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Shnayim Mikrah Vi'echad Targum

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Is shnayim Mikra vi'echad Targum an obligation or is it voluntary?

What is the proper way to read the parsha to fulfill the mitzvah?

An often overlooked mitzvah is *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum* (reading the original Hebrew text of the weekly Torah portion twice and the *Targum* once). This article will examine the mitzvah and its laws, and will hopefully be an encouragement to be vigilant in properly observing this mitzvah.

Source and Reasoning of the Mitzvah

The source of this mitzvah is found in the Gemara in Brachos (8a), where Rav Huna bar Yehuda taught in the name of Rav Ami that one should complete the Torah portion of the week with the congregation *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum*. He concludes that whoever follows this practice will merit longevity.

The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 285:2) states that this halacha was instituted by Moshe Rabbeinu. However, it is not clear what the source for this statement is; this author has not found any earlier source that makes this point.

There are three reasons for this mitzvah found in the commentators, and there are practical differences between these reasons. The Ra'avan (cited in Bais Yosef, Orach Chaim 285:1) explains that this halacha was instituted for an individual who lives in a place where there is no *minyan* and no Torah reading. Thus, one should try his best to commemorate the real Torah reading that takes place with a *minyan*. This is done by following two criteria. First, the person should read the weekly Torah portion on his own at the same time the Torah is being read with a *minyan*. Second, the Torah portion of that week should be read *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum*. The two times in the original Hebrew commemorate the two people who read from the Torah - the *ba'al koreh* and the person who receives the *aliyah*. The *Targum* commemorates the translator, for it used to be the custom that someone would translate the verses being read during the Torah reading.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285:1) clearly argues with this opinion, as he writes that the halacha of *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum* applies even when one hears the Torah reading with a *minyan*.

The second reason is that of Rabbi Eliezer Moshe Horowitz (commentary to Brachos 8b). He wonders why the reward for fulfilling *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum* is longevity. He explains this with a different Gemara in Brachos (55a) which teaches that if one is called to the Torah and does not go up, it shortens one's life. The flipside is that if one goes up to the Torah when called upon, he will merit longevity. He continues that the custom in the times of the Gemara was that there was no separate *ba'al korei* (reader of the Torah) who read the Torah; rather, the person who received the *aliyah* actually read from the Torah, which required proper

preparation. Therefore, reading the parsha *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum* is a way to be properly prepared to read from the Torah if called upon, and one thus merits the longevity associated with going up to read from the Torah. (This approach does not provide a reason for reading the *Targum*.)

This halacha would thus arguably not apply today since, in our times, the *ba'al korei* reads from the Torah, not the person receiving the *aliyah*. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.) clearly disagrees with this explanation, as he cites this halacha even though the custom in his days already was that the *ba'al korei* read the Torah.

The third reason is from the Levush (Orach Chaim 285:1). He explains that this mitzvah was instituted to ensure that people become fluent in the verses of the Torah. This reasoning would make the mitzvah relevant in today's times, as well.

The Proper Method for Performing the Mitzvah

There are five methods mentioned in the *poskim* (halachic authorities).

- 1) The Shlah (Shabbos Perek Ner Mitzvah s.v. *umnum*) writes that one should read one section¹ at a time, twice in the original Hebrew followed by the *Targum* once. This was the custom of the Vilna Gaon (Ma'aseh Rav).
- 2) The Lechem Chamudos (Divrei Chamudos Brachos 1:41) writes that one should read each verse twice in the original Hebrew followed by the *Targum*. This was the custom of the Chofetz Chaim (Shevet Halevi 7:32).
- 3) Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky (Introduction to Sefer Emes Liyaakov al HaTorah, pg. 11) posits a novel approach as to why the Hebrew text must be read twice. He explains that there are two parts to the mitzvah. One is to read the entire parsha, and the second is to learn it. Thus, one reads it once to fulfill the obligation to read, then reads it a second time with the *Targum* explanation, fulfilling the need to learn the parsha, as well. Based on this idea, Rabbi Kamenetzky says that should read the entire parsha straight the first time, followed by the second recitation of one verse at a time along with the *Targum*. He points out that this is essentially a compromise between the approaches of the Shlah and the Lechem Chamudos (though based on independent reasoning).
- 4) The Aruch Hashulchan (285:7) cites a custom to complete the entire

¹ A section, properly called a *parsha*, is marked by a space before it and after it in a Torah scroll. In most modern *chumashim*, a parsha is marked by a letter *peh* or a letter *samech*. The reasoning for these letters is beyond the scope of this article.

Torah portion twice followed by *Targum*.

5) The Levush (285:5) writes that one should read each verse once in the original Hebrew followed by the *Targum*, and should read the Hebrew a second time along with the *ba'al korei* as he reads from the Torah on Shabbos.

The Mishna Berura (285:2) and Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.) both conclude that all of these methods are valid options.

When completing the recitation of *Targum*, a number of authorities (Magen Avraham 285:1; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 72:11; Aruch Hashulchan 285:6) require that the final verse of the Torah portion itself be repeated a third time. This is based on an old custom (no longer practiced today in most communities) that during the Torah reading, a *meturgeman* (translator) repeated each verse in the vernacular. The custom was that final verse of the parsha was read again after its translation so that the last verse of the Torah reading recited was directly from the Torah and not from the *meturgeman* (see Shulchan Aruch Harav 285:3). Since *shnayim Mikra vi'echad Targum* is meant to represent the public reading of the Torah, the final verse must be repeated a third time after reciting the *Targum*. However, the Mishna Berura does not cite this halacha.

Proper Time for the Mitzvah

The Gemara in Brachos (8b) records a statement from a certain elder² that one should not perform this mitzvah before the proper time or after the proper time. Tosafos (Brachos 8b s.v. *yashlim*) states that the earliest time that one may fulfill his obligation to complete the weekly Torah portion is from *mincha* of the previous Shabbos, since at *mincha* on Shabbos we begin reading the coming week's Torah portion. This is the ruling of the Mishna Berura (285:7). Shmiras Shabbos Kihilchasa (42 fn. 218) explains that it is not dependent upon when one actually *davens mincha*. Rather, it begins from the time when one is able to *daven mincha*, which is half an hour after *chatzos* (halachic midday).

Regarding the latest time to complete the mitzvah, the Shulchan Aruch (ibid.:4) lists several possibilities. Ideally, one should complete the mitzvah before eating on Shabbos morning. The next best time is to complete the parsha before *mincha* on Shabbos afternoon. The Shmiras Shabbos Kihilchasa (ibid.) explains this to mean the earliest time that one may *daven mincha*, and not when one actually *davens mincha*. If that time has passed, one has until Wednesday (i.e., Tuesday night). If one did not finish by then, he still has until Simchas Torah to complete the mitzvah. The aforementioned ideal of finishing "before eating on Shabbos morning" refers to one's meal and not *kiddush* (Ketzos Hashulchan 72:6). This is based on the Bi'ur Halacha (285:4 s.v. *yashlim*) who cites the Ohr Zarua that the concern is that one will become preoccupied and not finish the parsha, which is only a concern when one eats a full meal.

Other Questions

Does one have to recite *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum* for festival readings as well? The Shulchan Aruch (285:7) rules that there is no requirement. Although there are opinions that disagree with this, as cited in the Terumas Hadeshen (23), Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 3:40) writes that the common custom is to follow

² According to one view cited in Tosafos (Chullin 6a s.v. *ashkechei*), "a certain elder" refers to Eliyahu Hanavi.

the Shulchan Aruch. He writes that this dispute is based upon whether the mitzvah is to complete the entire Torah once a year, in which case recitation of special holiday readings are not included, or to familiarize oneself with the communal reading, in which case they would be included.

Is this mitzvah obligatory? The Shibalei Haleket (75) writes that this mitzvah is only recommended. This is also the indication of the aforementioned Gemara, which states only that one who fulfills this mitzvah will merit longevity, but makes no mention that it is an obligation. However, the Shulchan Aruch (ibid.) clearly writes that it is an obligation. According to this, the Gemara must be understood as merely pointing out the importance of properly observing this mitzvah.

What qualifies as *Targum*? Tosafos (Brachos 8a s.v. *shnayim*) cite an opinion that any translation can qualify for *Targum*. However, Tosafos argue that *Targum* refers to *Targum Onkelos*, as it conveys explanations which are not evident through basic translation. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.:2) cites an opinion that Rashi's commentary qualifies as *Targum*. The Shulchan Aruch concludes that one who has fear of Heaven should read both *Targum Onkelos* and Rashi. The Mishna Berura (285:6) explains that there are benefits to both. The *Targum Onkelos* translates every word and was given together with the Torah on Mt. Sinai³, whereas Rashi provides a better understanding of the concepts of the verses based on Chazal.

There is an interesting responsum from Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:261) on this topic. He writes that he allowed someone to read an English translation in place of the *Targum*. He explained that the benefit of *Targum Onkelos* or Rashi only applies if there is some understanding of what one is reading. But if one has no comprehension at all, one should read an English translation. He concludes that it must be a reliable translation written by a Torah scholar.

Who is obligated in this mitzvah? Women are exempt from performing this mitzvah. This is because they are not obligated to learn Torah or listen to the Torah reading. Although the Magen Avraham (282:6) cites the Maseches Sofrim (8:4) that women are obligated to hear the weekly Torah reading, the Aruch Hashulchan (282:11) proves that it is not an actual obligation; rather, it is a good thing to do, since hearing the Torah reading instills a love and fear of Hashem in one's heart. The Magen Avraham (ibid.) himself concludes that the custom is that women are not obligated to hear the weekly Torah portion.

Interestingly, the Shach (Yoreh Deah 400:4) rules that a mourner can perform this mitzvah on Shabbos, despite the prohibition upon a mourner from studying most areas of Torah. This is because it is technically not Torah study but, rather, preparation for the Torah reading. Regarding whether one can also learn Rashi, there is a dispute in the *poskim*. The Lechem Hapanim (ibid.:1) is lenient, while the Birkei Yosef (ibid.:1) is stringent. The Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.:6) also rules leniently.

In conclusion, *shnayim Mikrah vi'echad Targum* is an obligation that brings blessing for long life with it. The proper fulfillment this mitzvah should certainly be a priority in one's schedule.

³ The Gemara says that it was subsequently forgotten and restored by Onkelos the Convert.

Points to Ponder:

If one made an error in reading a verse, must he repeat everything from that point, or just the one verse?

When is the earliest one may recite the coming week's parsha, and what about Vizos Habracha, read on Simchas Torah?

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