



## THE READING OF EICHA ON TISHA B'AV

On the night of *Tisha B'Av*, there is a tradition to read the Book of *Eicha*. The source for this tradition is *Masechet Soferim* 18:5, and *Eicha Rabbah*, *Parsha* no. 3. This article will explore the various practices regarding the tradition of reading the Book of *Eicha*.

### Should One Recite a Beracha on the Reading of *Eicha*?

The Book of *Eicha* is one of the Five Megillot. *Masechet Soferim* 14:1, states that when we read one of the Five Megillot, we recite the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah*. R. David Avudraham, *Tefillot HaPesach* codifies the statement of *Masechet Soferim*. Ramban, *Torat Ha'Adam* (Chavel ed. Pg. 258) applies the statement of *Masechet Soferim* specifically to the reading of *Eicha*. Nevertheless, R. Yosef Karo, *Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim* 559, notes that common

practice is to refrain from reciting the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah* on all of the megillot with the exception of Megillat Esther.

Rama, *Teshuvot HaRama* no. 35, addresses the practice of refraining from the recitation of a beracha. He presents four reasons for this practice. First, perhaps the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah* is only recited upon obligatory readings of a megillah. If the megillah is read because of a *minhag*, one does not recite a beracha. [Rama does note that the reading of *Eicha* can be considered an obligatory reading since it is based on Talmudic sources.] Second, there are different versions of *Masechet Soferim* as to what beracha should be recited. One version is to recite *Al Mikra Megillah*. Another version is to recite *Al Mikra Ketuvim*. Rama suggests that a tradition developed to omit the beracha in order to avoid this question. Third, Rama questions whether it is actually appropriate

to recite a beracha on reading a megillah (aside from Megillat Esther). Although *Masechet Soferim* does endorse reciting a beracha upon recitation of the megillot, Rama suggests that the statement in *Masechet Soferim* is based on opinions and traditions that are not considered common practice. Fourth, Rama suggests that one may only recite the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah* if one is reading from a text that is written on parchment and was written according to the laws of writing a *sefer* Torah. Since most communities do not have megillot that are written on parchment (with the exception of Megillat Esther), they do not recite the beracha of *Al Mikra Megillah*.

Rama concludes that one should never recite a beracha on the megillot (with the exception of Megillat Esther) even if they are written on parchment. He notes that if the only reason to refrain from

reciting the beracha is that they are not written on parchment, synagogues would make it a priority to purchase a set of megillot. Since we do not find such a practice, it must be that one would not recite a beracha on the megillot even if they are written on parchment.

*Magen Avraham* 490:9, disagrees with Rama's conclusion and rules that one should recite a beracha on reading any of the *megillot* (except *Kohelet*). [*Magen Avraham* does not seem to require parchment in order to recite the *beracha*. Ostensibly, *Magen Avraham* is following his own opinion (284:1) that there is no requirement to use parchment for the *Haftorah* text. *Mishna Berurah* 490:19, sides with the opinion of Rama that one should not recite a *beracha* on the *megillot*. However, he notes that one can justify the practice of reciting a *beracha* if the *megillah* is read from parchment. The Vilna Gaon's personal practice was to read all of the *megillot* from parchment and to recite a *beracha* (see *Ma'aseh Rav* no. 175). Those communities that follow all of the *minhagim* of the Vilna Gaon recite a *beracha* on reading the *megillah* from parchment. [See R. Yechiel M. Tucatzinski, *Sefer Eretz Yisrael* 21:2. R. Tucatzinski implies that reading from a parchment is necessary regardless of whether one plans on reciting a *beracha*.]

## Reading Eicha during the Daytime

*Masechet Soferim* 18:5 presents two traditions as to when one should read the Book of Eicha. One tradition is to read Eicha on the night of *Tisha B'Av*. Another tradition is to read it during the daytime. *Mishna Berurah* 559:2, notes that although

the prevalent tradition is read to Eicha at night, it is preferable to read Eicha (privately) during the daytime as well.

On *Tisha B'Av* 5708 (1948), during the second truce of Israel's War of Independence, many communities in Yerushalayim were not able to hold the evening *Tisha B'Av* services due to mortar attacks. By the next morning the mortar attacks ceased and everyone was able to hold the morning services. For those communities who followed the *minhagim* of the Vilna Gaon, the question arose whether it was permitted to recite a beracha on the reading of Eicha (from parchment) during the daytime. R. Yechiel M. Tucatzinski ruled that they should read the megillah without reciting a beracha. His rationale was that the beracha is only recited when there is a communal obligation to read the megillah. The communal obligation only exists at night, even if the entire community was unable to congregare at night. [See *Sefer Eretz Yisrael*, ch. 21, note 1.]

## Are Women Obligated to Participate in the Reading of Eicha?

*Masechet Soferim* 18:5, states that women are obligated to participate in the reading of Eicha. Nevertheless, this discussion is part of a broader discussion regarding a woman's obligation to participate in *k'riat haTorah*. *Masechet Soferim* states that women are obligated to participate in *k'riat haTorah* just as they are obligated to participate in the reading of Eicha. The issue of whether women are obligated to participate in *k'riat haTorah* is addressed by *Magen Avraham* 282:6. He

concludes (partially based on the comments of *Masechet Soferim*) that women are obligated to participate in *k'riat haTorah*. However, he notes that common practice is in his time was that women were not particular about attending the *k'riat haTorah* service. *Aruch HaShulchan* 282:11, explains that the intent of the statement of *Masechet Soferim* was not to formally obligate women in *k'riat haTorah* and the reading of Eicha. Rather, it was meant to encourage women to attend.

One can suggest that the discussion of a woman's obligation in the reading of Eicha is slightly different than the discussion of a woman's obligation in *k'riat haTorah*. The reading of Eicha serves two purposes. First, it fulfills the communal obligation (or tradition) to read Eicha on the night of *Tisha B'Av*. This is the very obligation that allows for the recitation of a beracha (for those who recite a beracha). Second, the reading of Eicha is part of the *Kinot* services. The discussion of whether women are obligated to participate in the reading of Eicha is limited to the first function of the reading of Eicha. In that sense, the reading of Eicha is similar to *k'riat haTorah*. Nevertheless, women are required to mourn the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and one of the mourning practices is the recitation of *Kinot*. Eicha serves as the prototypical *kinah* in describing the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. This is why there is a tradition of reading Eicha privately during the daytime. As such, it would be proper for women to read Eicha (at least privately) in order to fulfill this aspect of mourning the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.