

Megillah Minhagim

Rabbi Eliezer Barany

It is a custom of all Jews that the reader reads and spreads out [the Megillah] like a letter in order to make the miracle seen. And when one finishes, one goes back and wraps it all up and makes a blessing. (Shulchan Aruch Orech Chayim 690:17)

On Purim there is a requirement to read the Megillah once at night and to repeat it during the day. There are also some interesting *minhagim* associated with the reading of the Megillah. For instance, we spread out the Megillah like a letter while it is read. The Ramah explains that it is our practice to read four verses on our own.¹ These four verses are referred to as the redemptive verses.

What is strange about this practice is that Megillah is best read in a public audience. A minyan enhances the reading and increases the publicizing of the miracle. In fact, all things being equal, one should go to the largest minyan possible for the reading of the Megillah. The Mishnah Berurah points out that the Megillah reader should again say those four verses, despite each person having reading them, because it is best for people to hear it from the reader, from a kosher Megillah.

My question is, why should this minhag be performed? The Mishnah Berurah points out that it is best to hear the entire Megillah from the reader from a kosher Megillah scroll. So why should we not do what is best? He says it is because of *Simchah*, happiness. I would like to understand how that *Simchah* translates to this practice, and does it allow for other things? Would it be appropriate to just say other verses, or even shout out extraneous matters? The Mishnah Berurah quotes the Pri Megadim on the same *Halachah* and says that those who make too much noise lose their reward.

So it seems that some things are allowed for *Simchah* while others are not. In addition to that, it seems that it would theoretically be best to not even read the four verses on our own, since it is best to hear them from the reader.

Rabbi Helbo said further that Rav Hama bar Gurya said that Rav said: The Megillah is referred to as a “book” (Esther 9:32), and it is also referred to as a “letter” (Esther 9:29) (Mesechet Megillah 19a)

¹ Commentary of Ramah on Shulchan Aruch Orech Chayim 690:17

The Gemara explains that the Megillah is referred to as both a book and a letter. The Gemara shares that there are practical applications concerning the stitching of them. However, Rav Yisroel Chait explains that the word *Sefer* reflects permanence and *Igeret* (*letter*) reflects timeliness. These are two different ideas. A *Sefer* is kept but an *igeret* is thrown in the trash the next day. A *sefer* has permanent ideas and an *igeret* shows immediacy. The Megillah has both. Therefore, the reading of the Megillah must bring about a certain reliving, a certain excitement. As such, we can answer all of our questions concerning these *minhagim*.

From the perspective of hearing the megillah, hearing from the reader with a written scroll is best. However, reading these four redemptive verses draws the readers attention to the story. It allows the person to share in the immediacy of the message. It draws the person in to feeling a part of the story, and helps publicize Hashem's ongoing intervention. As such, it enhances the event of the Megillah. So it is very appropriate.

So too by the stomping by the name of Haman, a person shares in the anger of the enemy and sincerely feels connected. Stories have been shared throughout Jewish History when at times after war the people would feel a sense of katharsis at the banging of Haman. They often viewed their recent enemy as a current day Haman, and tangibly felt Hashem's ongoing providence. When there is not an authentic experience, for someone to just go crazy and detract from the connection to the miracle, that is when it is too far.

Hopefully we can be drawn to the reading of the Megillah, especially during such a scary time, and turn to Hashem. If we can feel the ongoing relationship Hashem has with us, we may want to enhance that relationship. Purim Sameach.