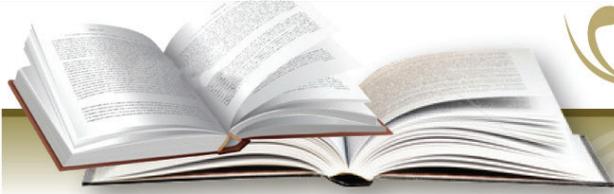


TORAH & HORAAH



Tetzaveh 5777

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Dear Reader,

One need not be an expert in economics to know that “money makes the world go round.” Indeed, the verse in Koheles (1:19) states that “money is the answer for everything.” Money and economic power determine what has importance and what does not; money brings nations to war, topples governments, and decides what has importance and what is irrelevant.

Less known, however, is the fact that money and the power of contract constitute a central theme in the tale of Esther and the miracle of Purim.

The Midrash dubs Haman the “chief of all buyers,” and Achashverosh “chief of all sellers.” In seeking to purchase the fate of the Jewish people from king Achashverosh, Haman planned to change the very course of history. He schemed not only to purchase not only the Jews, but even the entire world, and to shift its axis in the direction of his choice.

From the first moment of Creation, the Jewish people

This week’s article addresses the mitzvah of reading the Megillah, and in particular the obligation of women to read the Megillah. Is a woman’s obligation to read the Megillah identical to that of a man? Why are there opinions that a woman cannot dispense a man’s obligation of hearing the Megillah? Is a woman’s berachah over the reading the same as a man’s? These questions, and more, are discussed in this week’s article.

This week’s Q & A addresses the question of working on Purim.

Megillah Reading for Women: A Different Obligation?

A question that is often of great practical relevance on Purim is the obligation of women in reading the Megillah. While women are obligated to hear the Megillah, the scope of their obligation is a matter of some halachic debate. The topic is discussed by halachic authorities throughout the generations, and has reached a heightened level of intensity today.

What is the optimal way for a woman to hear the Megillah? Can and should a woman read the Megillah for herself? Can a group of women read the Megillah? Is there a difference between a man’s and a woman’s obligation in the Megillah, and how does this affect the berachah recited over the reading?

These questions, among others, are discussed below.

Women’s Obligation to Read the Megillah

The most commonly cited primary source for women’s obligation to read the Megillah is a Gemara in Megillah (4a): “R. Yehoshua b. Levi said, women are obligated to read the Megillah because they were part of the miracle.” Although women are generally exempt from positive time-bound commandments (with some exceptions), they are obligated to read the Megillah despite its ➤➤

have constituted the focal point of world history. The Midrash teaches that the world was created for Avraham, for the Patriarchs, for Israel. Following its creation, the order of world history continued to revolve around the same people.

Haman, however, planned an upheaval. Rather than being the heart of world history, the Jews would be wiped off the face of earth, never to return.

For this purpose, Haman paid good money. The Hebrew word for 'nature' (*teva*) stems from the Torah word for a coin (*matbe'a*). With his coins, Haman wished to buy the nature of the world. With his money, he planned to designate a new world order, with Amalek taking the central stage and the Jews outside the picture. Indeed, he was the "chief of all buyers."

A period of darkness and strife set upon the Jews. Exiled, their Temple destroyed, and a decree of destruction against them, they turned their eyes upwards in prayer. Hashem responded by thwarting the evil plan, revealing that even in times of darkness, when Divine direction is concealed, the wheels of history remain in the hands of Hashem, with the Jews planted firmly at its center.

The Gemara teaches: "It was known and revealed **before He who spoke and the world was created** that Haman would

being a positive, time-bound (rabbinic) commandment.

The reason given by the Gemara, namely that "they were part of the miracle"—a statement that occurs regarding the status of women for several festival-related obligations—is interpreted in different ways by early authorities.

The Rashbam (cited by Tosafos, *ibid.*) understands it to mean that the main part of the miracle came about through a woman: on Purim due to Esther, on Pesach due to the righteous women of the generation, and on Chanukah due to Yehudis. Tosafos, however, reject this interpretation, and explain rather that women were part of the miracle, in that they, too, were saved from threat and from oppression in the respective miracles of Purim, Pesach and Chanukah. For this reason, women are duty-bound to celebrate the redemption.

The simple reading of the Gemara is that the obligation of women to read the Megillah is equal to that of men. This understanding is reinforced by the Gemara in *Erchin* (3a), which reflects on the wording of a Mishnah in Megillah (19b). The Mishnah reads: "All are fit to read the Megillah, except for the deaf, the mentally deficient and a minor." The Gemara asks what the word "all" means to emphasize and include, and responds that it means to include women, citing the above-mentioned teaching of R. Yeshoshua b. Levi. The fact that women are included in the word "all" seems to indicate that their status is like that of men.

An Equal Obligation

The equal status of women and men in their Megillah obligation is noted by Rashi (*Erchin* 3a), who explains that women "are obligated in Megillah and qualified to read it, and fulfill the obligation for men." The ruling that women can read the Megillah on behalf of men indicates that their obligation is equal. If women's obligation was less than that of men, women could not read the Megillah for men to discharge their obligation.

A number of early authorities agree that women can fulfill men's obligation by their reading the Megillah to them, indicating that their obligation is equal. These include the *Riaz* (cited by the *Shiltei haGiborim*), the *Ritva*, *Meiri* and *Nimukei Yosef* (in their commentaries to *Megillah* 4a), the *Or Zarua* (2:368), and others.

The Rambam, too, rules: "Everyone is obligated in this reading: men, women, converts, and freed slaves" (*Megillah* 1:1). While not explicit, the implication of the ruling appears to be that all the

listed categories have the same obligation to read the Megillah, and each can read on behalf of the other.

An Unequal Obligation: Reading and Hearing

Matters, however, are complicated by another primary source, the Tosefta (*Megillah* 2:4), which differentiates between men and women concerning Megillah. The Tosefta writes: “All are obligated to read of the Megillah, Kohanim, Leviim, Yisraelim [...] women and slaves and minors are exempt, and [therefore] cannot fulfill the obligation of others.”

The Tosefta seems to contradict the ruling of the Gemara (based on R. Yehoshua b. Levi) head on. According to some of the authorities mentioned above, the Tosefta indeed represents an alternative position on the obligation of women, and it is deferred in the face of the Talmudic ruling. Thus, the Meiri (*Megillah* 4a) writes, “We should not push away the explicit Talmud, which is in our possession, because of a *baraisa*. [...] Rather, we should rely on the known rule that only one who is obligated in a mitzvah may fulfill the obligation of others.”

Yet, some authorities reconcile the two sources, based on a ruling given by the *Baal Halachos Gedolos*, who makes a distinction between reading and hearing the Megillah: “Women, slaves and minors are exempt from reading the megillah but are obligated to hear it. Why is this so? Because they were all endangered by [the decree] to destroy, kill and wipe out; since they were all endangered, they are all obligated to hear it” (*Halachos Gedolos*, Venice Edition, p. 80).

Citing the *Halachos Gedolos*, Tosafos (*Erchin* 3a; *Megillah* 4b), reconcile the two sources. When R. Yehoshua ben Levi states, “women are obligated in the reading of the megillah,” this should be understood as an obligation to hear the reading of the Megillah. The Tosefta, however, which states that women are exempt, refers not to hearing but to reading the Megillah. Although the Gemara in *Erchin* notes that women can read the Megillah, this refers only to a woman reading the Megillah for herself; she cannot do so on behalf of men. The reason is because men have an obligation to read Megillah but woman only have an obligation to hear it.

This opinion is also noted by the Raavia (Chap. 569), the Mordechai (*Megillah* 4a, no. 778), and other prominent authorities (*Sefer Hatur*; *Sefer HaEshkol*; *Rabbeinu Yerucham*; and others). Some of these authorities mention that the *Baal Halachos Gedolos* had an alternative version of the Gemara in Megillah, which read that women are obligated to hear the Megillah, rather than to read it.

weigh Shekalim against Israel, therefore He preceded their Shekalim to his” (*Megillah* 13b). He who created the world, and who continues to forever guide it, ensured that the coins of Israel were true even before those of Haman were conceived. In spite of Haman’s best efforts, the nature of the world is forever minted with coins of Israel.

The miracle of Purim, in those days and this time, reminds us that in spite of the deep concealment we live through, and despite the harsh realities that sometimes greet us, the rules of nature remain unchanged. Even as we are engulfed in the sea of darkness, the original plan continues to unfold. Still, Israel takes center stage.

Time will tell how the pieces of the puzzle fall in place to form a single, harmonious and complete picture. Until that time, our prayers are raised to the Master of the World: End our sorrows, hasten our redemption, and let the joy of Purim and be forever set in our hearts.

We take the opportunity to remind readers of the opportunity Purim presents us with in the mitzvah of *mishloach manos*. The eyes of the poor are turned towards Purim in anticipation, and it is left to us to open our hearts and our purses to their call. **Those wishing to do so can fulfill the mitzvah, with the greatest hiddur, through an online donation at our site.**

A Dishonorable Practice

Some authorities give a different reason why woman can't read for men. They understand that the reason women cannot read for men in order to discharge their obligation of Megillah is because this is unseemly, dishonorable or immodest. These authorities maintain that in principle there is no difference in the obligation of men and women, but that nonetheless it is forbidden for a woman to read the Megillah on behalf of a man.

Thus, *Sefer Mitzvos Gadol (Hilchos Megillah)* writes that reading the Megillah is similar to the reading of the Torah, for which a woman cannot read for a man. While in theory a woman can be called up and read from the Torah (see *Megillah 23a*), it is forbidden in practice. Some authorities note the issue of immodesty in hearing a woman read the Megillah, arguing that this will infringe the prohibition of *kol be'isha erva (Kol Bo, Chap. 45; Orchos Chaim, Megillah 2)*.

The *Tosafos HaRosh (Sukkah 38a)* gives a different reason why women cannot discharge the obligation of men. He cites the *Halachos Gedolos* in comparing reading the Megillah to *Birkas Hamazon*: “[women cannot say *Birkas Hamazon* for men] because it is dishonorable in public, like Megillah in which *Halachos Gedolos* explained that though women are obligated, they do not discharge the obligation of the many.”

It is notable that the *Korban Nesanel* understood the *Tosafos* in *Sukkah* to mean that woman cannot discharge the obligation even of other women, for this, too, is dishonorable—a ruling cited by the *Mishnah Berurah (689, Shaar Hatzion 15)*. The *Tosafos HaRosh* (unprinted at their time) indicates that this is not the correct understanding, and that the *Tosafos* refers to discharging the obligation of men alone. This is also the interpretation given by the *Aruch Hashulchan (271:5)*.

Which Berachos to Make?

When a woman reads for herself or for other women, or when a man who has already discharged his obligation reads on behalf of women, which blessing should be recited?

The *Shulchan Aruch (689:1-2)* rules: “All are obligated in its reading: men, and women, and converts, and freed slaves. [...] There are those who say that women do not fulfill the obligation on behalf of men.” The *Rema* adds: “There are those who say that if a woman reads for herself she recites the blessing, ‘to hear the megillah,’ since she is not obligated to read.”

Thus, the simple ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* is thus that women can discharge a man's obligation. Although he mentions the opinion that women cannot do so, *Rav Ovadya Yosef (Shut Yehaveh Da'as 3:51)* has written that the first ruling is the principal halacha, so that in principle a woman can read the Megillah and even fulfill a man's obligation (even in the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch*, this approach is not unanimous).

In Ashkenazi custom, however, the *Rema's* endorsement of the latter opinion decrees that the principal halacha is that women cannot dispense men's obligation. Moreover, the *Rema* understands this, following *Tosafos*, based on a basic distinction between men and women: men are obligated to read, and women to hear. For this reason, the *Rema* notes that some say a woman prefaces her reading with a blessing *al shmias Megillah*, rather than *al mikra Megillah*. The *Magen Avraham (692:5)* writes (citing *Bach*) that this is the case even when a man (who has already heard the Megillah) reads on behalf of women and this is the ruling of the *Mishna Berura (689, 8)*.

The Final Beracha

The blessing that follows the reading of the

Megillah at night (“*harav et riveinu*”) is a function of the *pirsumei nisa*, the publicizing of the miracle. For this reason, it is not recited by an individual reading alone, but only in a public setting of ten or more.

The Rema (*Orach Chaim 690:18*) states that we are “doubtful if women can be counted among the ten”—for purposes of reading the Megillah, so it is possible that women do not join men in constituting a quorum. It is possible that this

is only true for a mixture of men and women, due to modesty considerations, and that when a *minyan* of women gather to hear the Megillah, the requisite *pirsumei nisa* is achieved and the final blessing should be recited (see *Mikraei Kodesh, Purim 35*).

However the Halichos Bas Yisroail (22, 14) states that the custom is that the final blessing is not recited in women’s readings of the Megillah even if ten women are present.

Halachic Responsa

to Questions that have been asked on our website dinonline.org



The Question:

Can you work on Purim?

Thanks very much.



Answer:

One should not work on Purim if this is possible.

Under extenuating circumstances it is permitted to work, provided of course that one can fulfill the mitzvos of the day.

Best wishes.



Sources:

According to the strict halachah it is permitted to work on Purim. The Megillah describes the day of Purim as an occasion of “*mishteh ve-simcha*” — feasting and rejoicing (9:22). No mention is made of a “*Yom Tov*,” a day on which work is forbidden.

Nevertheless, the custom developed among some communities to refrain from work on Purim day, and the halachah is that in such communities one should abide by this custom. This is ruled by the Shulchan Aruch (696:1), the Rema citing from the Kol Bo that today all places have the custom of not working.

Furthermore, the Shulchan Aruch notes that work performed on the day of Purim does not result in beracha (blessing); it is therefore inadvisable to work on Purim in any case.

The Mishnah Berurah rules that it is permitted to engage in business, because a person “enjoys” business. This cannot generally be said for office work.

Therefore, one should not work on Purim, if possible. If significant loss is involved, however (for instance, if the employer refuses to allow the employee a day off).