



Alyth Chavruta Project

Mishnah Megillah: Week 6



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

- Proverbs 27:17



Introduction

Welcome to the sixth week of the Alyth Chavruta Project! This week, we come to the fourth and final chapter of Mishnah Megillah. The chapter begins by considering the practicalities of Megillah reading, before moving on to the reading of the Torah, how many should read it, and its blessings. The Mishnah then turns to those things (not just scriptural readings) that require a minyan (the presence of ten), and finally to the question of the minimum number of verses that can be read from the Torah or from the prophets.

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 blue 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

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי
תוֹרָה.

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 ד

א הקורא את המגלה עומד ויושב, קראה אחד, קראה שנים, יצאו. מקום שנהגו לברך, יברך. ושלא לברך, לא יברך. בשני ובחמישי ובשבת במנחה, קורין שלשה. אין פותחין ואין מוסיפין עליהן, ואין מפטירין בנביא. הפותח והחותם בתורה, מברך לפניו ולאחריה:

ב בראשי חדרים ובחלו של מועד, קורין ארבעה. אין פותחין מהן ואין מוסיפין עליהן, ואין מפטירין בנביא. הפותח והחותם בתורה, מברך לפניו ולאחריה. זה הכלל, כל שיש בו מוסף ואינו יום טוב, קורין ארבעה. ביום טוב, חמשה. ביום הפורים, ששה. בשבת, שבעה. אין פותחין מהן, אבל מוסיפין עליהן, ומפטירין בנביא. הפותח והחותם בתורה, מברך לפניו ולאחריה:

ג אין פורסין את שמע, ואין עוברין לפני התבה, ואין נושאים את פניהם, ואין קורין בתורה, ואין מפטירין בנביא, ואין עושין מעמד ומושב, ואין אומרים ברפת אבלים ותנחומי אבלים וברפת חתנים, ואין מזמנין בשם, פחות מעשרה. ובקרקעות, תשעה וכהן. ואדם, פיצא בהן:

ד הקורא בתורה לא יפחות משלשה פסוקים. לא יקרא למתרגמן יותר מפסוק אחד, ובנביא שלשה. היו שלשתן שלש פרשיות, קורין אחד אחד. מדלגין בנביא ואין מדלגין בתורה. ועד כמה הוא מדלג, עד כדי שלא יפסוק התרגמן:



4:1

הקורא את המגילה עומד ויושב, קראתה אחד, קראוה שנים, יצאו.

מקום שנהגו לברך, יברך. ושלל לברך, לא יברך.

בשני ובחמישי ובשבת במנחה, קורין שלשה. אין פוחתין ואין מוסיפין עליהן, ואין מפטירין בנביא. הפותח והחותם בתורה, מברך לפנייה ולאחרייה:

The one who reads the Megillah may stand or sit. If one person reads it or two people read it, they [i.e. the hearers] have fulfilled their obligation.

[In] a place in which it is customary to say a blessing, one should bless; and [in a place in which it is] not [customary] to bless, one should not bless.

On Monday and Thursday, and on Shabbat afternoon, three people read – not more, and not fewer. And we do not conclude with a *haftarah* from the prophets. The one who opens, and the one who closes the Torah [reading], bless before and after.

Questions

- This mishnah suggests that it is a matter of custom whether to recite blessings before and after reading from the Megillah. Why do you think it is a matter of custom whether to bless the reading of the Megillah, unlike in the case of reading from the Torah?
- On pages 8-9 you can find what these blessings were in Talmudic times and in our Reform prayer book. What are the differences, and why do think they are different?
- Consider the final sentence of this mishnah. Is this how we do things now? It may be useful to look at the commentary from the Babylonian Talmud on page 10.

בְּרֵאשֵׁי חֳדָשִׁים וּבְחֵלוֹ שֶׁל מוֹעֵד, קוֹרִין אַרְבָּעָה. אֵין פּוֹחֲתִין מֵהֶן וְאֵין מוֹסִיפִין עֲלֵיהֶן, וְאֵין מַפְטִירִין בְּנִבְיָא. הַפּוֹתֵחַ וְהַחוֹתֵם בַּתּוֹרָה, מְבָרֵךְ לְפָנֶיהָ וְלְאַחֲרֶיהָ.

זֶה הַכֶּלֶל, כֹּל שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ מוֹסָף וְאֵינוֹ יוֹם טוֹב, קוֹרִין אַרְבָּעָה. בְּיוֹם טוֹב, חֲמִשָּׁה. בְּיוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים, שֵׁשָׁה. בְּשַׁבָּת, שִׁבְעָה. אֵין פּוֹחֲתִין מֵהֶן, אֲבָל מוֹסִיפִין עֲלֵיהֶן, וּמַפְטִירִין בְּנִבְיָא. הַפּוֹתֵחַ וְהַחוֹתֵם בַּתּוֹרָה, מְבָרֵךְ לְפָנֶיהָ וְלְאַחֲרֶיהָ:

On new moons, and on the intermediate days of festivals, four people read – not more, and not fewer. And we do not conclude with a *haftarah* from the prophets. The one who opens, and the one who closes the Torah [reading], bless before and after.

This is the general rule: whenever there is *Musaf* and it is not a festival,² four read. On a festival, five [read]. On Yom Kippur, six. On Shabbat, seven. There may be no fewer than this, but we may add to them. And we conclude with a *haftarah* from the prophets. The one who opens, and the one who closes, bless before and after.

Question

- Why do we not have seven people reading the Torah every Shabbat?

¹ *Musaf* is the additional service that follows the regular morning service on Shabbat, festivals, and new moons.

² A general rule is being extrapolated or clarified from the first section of the Mishnah. The times in which there is *Musaf* but not a festival are new moons and the intermediate days of festivals.



4:3

אין פּוֹרְסִין אֶת שְׁמַע, וְאֵין עוֹבְרִין לְפָנֵי הַתְּכָה, וְאֵין נוֹשְׂאִין אֶת כַּפֵּיהֶם, וְאֵין קוֹרִין בַּתּוֹרָה, וְאֵין מְפַטְרִין בְּנִבְיָא, וְאֵין עוֹשִׂין מַעֲמֵד וּמוֹשָׁב, וְאֵין אוֹמְרִים בְּרַפְת אֲבֵלִים וְתַנְחוּמֵי אֲבֵלִים וּבְרַפְת חֲתָנִים, וְאֵין מְזַמְנִין בְּשֵׁם, פְּחוֹת מַעֲשָׂרָה.

ובקרקעות, תשעה וכהן. ואדם, פיוצא בהן :

We do not recite the *Shema*,³ and we do not pass in front of the ark,⁴ and we do not deliver the priestly blessing,⁵ and we do not read from the Torah, and we do not conclude with a *haftarah* from the prophets, and we do not cause to stand or to sit,⁶ and we do not say the blessing of the mourners,⁷ or comfort the mourners,⁸

³ *Porsin et Shema* literally translates as ‘divide the *Shema*’, and there is uncertainty about what this phrase means. One theory is that, originally, the *Shema* would be read verse-by-verse by the leader, and repeated by congregation, as a call and response. Another theory is that it refers to the blessings that come before and after the *Shema* (beginning with the public call to prayer – *Barchu*). In both cases, the practical effect is that it refers to the public recitation of the *Shema*, rather than the private (silent) saying, which would still be permitted without a minyan of ten.

⁴ This refers to one who is sent in front of the ark to lead public worship, and is generally understood to refer to the one who leads the out-loud repetition of the *Amidah*. This does not mean that the *Amidah* is not recited with fewer than ten people, simply that it is not said publicly by the service leader.

⁵ *Nos'in et Kapeihem* literally translates as ‘raising of the hands’, which is taken to mean the priestly blessing. In orthodox synagogues, those who are thought to descend from priests are still invited to ascend to the *bimah* to recite the blessing at certain services, holding out their hands in a gesture that was later adopted by Leonard Nimoy in Star Trek as the Vulcan salute. 🖐️

⁶ ‘Cause to stand or to sit’ refers to a mourning practice, in which the funeral procession would start walking towards the grave before stopping and sitting on the floor and wailing or eulogizing for a period, before moving on. According to the Talmud in another tractate, this should be repeated seven times (BT Bava Batra 100b).

⁷ We do not know what the blessing of the mourners was – even in the time of the Talmuds, they could only guess at its content.

⁸ ‘Comfort the mourners’ is a specific ritual in which the immediate mourners walk down a line of people who comfort them in turn immediately following the burial. It does not refer to comforting those who mourn in general.

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or the blessing of the groom,⁹ and we do not invite others [to recite grace after meals],¹⁰ when there are fewer than ten.

And for the [redemption of] lands, nine and a priest [are required]; and for [the redemption of] a person, the same.¹¹

Question

- The idea that you need ten people to be present for certain ritual acts is presented here without explanation. The Talmud and other later sources try to explain it (you can find their explanations on pages 10-11). Are you convinced by their explanations? Are there other reasons to require a *minyan* (the Hebrew word used for ten people)?

⁹ As for the blessing of the mourners, we do not know exactly what the blessing of the groom was. One theory is that it refers to the seven blessings that are still recited at a Jewish wedding.

¹⁰ There are specific parts of the grace after meals that are only recited in the presence of ten people - specifically, the invitation offered by the person leading the prayers to everyone else. This does not mean that grace after meals is not said with fewer than ten people.

¹¹ Where a piece of land or a person has been dedicated to the Temple, ten people (including at least one priest) must be present to assess its/their value. This part appears to be lifted from another location in the Mishnah, whose context makes its meaning much clearer (see: [Mishnah Sanhedrin 1:3](#)).



4:4

הַקּוֹרֵא בַּתּוֹרָה לֹא יִפְחוֹת מִשְׁלֹשָׁה פְּסוּקִים.

לֹא יִקְרָא לְמַתְרַגְּמָן יוֹתֵר מִפְּסוּק אֶחָד, וּבִבְנֵי אֶלְפָּה. הָיוּ שֶׁלְּשָׁתַּן שְׁלֹשׁ פְּרָשִׁיּוֹת, קוֹרֵין אֶחָד אֶחָד.

מְדַלְגִין בְּנֵבִיא וְאִין מְדַלְגִין בַּתּוֹרָה. וְעַד כַּמָּה הוּא מְדַלֵּג, עַד כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִפְסוֹק הַתְּרַגְּמָן:

The one who reads the Torah does not read fewer than three verses.

One should not read more than one verse to the translator [at a time],¹² or three in the case of [a reading from] the prophets – if they are in three parts, we read them one by one.

We may skip in [a reading from] the prophets, but we may not skip in [reading from] the Torah. And how much may one skip? Only so much that the translator does not pause.

Questions

- Why do you think there is a minimum requirement for how much Torah can be read at a time?
- Why is there a difference between how much you can read to the translator between the Torah and the Prophets?

¹² By the time in which the Mishnah was being compiled, the language of Israel had shifted from Hebrew to Aramaic. Therefore, many people did not understand the language in which the Torah was written, and it was necessary to have someone translating the Torah into Aramaic as it was being read in Hebrew. Over the course of the Talmudic period, a number of these translations were written down, and are known as the Aramaic Targums.

1. Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 21b

לפניה מאי מברך

רב ששת מקטרוזיא איקלע לקמיה דרב אשי ובריך מנ"ח

Before [the reading of the Megillah], what does one recite as a blessing?

Rav Sheshet of Katrazia happened to come before Rav Ashi, who recited the blessing *menach* [an acronym for *mikra Megillah*, *she'asah nissim* and *shehechianu*].

לאחריה מאי מברך

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם (האל) הרב את ריבנו והדן את דיננו והנוקם את נקמתנו והנפרע לנו מצרינו והמשלם גמול לכל אויבי נפשנו ברוך אתה ה' הנפרע לישראל מכל צריהם

רבא אמר האל המושיע

אמר רב פפא הלכך נימרינהו לתרוייהו ברוך אתה ה' הנפרע לישראל מכל צריהם האל המושיע:

After [the reading], what does one recite as a blessing?

'Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Sovereign of the Universe (the God), who takes up our grievance, and who judges our claim, and who avenges our vengeance, and who takes vengeance for us on our foes, and who brings punishment upon all enemies of the soul. Blessed are You, Eternal, who takes vengeance for Israel on all their foes.'

Rava¹³ said, '[The blessing should conclude with:]: "The God who saves."'

Rav Pappa¹⁴ said, 'Therefore, we should say both: "Blessed are You, Eternal, who takes vengeance for Israel on all their foes, the God who saves."'

¹³ Rava (bar Yosef bar Chama) lived in Babylonia in the first half of the fourth century CE. Traditionally he is believed to have taught at a Talmudic academy at Machoza on the Tigris.

¹⁴ Rav Pappa (bar Chanan) was a student of Rava (see above).



2. Forms of Prayer, p. 385

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PURIM

Before reading the Scroll of Esther

ברוך Blessed are You, our Living
God, Sovereign of the universe,
whose commandments make us
holy, and who commands us to read
the Scroll of Esther.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך
העולם. אשר קדשנו במצותיו.
וצונו על מקרא מגלה:

ברוך *Baruch attah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam,*
asher kidd'shanu b'mitsvotav, v'tsivvanu al mikra m'gillah.

ברוך Blessed are You, our Living
God, Sovereign of the universe, who
did wonders for our ancestors in
those days at this season.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך
העולם. שעשה נסים לאבותינו
בימים ההם ובזמן הזה:

ברוך *Baruch attah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam,*
she'asah nissim la'avoteinu ba-yamim ha-heim uvva-z'man ha-zeh.

ברוך Blessed are You, our Living
God, Sovereign of the universe, who
has kept us alive and supported us
and brought us to this season.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך
העולם. שהחיינו וקיימנו והגייענו
לזמן הזה:

ברוך *Baruch attah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam,*
shehecheyanu v'kai'manu v'higgi'anu la-z'man ha-zeh.

After reading the Scroll of Esther

ברוך Blessed are You, our Living
God, Sovereign of the universe,
who heard our plea and judged our
cause. You are the One who has
always saved us, our hope in every
generation. May those who trust
in You never be ashamed or
humiliated. Blessed are You God,
the Power that saves us.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך
העולם. הרב את־ריבנו והדן
את־דיננו. תשועתנו היית לנצח
ותקותנו בכל־דור ודור. לא־
יבושו ולא־יכלמו לנצח כל־
החוסים בך: ברוך אתה יהוה.
האל המושיע:

ברוך *Baruch attah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam, ha-rav et riveimu, v'ha-dan et*
dineimu, t'shu'ateinu hayita la-netsach, v'tikvateimu b'chol dor vador, lo yeivoshu v'lo
yikkal'mu la-netsach kol ha-chosim bach. Baruch attah Adonai, ha-eil ha-moshi'a.

3. Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 21b

תנא הפותח מברך לפניו והחותם מברך לאחריה

והאידינא דכולהו מברכי לפניו ולאחריה היינו טעמא דתקיננו רבנן גזירה משום הנכנסין ומשום היוצאין:

A Tanna¹⁵ taught [in a *Baraita*], ‘The one who opens [the Torah reading] blesses before, and the one who closes [the reading] blesses after.’

But now, when all bless before and after, the reason the rabbis established this was to safeguard against those who enter [late] and leave [early].

4. Masechet Soferim 10:7

אין פורסין על שמע לא בעמידה ולא בישיבה ... ואין אומרים קדיש וברכו פחות מעשרה

רבותינו שבמערב אומרים בשבעה ונותנין טעם לדבריהם בפרוע פרעות בישראל בהתנדב עם ברכו ה' כמנין התיבות

וי"א אפי' ששה ברכו ששה הוא

We do not recite the *Shema*, either standing or sitting ... and we do not say the *Kaddish* or *Barchu*, when there are fewer than ten.

Our teachers in the West¹⁶ say ‘when there are seven’ and give the reason for their ruling: ‘When hair grows wild in Israel, when the people dedicate themselves to bless the Eternal’ (Judges 5:2), [which implies that the number present must be the same] as that of the words.¹⁷

There are those who say ‘even when there are six’, [since up to the word] ‘bless’ [above, there are] six [words].

¹⁵ A Tanna (literally ‘teacher’) was a sage or rabbi who lived and taught at the time of the Mishnah (i.e. up to around 220 CE).

¹⁶ The Land of Israel, which was west of Babylonia.

¹⁷ The number of Hebrew words in the verse quoted is seven.



5. Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 23b

מה"מ

אמר ר' חייא בר אבא א"ר יוחנן דאמר קרא ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל כל דבר
שבקדושה לא יהא פחות מעשרה

מאי משמע

דתני ר' חייא אתיא תוך תוך כתיב הכא ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל וכתיב התם
הבדלו מתוך העדה ואתיא עדה עדה דכתיב התם עד מתי לעדה הרעה הזאת מה
להלן עשרה אף כאן עשרה:

From where do we know these things?

Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba¹⁸ said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan,¹⁹ 'As Scripture says: "I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel" (Leviticus 22:32) – all matters of sanctity should not involve fewer than ten.'

How is it implied?

As Rabbi Chiyya taught, 'It is derived [from a *gezeirah shavah* – i.e. from two instances of the word] "among". It is written here [i.e. in one part of Scripture]: "I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel" (Leviticus 22:32), and it is written there [i.e. in another part of Scripture]: "Separate from among the congregation!" (Numbers 16:21). And it is derived [from another *gezeirah shavah*, from two instances of the word] "congregation". It is written there: "How long shall this evil congregation exist?" (Numbers 14:27). Just as there were ten there [i.e. in Numbers 16:21], so there are ten here [i.e. in Numbers 16:21].'

¹⁸ Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba was originally from Babylonia, but travelled to the Land of Israel in his youth, becoming a student of Rabbi Yochanan (see below).

¹⁹ Rabbi Yochanan (bar Napacha) lived in the Land of Israel in the third century CE, where he was one of the preeminent sages of his generation. According to Maimonides, Rabbi Yochanan was the redactor of the Jerusalem Talmud.

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 **Babylonian Talmud** (also known simply as The Talmud or *Bavli*) is a commentary on the Mishnah 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 are also a number of what are called **Minor Tractates**, which appear to come after the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, and which repeat much of the material found in the Mishnah and Talmuds. Here we find a text from **Masechet Soferim**, meaning '**The Tractate of Scribes**', which quotes extensively from Mishnah Megillah, including this section, though we can also see where there are differences with the Mishnah and Talmud.



Notes

HAPPY STUDYING!

If you have any further questions, please be in touch with Rabbi Elliott

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