובקומוס ובקנקנתום, על הנגר ועל הדפתרא, לא יצא, עד שתהא כתובה אשורית על הספר ובדיו:

ג בן עיר שהלך לכרך וכן פרוך שהלך לעיר, אם עתיד לחזור למקומו, קורא כמקומו. ואם לאו, קורא עמקו. ומהיכן קורא אדם את המגלה ויוצא בה ידי חובתו, רבי מאיר אומר, כלה, רבי יהודה אומר, מאיש יהודי. רבי יוסי אומר, מאחר הדברים האלה:

ד הפל פשרין לקרות את המגלה, חוץ מחרש, שוטה, וקטן. רבי יהודה מכשיר בקטן. אין קורין את המגלה, ולא מלין, ולא טובלין ולא מזין, וכן שומרת יום כנגד יום לא תטבול, עד שתגן החמה. וכלן שעשו משעלה עמוד השחר, כשר:

ה כל היום כשר לקריאת המגלה, ולקריאת ההלל, ולתקיעת שופר, ולנטילת לולב, ולתפלת המוספין, ולמוספין, ולודוי הפרים, ולודוי המעשר, ולודוי יום הכפורים, לסמיכה, לשחיטה, לתנופה, להגשה, לקמיצה ולהקטרה, למליקה, ולקבלה, ולהזיה, ולהשקית סוטה, ולצריפת העגלה, ולטהרת המצרע:

ו כל הלילה כשר לקצירת העמר ולהקטר חלבים ואברים. זה הפלל, דבר שמצותו ביום, כשר כל היום. דבר שמצותו בלילה, כשר כל הלילה:



2:1

הַקּוֹרֵא אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה לְמַפְרֵעַ, לֹא יֵצֵא. קִרְאָהּ עַל פִּיָּהּ, קִרְאָהּ תְּרַגְמוּם, בְּכָל לְשׁוֹן, לֹא יֵצֵא.

אֲבָל קוֹרֵין אוֹתָהּ לְלוֹעֲזוֹת בְּלֵעָז. וְהַלּוֹעֵז שִׁשְׁמַע אַשּׁוּרִית, יֵצֵא:

One who reads the Megillah backwards, they have not fulfilled the obligation. One who read it by heart or a translation in any language, they have not fulfilled the obligation.

But those who read it to non-Hebrew speakers in non-Hebrew language, and non-Hebrew speakers who hear [the Megillah] in *Ashurit*,¹ they have fulfilled the obligation.

Questions

- Why do you think there was a need for a law against reading the Megillah backwards?
- Why do you think that reading the Megillah from memory does not fulfil the obligation?

¹ *Ashurit* (literally meaning 'Assyrian') refers to the Aramaic alphabet in which Hebrew is written. It therefore refers to Hebrew as the preferred language in which the Megillah should be read.

קְרָאָה סְרוּגִין, וּמְתַנְמָנִים, יֵצֵא.

הִיָּה כּוֹתֵבָהּ, דּוֹרְשָׁהּ, וּמְגִיָּהָהּ, אִם כִּיּוֹן לְבוֹ, יֵצֵא. וְאִם לֹא, לֹא יֵצֵא.

הִיָּתָה כְּתוּבָה בְּסֵם, וּבִסְקָרָא, וּבְקוּמוֹס וּבְקִנְקִנְתוֹם, עַל הַנִּיָּר וְעַל הַדְּפִתְרָא, לֹא יֵצֵא,
עַד שֶׁתְּהֵא כְּתוּבָה אֲשׁוּרִית עַל הַסֶּפֶר וּבְדִיו:

If one read it intermittently, or drowsily, they have fulfilled the obligation.

If one was writing it, interpreting it, or correcting it, if they intended in their heart [to read it], they have fulfilled the obligation. But if not, they have not fulfilled the obligation.

If it was written in paint, or red paint, or resin, or vitriol, on paper or on rough parchment, they have not fulfilled their obligation, unless it is written in *Ashurit* on parchment and in ink.

Question

- Why do you think the authors of the Mishnah believed there was a need for these laws?

It may be useful to consult the following supplementary text: Mishnah Rosh Hashannah 3:7



2:3

בְּן עִיר שֶׁהִלֵּךְ לְכַרְךָ וּבֶן כְּרֶךְ שֶׁהִלֵּךְ לְעִיר, אִם עָתִיד לְחַזֹּר לְמִקְוֹמוֹ, קוֹרֵא כְּמִקְוֹמוֹ.
וְאִם לֹא, קוֹרֵא עִמָּהֶן.

וּמֵהֵיכָן קוֹרֵא אָדָם אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה וְיוֹצֵא בָּהּ יָדָיו חוֹבְתוֹ, רַבִּי מֵאִיר אוֹמֵר, כְּלָהּ, רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר, מֵאִישׁ יְהוּדִי. רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר, מֵאַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:

A resident of a city who goes to a fortified city,² or a resident of a fortified city who goes to a city, if in the future they will return to their place [of residence], they read according to their place [of residence]. And if not, they read with them.

And from where should one read the Megillah and [thereby] fulfil their obligation? Rabbi Meir³ says, 'The whole of it!' Rabbi Yehudah⁴ says, 'From "There was a certain Jew ..." (Esther 2:5).' Rabbi Yosef⁵ says, 'From "After these things ..." (Esther 3:1).'

Questions

- Why do you think there was a need for the law in the first part of this mishnah about the residents of cities and fortified cities?
- Take a look at the book of Esther and see if you can work out why the different rabbis thought it was acceptable to start from different places in the Torah. If you do not have your own copy of the Tanach, [click here to find the book of Esther on Sefaria](#). Also have a look at the supplementary text from the Jerusalem Talmud on page 8, which adds yet another opinion from Rabbi Shimon.

It may be useful to consult the following supplementary text: Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 2:4

² I.e. a city with walls from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun.

³ Rabbi Meir (2nd century CE) was a student of the famous Rabbi Akiva, and is traditionally believed to be the author of many of the anonymous laws collected in the Mishnah.

⁴ Rabbi Yehudah (bar Ilai) (2nd century CE) is one of the most frequently cited sages in the Mishnah. He was the most prominent student of Rabbi Akiva.

⁵ Rabbi Yosef (ben Chalafta) lived and taught in Sepphoris in the Land of Israel in the 2nd century CE at the same time as both Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah.

הַפֶּל כְּשֵׁרִין לְקִרְוֹת אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה, חוּץ מִחֶרֶשׁ, שׁוֹטֵה, וְקֶטָן. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה מְכַשֵּׁיר בְּקֶטָן.
 אֵין קוֹרִין אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה, וְלֹא מְלִין, וְלֹא טוֹבְלִין וְלֹא מְזִין, וְכֵן שׁוֹמְרֵת יוֹם כְּנֶגֶד יוֹם
 לֹא תִטְבּוֹל, עַד שֶׁתִּמְנָץ הַחֲמָה. וְכֵלֶן שֶׁעָשׂוּ מִשְׁעָלָה עֲמוּד הַשַּׁחַר, כְּשֵׁר:

Everyone is *kasher*⁶ to read the Megillah, except for a deaf person,⁷ a *shoteh*⁸ and a minor. Rabbi Yehudah⁹ declares the minor *kasher*.

We do not read the Megillah, and do not circumcise, and do not immerse [in a *mikveh*], and do not sprinkle (and so for her who observes a day corresponding to the day [of uncleanness]) do not bathe, until the sun shines. But all of them that they do from the rising of the dawn are *kasher*.

Questions

- Why (according to this mishnah) is a deaf person not *kasher* to read the Megillah?
- According to this mishnah, are women permitted to read the Megillah?
- Look at the supplementary texts here (Mishnah Rosh Hashannah and Mishnah Kiddushin on page 9). Does the view of women reading the Megillah fit with these other texts, which are also from the Mishnah?

It may be useful to consult the supplementary texts on pages 9-11.

⁶ *Kasher*, literally meaning 'clean' or 'fit', indicates that something is appropriate for use or consumption. In this case, it means that someone is qualified to engage in the ritual action of reading the Megillah in public.

⁷ The word *cheresh* usually refers to a deaf-mute (someone who can neither hear nor speak). However, here it makes more sense to translate it as 'deaf person', since a deaf-mute would not be able to read the Megillah to begin with. Later in this text pack, on page 9, we have kept the translation of deaf-mute. Do you think there is an implied difference between the use of the word *cheresh* in the two texts?

⁸ A *shoteh* is someone who is intellectually incapable of understanding religious obligations. For more discussion, see the extracts from the Mishneh Torah on page 10.

⁹ See note on Rabbi Yehudah above.



2:5

כָּל הַיּוֹם כָּשֶׁר לְקִרְיַאת הַמִּגִּלָּה, וְלְקִרְיַאת הַהֶלֶל, וְלִתְקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר, וְלִנְטִילַת לוּלָב, וְלִתְפִלַּת הַמוֹסָפִין, וְלַמּוֹסָפִין, וְלוֹדוּי הַפָּרִים, וְלוֹדוּי הַמַּעֲשֶׂר, וְלוֹדוּי יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים, לְסַמֵּיכָה, לְשַׁחֲיטָה, לְתַנוּפָּה, לְהַגָּשָׁה, לְקַמִּיצָה וּלְהַקְטִירָה, לְמִלִּיקָה, וּלְקַבְלָה, וּלְהַזִּיחָה, וּלְהַשְׁקִית סוּטָה, וְלַעֲרִיפַת הָעֵגְלָה, וּלְטַהֲרַת הַמְצָרָע:

The whole day is *kasher* for the reading of the Megillah, and for the reading of the Hallel, and for the sounding of the Shofar, and for the shaking of the Lulav, and for praying of Musaf, and for the Musaf sacrifice, and for the confession of the bullock offering, and for the confession of the tithe, and for the confession of Yom Kippur, for the laying of hands, for slaughtering, for waving, for bringing, for taking a handful, for burning, for nipping the neck, and for receiving [the blood] and sprinkling [it], and for giving the bitter waters to the *sotah*, and for breaking the neck of the heifer, and for the purification of the *metzora*.

2:6

כָּל הַלַּיְלָה כָּשֶׁר לְקִצִּירַת הָעֹמֶר וּלְהַקְטִיר חֲלָבִים וְאֲבָרִים.

זֶה הַכֹּלֵל, דְּבַר שְׂמֵצוֹתוֹ בַּיּוֹם, כָּשֶׁר כָּל הַיּוֹם. דְּבַר שְׂמֵצוֹתוֹ בַּלַּיְלָה, כָּשֶׁר כָּל הַלַּיְלָה:

The whole night is *kasher* for harvesting the *omer* and for the burning of the fats and the limbs.

This is the general rule: A thing that is commanded [to be done] in the day is *kasher* all day; a thing that is commanded [to be done] at night is *kasher* all night.

Mishnah Rosh Hashannah 3:7

מִי שֶׁהִיָּה עוֹבֵר אַחֲרֵי בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת, אוֹ שֶׁהִיָּה בֵּיתוֹ סָמוּךְ לְבֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת, וְשָׁמַע קוֹל שׁוֹפָר אוֹ קוֹל מְגִלָּה, אִם פָּנָן לְבוֹ, יֵצֵא, וְאִם לֹא, לֹא יֵצֵא.

One who was passing the synagogue, or whose house is next to the synagogue, who heard the sound of the shofar or the sound of the Megillah, if they intended in their heart [to hear it], they have fulfilled the obligation, and if not, they have not fulfilled the obligation.

Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 2:4 (73b)

תני רבי שמעון בן יוחי אומר מבלילה ההוא ממקום שהיתה מפלתו של המן משם היתה גדולתו של מרדכי

רבי בא רב ירמיה בשם רב הלכה כרבי מאיר דהוא אמר כולה

They taught [in a *Baraita*]: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai¹⁰ says, ‘From “On that night ...” (Esther 6:1) – from the point at which the fall of Haman [began], and it was from there that they rise of Mordechai [began].’

Rabbi Ba¹¹ [said in the name of] Rav Yirmiyah¹² in the name of Rav,¹³ ‘The *halachah* follows Rabbi Meir, who said [that the obligation is to read] the whole of it.’

¹⁰ Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai lived in the Land of Israel in the 2nd century. He is traditionally believed to be the author of the *Zohar* (though in reality it was not written until 1000 years later).

¹¹ Rabbi Ba (full name Rabbi Abba bar Zabdai) lived in the Land of Israel in the 3rd century CE, and also spent some time in Babylonia.

¹² Rav Yirmiyah (bar Abba) lived in the Land of Israel in the 3rd century CE, and also spent some time in the Land of Israel. He was student of Rav (see below).

¹³ Rav (full name Abba Aricha) went from Babylonia to the Land of Israel to study under Rabbi (see below) in the early 3rd century CE. When he returned, he is traditionally believed to have founded the first rabbinic academy in Babylonia.



Mishnah Berachot 2:3

הקורא את שמע ולא השמיע לאזנו, יצא. רבי יוסי אומר, לא יצא.

If one read the Shema but did not hear it with their ears, they have fulfilled the obligation. Rabbi Yosei¹⁴ says, 'They have not fulfilled the obligation.'

Mishnah Rosh Hashannah 3:8

חרש, שוטה, וקטן, אין מוציאין את הרבים ידי חובתן. זה הכלל, כל שאינו מחיב בדבר, אינו מוציא את הרבים ידי חובתן:

A deaf-mute, a *shoteh*, and a minor cannot cause the congregation to fulfil their religious duty. This is the general rule: Anyone who is not obligated in the thing, they are do not cause the congregation to fulfil their obligation.

Mishnah Kiddushin 1:7

כל מצות הבן על האב, אנשים חייבין ונשים פטורות. וכל מצות האב על הבן, אחר אנשים ואחר נשים חייבין. וכל מצות עשה שהזמן גרמה, אנשים חייבין ונשים פטורות. וכל מצות עשה שלא הזמן גרמה, אחר אנשים ואחר נשים חייבין. וכל מצות לא תעשה, בין שהזמן גרמה בין שלא הזמן גרמה, אחר אנשים ואחר נשים חייבין, חוץ מבל תשחית ובל תקיף ובל תטמא למתים:

All obligations of the son upon the father, men are obligated, but women are exempt. All obligations of the father upon the son, both men and women are obligated. All positive commandments that are time-bound, men are obligated and women are exempt. All positive commandments that are not time-bound, both men and women are obligated. All negative commandments, whether time-bound or not time-bound, both men and women are obligated, excepting: You shall not round [the corners of your heads], nor shall you mar [the corner of thy beard],¹⁵ and You shall not defile himself for the dead.¹⁶

¹⁴ See note on Rabbi Yosei above.

¹⁵ See Leviticus 19:27

¹⁶ See Leviticus 21:1

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Edut 9

עשרה מיני פסלות הם כל מי שנמצא בו אחד מהן הרי הוא פסול לעדות ואלו הן: הנשים והעבדים והקטנים והשוטים והחרשים והסומים והרשעים והבזויין והקרובין והנוגעין בעדותן הרי אלו עשרה:

Halachah 1

There are ten categories of disqualifications. Any person belonging to one of them is disqualified from acting as a witness. They are: Women; servants; minors; *shotim*; deaf-mutes; the blind; the wicked; debased individuals; relatives; people who have an interest in the testimony. A total of ten.

השוטה פסול לעדות מן התורה לפי שאינו בן מצות ולא שוטה שהוא מהלך ערום ומשבר כלים וזורק אבנים בלבד אלא כל מי שנטרפה דעתו ונמצאת דעתו משובשת תמיד בדבר מן הדברים אף על פי שהוא מדבר ושואל כענין בשאר דברים הרי זה פסול ובכלל שוטים יחשב

Halachah 9

A *shoteh* is disqualified as a witness according to Torah Law, because he is not obligated in the mitzvot. This applies not only to a *shoteh* who goes around naked, destroys utensils, and throws stones, but to anyone whose mind is disturbed and continually confused when it comes to certain matters – even if he can speak and ask questions regarding other things. Such a person is disqualified and is placed in the category of unstable people.

הפתאים ביותר שאין מכירין דברים שסותרין זה את זה ולא יבינו עניני הדבר כדרך שמבינין שאר עם הארץ וכן המבוהלים והנחפזים בדעתם והמשתגעים ביותר הרי אלו בכלל השוטים ודבר זה לפי (מה) שיראה הדיין שאי אפשר לכוין הדעת בכתב:

Halachah 10

People who are very simple-minded, who do not recognise matters that contradict each other and who are incapable of understanding an idea as it would be understood by people at large; and those who are very unsettled, tumultuous, deranged. These are included in the category of *shotim*. This matter is dependent on the judgment of the judge. It is impossible to describe someone's mental state in a text.



Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 20a

ר' יהודה מכשיר בקטן:

(דתניא) א"ר יהודה קטן הייתי וקריתיה למעלה מרבי טרפון וזקנים בלוד

אמרו לו אין מביאין ראיה מן הקטן

'Rabbi Yehudah declares the minor *kasher*.'

(It is taught in a *baraita*.) Rabbi Yehudah said, 'I was a minor and I read it [i.e. the Megillah] before Rabbi Tarfon¹⁷ and the elders in Lod.'

They said to him, 'We do not bring proof from a minor.'

תניא אמר רבי קטן הייתי וקריתיה למעלה מרבי יהודה

אמרו לו אין מביאין ראיה מן המתיר

It was taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi¹⁸ said, 'I was a minor and I read it [i.e. the Megillah] before Rabbi Yehudah.

They said to him, 'We do not bring proof from one who permitted.'

¹⁷ Rabbi Tarfon (1st/2nd century CE) came from Lod, and was one of the contemporaries of the famous Rabbi Akiva, and teacher of Rabbi Yehudah.

¹⁸ Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (2nd Century CE), known usually as 'Rabbi' was the leader of the Jewish people (HaNasi means 'the prince') in the Land of Israel at the end of the 2nd century CE. He is traditionally believed to be the one who collated and edited the Mishnah. He was a student of Rabbi Yehudah, who was the student of Rabbi Tarfon.

A GUIDE TO THE TEXTS

The Mishnah is a Jewish legal code from approximately 200 CE, containing legal rulings and disputes of the sages which are written down there for the first time. It is the first part of what is called the 'Oral Law', which for traditional Jews is just as authoritative as the Written Law (the Tanach). The Mishnah is divided into six 'orders', and each order is divided into tractates. Mishnah Megillah is from *Seder Mo'ed*, which deals with the laws of the appointed times (i.e. festivals).

The **Jerusalem Talmud** (also known as the Palestinian Talmud or *Yerushalmi*) is essentially a commentary on the Mishnah from the Land of Israel, containing the discussions of rabbis from the period just after the Mishnah was finished (around 200 CE), until 414 CE when Jewish autonomy in the Land of Israel finally came to an end.

The **Babylonian Talmud** (also known simply as The Talmud or *Bavli*) is another commentary on the Mishnah but from Babylonia, containing the discussions of rabbis from the period just after the Mishnah was finished (around 200 CE), until it was finally redacted in approximately 700 CE.

There is much material that is shared by the two Talmuds, often in altered form. However, the Babylonian Talmud is much longer and is considered more authoritative when it comes to Jewish law.

Moshe ben Maimon (also known as **Moses Maimonides** or **the Rambam**) was a Jewish scholar and philosopher, was born in Cordoba, Spain in 1138 and died in Cairo, Egypt in 1204. As a young man he wrote an influential commentary on the Mishnah. In maturity he composed one of the first codes of Jewish law, called the **Mishneh Torah**, as well as a philosophical treatise called *A Guide of the Perplexed*.



Notes