

Women and the Reading of the Megillah

May women read the Megillah for other women, and for that matter, may women read the Megillah for men?

I. Tana'itic Texts

Two primary Tana'itic texts deal with this issue, texts which on the surface seem contradictory. The Mishnah states (*Megillah* 19b), "*Ha-kol kesherim likrot ha-Megillah*," "all are qualified to read the Megillah." Commenting on this Mishnah, the Talmud (*Arakbin* 2b-3a) states: "*La-atuyei mui? La-atuyei nashim, u-kbe-de-Rebbi Yehoshua ben Levi, de-amar Rebbi Yehoshua ben Levi, nashim hayyavot be-mikra Megillah she-af ben hayu be-oto ha-nes.*" "What is the word 'ha-kol' meant to include? It is meant to include women, in accordance with the view of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Women are obliged to read the Megillah because they, too, were included in that miracle."

From this text it would appear that women are mandated to read the Megillah. Based on the principle that one can fulfill the responsibility for another if they are on the same level of *h'yyuv*, it would seem that women can also fulfill the obligation for men.¹ Since women are duty bound to read the Megillah, they can fulfill the

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obligation for males who are similarly obliged to read the Megillah.

There is an alternative Tana'itic source which seems to maintain the reverse. The Tosefta states (*Megillah* 2A): "*Ha-kol hayyavin bi-keriyat Megillah, Kohanim, Levi'im, Yisraelim . . . kulan hayyavin u-mozi'in et ha-rabbim yedei hovatan. Androginus mozi mino ve-lo et she-eno mino; tumtum eno mozi lo et mino ve-lo et she-eno mino. . . Nashim ve-'avadim u-ketanim peturin, ve-en mozi'in et ha-rabbim yedei hovatan.*" "All are obligated in the reading of the Megillah. Priests, Levites, Israelites . . . all are obligated and fulfill the obligation of others. [An] *androginus* (a person with both male and female characteristics) fulfills the obligation for another *androginus*, but not of a non-*androginus*; a *tumtum* (a person either male or female, but it is not clear which) does not fulfill the obligation for another *tumtum* or a non-*tumtum*. . . . Women, 'avadim,² and minors are exempt and cannot fulfill the obligation for others."

The simple reading of the last sentence of the Tosefta is that women, unlike all of those previously mentioned, are exempt from reading the Megillah, and, therefore, cannot fulfill the obligation for their male counterparts who are mandated to read.

The contradiction is obvious. The Mishnah seems to proclaim that women are obliged to read the Megillah and can therefore do so for men, while the Tosefta says that women are exempt from reading and therefore can not fulfill the obligation for men.

II. Rishonim

1. Pre-eminence of the Mishnah

Rishonim deal with this question in different ways. Some insist that while the contradiction remains, the Mishnah has pre-eminence. In the words of *Or Zarua'* (R. Isaac of Vienna, 13c., Vienna): "It seems to me since the Tosefta is not mentioned in our Talmud, we do not rely on it."³ Meiri (R. Menahem ben Shlomo, late 13c., Provence) concurs: "And the essential position is not to push aside our well-thought-out talmudic [discussion] because of a Beraita [i.e., the Tosefta]."⁴

From this perspective, *Or Zarua'* and Meiri definitively maintain that women can read the Megillah for men. *Or Zarua'* writes "concerning Megillah, it appears to me that the practical halakhah (*halakha le-ma'aseh*) is that women are obligated to read the Megillah and can fulfill the obligation for males." Meiri consents: "Let us rely on the well known principle, all who are obligated in the matter may fulfill the obligation for others."

Both *Or Zarua'* and Meiri agree with Rashi's position in his com-

mentary on the *Arakbin* passage that: "[Women] are obligated to read the Megillah, and they may read it and fulfill the obligation for men." In fact, *Or Zarua'* says explicitly "it seems to me that the essential view is that of Rashi. [*Ha-kol*] is meant to include women who are obligated in reading Megillah and are qualified to fulfill the obligation for men."⁶

Other Rishonim, while not dealing with the *Tosefta*, explicitly state that women can fulfill the Megillah obligation for men. *Sefer ha-Mikhtam* (R. David ben Levi, 13c., Provence) writes: "And if a woman knows how to read, she fulfills the obligation for men."⁷ Rid (R. Yishayahu of Trani ha-Zaken, early 13c., Italy) and Riaz (R. Yishayahu Aharon ben Eliyahu of Trani, 13c., Italy) state: "Women . . . are obligated in its [Megillah] reading. And it seems to me that they fulfill the obligation of the many."⁸ *Nimukei Yosef* (R. Yosef Haviya, 15c., Spain) adds: "Women recite a blessing on reading Megillah, and they fulfill the obligation of men."⁹

There are other Rishonim who, while not explicitly stating that women can fulfill the obligation for men, seem to agree. Rambam writes: "Everyone is obligated in its reading [of the Megillah], men, women . . .," not making any differentiation between the two. He then adds, "Both the reader and listener fulfill their obligation as long as it is heard from one who is obligated."¹⁰ Here, *Maggid Mishneh* (R. Vidal of Tolosa, 14c., Spain) states: "From our rabbi [Rambam] it can be deduced that she fulfills the obligation of others, and this is the essential view."¹¹

Similarly, *Sefer Yere'im* (R. Eliezer ben Shmuel of Metz, 12c., France) states, "all are qualified to read the Megillah. . . ." Here, again, no distinction is made between men and women. *Sefer Yere'im* then concludes: "This is the principle. Whoever is not obligated in the matter cannot fulfill the obligation of others."¹²

Sefer ha-Manhig (R. Avraham ben Nathan ha-Yarhi, 12c., Provence) follows a similar approach when stating that "women are obligated in the reading of the Megillah . . . and so are they obligated in Hanukkah candles."¹³ It follows that as women can light Hanukkah candles for men¹⁴ so can they read Megillah for their male counterparts.¹⁵

2. Reconciling the Mishnah and Tosefta

A. "EXTERNAL REASONS"

There are other Rishonim who fundamentally believe that women can read the Megillah for men, but for external reasons are enjoined from doing so. These external reasons include *kol ishub*, *zila milta* and *kevod ha-zibbur*.

Sefer ha-Me'orot was the first to attribute to *Aseret ha-Dibbrot*

(Ba'al ha-Ittur—R. Yizhak ben Abba Mari, 12c., Provence) the idea that women cannot fulfill the obligation for men through their reading because of *kol ishab 'ervah*, the voice of a woman is licentious.¹⁶ *Orhot Hayyim* (R. Aharon ben Ya'akov ha-Kohen mi-Lunel, 14c., Provence) and *Kol Bo* (authorship unknown) follow in his footsteps by similarly attributing to Ba'al ha-Ittur the position that women may not read for men because of *kol ishab*.¹⁷ This position, however, does not appear in our editions of the *Ittur*.¹⁸

Tosafot explains the position of Bahag (Ba'al Halakhot Gedolot) that women cannot read the Megillah for men, because it is considered "*zila milta*," a process which results in a diminution of dignity.¹⁹

Semag (*Sefer Mizvot Gadol* of R. Moshe of Coucy, 13c., France) associates the external inability of women to read the Megillah for men with *keriyat ha-Torah*.²⁰ This seems to relate to the Talmudic passage which states that women cannot read the Torah for men because of *kevod zibbur* (*Megillah* 23a). In fact, Ritva (R. Yom Tov ben Avraham Ibn Asevill, 14c., Spain) explicitly states that since women are "obligated [in reading the Megillah] they also can fulfill the obligation [of men] but this is not *kevod* to the *zibbur*."²¹

However, assuming this approach, i.e., that were it not for other considerations, women *could* fundamentally read the Megillah for men, how is one to understand the Tosefta which explicitly concludes "women are exempt from Megillah?"

Alternative versions of the Tosefta resolve the problem. *Semag* insists that the Tosefta's last sentence "women are exempt" does not appear in the original text. However, he adds that from the inability of a *tuntum* to read the Megillah for another *tuntum*, we can deduce that women cannot read the Megillah for men because of external considerations. His reasoning is as follows: In principle, even if the *tuntum* is a female, she should be able to read the Megillah for a *tuntum* who is male, because both of them are on the same level of reading obligation. This, however, is not done for external reasons. In the words of *Semag*, "The reading of the Megillah is to be compared to *keriyat ha-Torah*" where women do not read for men because of *kevod ha-zibbur*.²²

Alternatively, the Meiri,²³ Rashba²⁴, Ran²⁵ (R. Nissim ben Reuven, 14c., Spain) and others quote a different ending of the Tosefta. For them, the concluding statement reads "women are obligated but still cannot fulfill the obligation of men." One can understand this alternative version to mean that women, like men, are indeed obligated to read the Megillah but still cannot fulfill the obligation for men for external reasons.

Given these alternate readings, one can reconcile the Tosefta with

the Bavli by insisting that the Bavli reflects a post facto (*be-de'avad*) rule. Optimally (*le-khatbila*), it is best that women not read for men for any of the external reasons cited above. The Bavli, however, says, if they do read for men, post facto, the men have thereby fulfilled their obligation. Alternatively, the Gemara of "*le-atuyet nashim*" means that women can read the Megillah for other women. For other women—but, for "external" reasons, they cannot read the Megillah for men.

B. READING VS. HEARING

There are other Rishonim who believe that women cannot fulfill the obligation for men not for external reasons but because they are on different levels of obligation. This inability of women is fundamental, rather than external, in nature. While men are obligated to *read* the Megillah, women are only obligated to *hear* the Megillah. This is the position of Ba'al Halakhot Gedolot (Bahag) as quoted by Tosafot.³⁰

There are other Rishonim who agree with the view of Tosafot. Rabbenu Hannanel (ben Hushiel, 11c., Tunisia) maintains that "women are obligated to listen to the reading of the Megillah."³¹ Roke'ah (R. Elazar of Worms, 12c., Germany) concurs: "Women . . . are obligated to listen [to the Megillah]."³² Similarly, Ba'al ha-Ittur states: "Women . . . are obligated to listen to the reading of the Megillah . . . but they are not obligated to read [the Megillah]."³³ Rabbenu Simḥah (R. Simḥah ben Shmuel of Speyer, 12c., Germany) also states "and they [women] are not obligated to read [the Megillah] but only to hear."³⁴ Rabbenu Hannanel, Roke'ah, Ittur and Rabbenu Simḥah do not deal with whether women can fulfill the Megillah obligation for others. Ran, however, after presenting the view that women are only obligated to hear, states that women "fulfill the obligation [in Megillah] for other women, even though they do not fulfill the obligation for men."³⁵

Accordingly, the Tosefta and the Bavli can be reconciled in the following fashion. The final phrase of the Tosefta is understood to mean that "women are exempt [from *reading* the Megillah]." As such, they cannot fulfill the obligation for men. However, according to this reading of the Tosefta, women are obligated to *hear* the Megillah and thus may read for other women. This, in fact, is the position of the Bahag according to Tosafot,³² Rosh³⁵ (R. Asher ben Yehiel, 13c., Spain) and Ran.³⁴

The Bavli can be explained in a similar fashion. The inclusion of women in Megillah does not refer to women reading the Megillah for men; rather it refers to women reading the Megillah for other women. This, in accordance with the opinion of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, that women are obligated—and this is what Tosafot adds—to *listen* to the reading of the Megillah.³⁵

3. Blessing, "Li-shmoa'" or "Al Mikra?"

Separate from the issue of whether women should read or hear the Megillah, is the question, which blessing should women recite? According to the school of Rashi, that women are obligated to read and can fulfill the obligation of men, it would seem that they would recite the blessing "*al mikra Megillah*" for *reading* the Megillah.

Even according to those like *Semag* who declare that women cannot read for men because of external reasons, since they are fundamentally obligated in "*kri'ab*," when reading for women it would seem that they would still recite the blessing "*al mikra Megillah*."

The text of the *berakhab* becomes less clear according to the view of *Yosafot* and others who believe that women cannot read for men because they are obligated to *hear* Megillah, while men have the higher obligation of *reading*. On the one hand, it can be argued that if women are obligated to listen to the Megillah, they should recite the blessing of "*li-shmoa'*" when reading for other women. On the other hand, although the fulfillment of the *mizvah* (*kiyyum ha-mizvah*) is accomplished through *shmi'ab*, the reality is that this "*kiyyum*" can only be achieved through the act of reading. Hence "*al mikra*" should still be recited.⁵⁶

Ra'avyah (R. Eliezer ben Rabbenu Yoel Halevi, 12c., Germany) who is in agreement with the position that women are fundamentally obligated only in hearing Megillah, is the first Rishon to declare definitively that when reading for other women, a woman must recite "*li-shmoa'*." This is the case, Ra'avyah adds, even ("*afilu*") when a woman reads for herself. One would have thought otherwise. It is one thing to recite "*li-shmoa'*" when others are listening. It is more difficult to say the blessing "*li-shmoa'*" when the only listener is the reader. Notwithstanding this concern, Ra'avyah writes, "and it seems to me that women recite the blessing of listening to the Megillah even if they read for themselves."⁵⁷

This reading of Ra'avyah is supported by Mordekhai (R. Mordekhai ben Hillel, 13c., Germany). In explaining the Bavli and Tosefta as relating to a woman's obligation to hear the Megillah, Mordekhai explicitly states that women can "fulfill [the obligation] for other women like them." It is here that Mordekhai quotes Ra'avyah verbatim.⁵⁸

III. *Shulhan 'Arukh* and Rama

With this background, we can understand the different views on this issue as presented in the *Shulhan 'Arukh* (R. Yosef Caro, 16c., Erez Yisrael) and Rama (R. Moshe ben Yisrael Isserles, 16c., Poland). R.

Yosef Karo writes, "All are obligated in the reading of the Megillah, men, women. . . . The reader and the one who listens to the reader fulfill their obligation with the proviso that the listener is on the same level of obligation as the reader. . . . *Ve-yeshb omrim*, and there are those who say, that women cannot fulfill the obligation for men." The Rama adds, "*Ve-yeshb omrim*, and there are those who say, if a woman reads for herself, she recites the blessing 'to hear the Megillah' (*li-shmoa'*) as she is not obligated in reading the Megillah."³⁹

Based on our review of the Rishonim, the *Sbulhan Arukh* and Rama can be clearly understood. The first view of the Mehaber is that of the school of Rashi, that women can read for men. The second view, the Mehaber's "*ve-yeshb omrim*" that women cannot read for men, is, according to *Magen Avraham* (R. Avraham Gombiner, 17c., Poland) referring to the school of *Semag*, that women cannot read for men because of external reasons.⁴⁰ Alternatively, Gaon of Vilna (R. Elyahu of Vilna, 18c., Shklov) postulates that the Mehaber's "*ve-yeshb omrim*" is the view of Tosafot that women cannot read for men as women are obligated in "*sbmi'ah*" while men are obligated in "*kri'ah*."⁴¹

According to Mehaber's "*ve-yeshb omrim*," it is unclear whether women would recite the blessing of "*kri'ah*" or "*sbmi'ah*." It is here that Rama, in his "*ve-yeshb omrim*," quotes Mordekhai who, in his commentary, had quoted Ra'avyah who said that when a woman reads the Megillah for other women, she would recite the blessing "*li-shmoa'*."⁴² In fact, the language of Rama is almost identical with Mordekhai's quote of Ra'avyah. Note the similarity: Mordekhai quoting Ra'avyah writes "*de-nasbim mevarkhot 'al mishma' Megillah ve-afilu* (the Aramaic equivalent of *im*) *kar'u le-azman*," "women recite the blessing to hear Megillah and even if they read for themselves." Rama writes "*Im ba-ishbah kar'ab le-azmah, mevarekhet li-shmoa' Megillah*," "if a woman reads for herself she recites the blessing *li-shmoa' Megillah*." The major difference between the two formulations is that Rama inverts the sentence and skips the word "*ve-afilu*" when quoting Mordekhai in the name of Ra'avyah. But it is common to understand "*im*, if" as implicitly meaning "*ve-afilu im*, even if." In other words, not only when a woman reads for other women, but even if she reads for herself, the blessing of "*li-shmoa'*" is recited.

It is important to note that Rama, in his *Darkehei Moshe* commentary on the *Tur* (R. Ya'akov Ba'al ha-Turim, 14c., Spain), cites Mordekhai as supporting Bahag's ruling that women cannot fulfill the obligation for men.⁴³ It is, therefore, not surprising that Mordekhai is also cited in the brackets following the Rama's statement, indicating that Mordekhai was the source upon which Rama based his comment.⁴⁴

IV. Ahronim

During the period of the late authorities (Ahronim), both permissive and restrictive approaches took hold.

1. Permissive Approach

On the permissive side, some Ahronim argued that the view of Rishonim that women cannot read for men because women are obligated to hear while men are obligated to read, may apply only to the day, not the night. This reasoning flows from various approaches used to understand the distinction between hearing and reading.

Some Ahronim argue that hearing the Megillah is a function of the obligation to publicize the Purim reading, *pirsumei nisa*.⁴⁵ Here, women and men are equally obligated since *pirsumei nisa* applies equally to both. This is the obligation at night. Reading, however, is an added obligation during the day. While the nature of the added obligation is a matter of dispute, they have a common denominator - the exemption of women.

Marḥeshet suggests that the added obligation is linked to the *mitzvah* of reading Hallel; praise is, of course, due God on Purim.⁴⁶ Alternatively, *Hedvat Hasbem* connects the reading of the Megillah to the *mitzvah* of remembering and obliterating Amalek since Haman was an Amalakit.⁴⁷ *Kebillat Ya'akov* relates it to the *mitzvah* of *sho'atin ve-dorshin*, i.e., the *mitzvah* of Talmud Torah. In other words, the obligation to read the Megillah parallels and, indeed, intersects with the obligation to study the laws of Purim.⁴⁸ Let us now examine each of these positions.

Concerning the added dimension in Megillah to recite Hallel, *Marḥeshet* notes that "women are exempt from Hallel."⁴⁹ He then writes: "even according to the view of Bahag, [the inability of women to be *mozi* men] would only apply during the day [as they, unlike men, are exempt from Hallel]. But concerning the reading of the Megillah at night, at which time there is no obligation in Hallel as the obligation to recite Hallel only applies to the day . . . and the Megillah is read at night only for *pirsumei nisa*, women can fulfill the obligation for men, as their obligation is equal."⁵⁰

Hedvat Hasbem makes a similar comment concerning the connection between Megillah reading and Amalek. He cites *Marḥeshet* who argues that there is no obligation even for men to remember Amalek at night. This is based on the *Sefer ha-Hinukh*, who links going to war against Amalek to remembering Amalek.⁵¹ Therefore, just as there is no *mitzvah* to destroy Amalek at night as there is no judgment then (*de-en danim ba-laylah*), so is there no *mitzvah* to mention Amalek at night. *Hedvat Hasbem* then writes: "Therefore, concerning

the [Megillah] reading at night, even men do not fulfill the *mizvah* of remembering Amalek. Hence, men are also only obligated at night from the perspective of *sbmi'ab* like women, and, therefore, at night women can be *mozi* men as their obligation is equal."⁵² During the day, however, a woman may not read the Megillah for men as reading it is a function of remembering Amalek. Since women, unlike men, are exempt from destroying Amalek, so are they exempt from remembering Amalek.⁵³

The view of *Kebillat Ya'akov*, that Megillah includes the added dimension of Talmud Torah, is also mentioned by *Hedvat Hashem*. *Hedvat Hashem* explains that women may read the Megillah for men at night since ritualized forms of Talmud Torah are only applicable during the day. He writes: "From the perspective that everyone is obligated to read [the Megillah] in its proper time, [an obligation] which is based on our mandate [to be involved] in Talmud Torah, [it ought be remembered that] that obligation only applies to the day, like the public reading of the Torah on every holiday which is limited to the day. It follows that when men read the Megillah at night, it is not a function of *sho'atin ve-dorshin*. Hence, for both [men and women] there is only the law of *pirsumei nisa*, and the obligation of men and women are equal, and they, therefore, can fulfill each others' obligation."⁵⁴

Additionally, *Turei Even* (R. Aryeh Leib Gunzberg, 18c., Frankfurt on the Oder) introduces a new understanding of Bahag. The reason why women cannot read for men is not a function of *sbmi'ab* and *kri'ah*, but rather it is because the source of their obligations are different. Women are obligated in Megillah *mi-de-rabbanan* since they too were part of the miracle.⁵⁵ Men, on the other hand, are obligated in Megillah *mi-divrei kabbalah*, in this case, from the Megillah itself. The status of obligation *mi-divrei kabbalah* is more than *mi-de-rabbanan* although it is not quite on the level of a Biblical obligation.⁵⁶ Basing himself on *Turei Even*, *Hedvat Hashem* writes, "The upshot is, that at night women may fulfill a man's obligation, because at night they are both on the same level [of obligation] as even men are only obligated [to hear Megillah] rabbinically and are not obligated *mi-divrei kabbalah*. And when Bahag writes that a woman may not fulfill the obligation of a man, this applies only during the day when his obligation is greater."⁵⁷

The distinction between day and night may resolve the contradiction between the Tosefot and the Bavli, as the Tosefot which states that a woman does not fulfill a man's obligation refers to the day, while the Bavli which speaks of a woman being able to fulfill a man's obligation refers to the night.⁵⁸

2. Restrictive Approach

A more restrictive attitude also emerged amongst some Ahronim. This attitude is found both within the position that women cannot read for men because of external reasons as well as the position that women cannot read for men because their level of obligation is less (*sbtmi'ab* vs. *kri'ab*).

Concerning the position that women cannot read for men because of external reasons, *Korban Netanel* (R. Netanel ben Naftali Zevi Weil, 17c., Germany) insists that Tosafot's understanding of Bahag, that women cannot read for men because of *zila milta*, extends also to reading for women. In other words, not only is it *zila milta* if a woman reads for men, it is also *zila milta* if a woman reads for a number of other women. However, a woman reading for one woman is not *zila milta*.⁵⁹

Concerning the position that women cannot read for men because their level of obligation is less, *Magen Avraham* quotes *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* on Rut (which is part of the *Zohar*) as stating that a woman cannot read the Megillah for women, and not even for herself.⁶⁰ *Hayyei Adam* (R. Avraham Danzig, late 18c., Vilna) disagrees, insisting that the correct reading of *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* on Rut indicates that a woman has a right to read for herself, but not for other women.⁶¹

Both the positions of *Korban Netanel* and *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, as understood by *Magen Avraham* and *Hayyei Adam*, need further clarification.

Korban Netanel is difficult because the Tosafot which speaks of *zila milta* refers to the case of a woman leading *zimmun* or reading Megillah for men. Extending *zila milta* to a woman reading for other women is a forced reading of Tosafot.⁶² Moreover, Bahag, which Tosafot sets out to explain, speaks of whether or not women can fulfill the Megillah obligation for men. In the words of *Ijedvat Hashem*: "However, this view [*Korban Netanel*] is very difficult. Because Bahag, and, indeed, all Rishonim who quote Bahag only speak of a woman fulfilling the obligation for men [in Megillah], and not of women fulfilling the obligation [of Megillah] for other women. How then can Tosafot quote this law that women are unable to fulfill the obligation for other women [in Megillah] in the name of Bahag?"⁶³

The restrictive explanation of *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* is similarly difficult since it runs contrary to the total text. *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* states: "And Rabbi Abba said, 'women . . . are obligated in the reading of Megillah. But they do not read for others (*le-aherim*).'"⁶⁴ From the context it seems clear that "*le-aherim*" means for men—coming as it does on the heels of the comment of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* that women should not recite Grace After Meals for men.⁶⁵ Additionally,

the phrase in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, "aval ben enan ko'rot le-aherim," "but they do not read for others," could easily mean the following: "They, the women, do not read for others," that is, for men.⁶⁶ Finally, even if *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* presents a position that a woman cannot read for other women, it must be pointed out that this is a statement found in the *Zohar*, a non-halakhically binding text, one which runs contrary to the view of every Rishon.⁶⁷

3. Mishnah Brurah, 'Arukh ha-Shulhan and other Poskim

Notwithstanding these difficulties, *Mishnah Brurah* (R. Israel Meir Ha-Kohen [Hafez Hayyim], late 19c-early 20c., Poland) utilizes these positions to explain the *yesh omrim* of the Mehaber and the *yesh omrim* of the Rama. The *yesh omrim* of the Mehaber denying a woman the right to read for men is, according to *Mishnah Brurah*, either based on *kened ha-zibbur*⁶⁸ or on her lesser level of obligation, i.e. *shmi'ah* vs. *kri'ah*.⁶⁹ Either understanding of this denial, *Mishnah Brurah* argues, would even apply to a woman reading for one man.⁷⁰ *Mishnah Brurah* concludes his understanding of the *yesh omrim* of the Mehaber by stating that a woman may read for "haventab"—which, Hafez Hayyim in his *Sba'ar ba-Ziyun* citing *Korban Netanel* explains to mean for one woman. Only in that case does *zila milta* not apply.⁷¹

Mishnah Brurah then explains Rama by first citing *Magen Avraham's* understanding of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* that a woman should not even read for herself. He then continues, basing himself on *Hayyei Adam's* understanding of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, that if no man is there to read for her, a woman may read the Megillah for herself, reciting the blessing "lishmoa' mikra Megillah."⁷²

As we have already pointed out, explaining Mehaber's *yesh omrim* with *Korban Netanel* is difficult because it would have the Mehaber agree with a forced reading of Tosafot and Rosh. Indeed, R. Yosef Karo makes no mention of this forced ruling in his *Bet Yosef* commentary on the Tur.⁷³ Similarly, identifying Rama's position as being based on an understanding of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, that a woman cannot read for other women, would have the Rama depending on a position found in the *Zohar* that seems to run contrary to every other Rishon.⁷⁴ In fact, Rama himself, in his *Darkhei Moshe*, states that a position of the *Zohar* should be given no greater halakhic weight than the *da'at yahid* of R. Shimon.⁷⁵ Rama goes on to cite Rabbi Yosef Karo who maintains that we do not rule in accordance with the *Zohar* when it runs contrary to the way the talmudic text is generally understood.⁷⁶ It is, therefore, not surprising that Rama makes no mention of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* in discussing Megillah reading in his *Darkhei Moshe*.⁷⁷

'*Arukh ha-Shulhan* (R. Yehiel Mikhel Epstein, 19c., Belorussia) explains the Mehaber and Rama based upon the mainstream of the positions of the Rishonim. The second opinion of Mehaber denying women the right to read for men is based, according to '*Arukh ha-Shulhan*, on *kevod ha-zibbur*. This would apply to women reading for men, not to women reading for women (even more than one woman). Rama, according to '*Arukh ha-Shulhan*, then states that women cannot read for men because they are only obligated to hear while men are obligated to read. It is here that '*Arukh ha-Shulhan* offers a novel interpretation of this view suggesting that women have a lesser *hiyyuv* because a woman's obligation in *pirsumei nisa* is less than that of a man. "However," '*Arukh ha-Shulhan* concludes, "women can fulfill the obligation for other women since they are on the same level of obligation."⁷⁸

Today there are authorities who object to a woman reading the Megillah for others. For example, Rabbi Hershel Schachter prohibits groups of women from hearing the Megillah from one another.⁷⁹ Other Torah scholars permit a woman to read the Megillah for other women.⁸⁰ For example, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein gave his imprimatur to such a reading at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Israel.⁸¹

In fact, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef extends this right even to women reading the Megillah for men. He writes: "In truth, we follow the halakhah that even regarding reading the Megillah, women can fulfill the obligation of men. [This is] in accordance with the view of Rambam, Rashi, *Or Zarua'*. . . . And this is the decision of our teacher the *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* in the general opinion (*stam*) he puts forth. Except that he concludes: 'and there are those who say that women cannot fulfill the obligation of their male counterparts.' And the principle is well known that when [*Shulhan 'Arukh* presents two opinions, one] a '*stam*' opinion and a '*yesb onurim*,' the law is like the '*stam*' view."⁸²

V. Megillah and Minyan

There is another issue that must be considered relative to a woman's right to read Megillah for someone else. Does Megillah reading require a minyan, and, if so, may women be counted in that minyan? Tangentially, does a group of women reading the Megillah run contrary to the preference that the Megillah be read in the largest assemblage possible—in the spirit of "*be-rov 'am badrat melekh*?"

The Talmud (*Megillah* 5a) states: "Rav said: 'On the actual day of Purim, the Megillah may be read even by an individual, but on the

alternative days [lit., not in its proper time]⁸⁵ it should be read only in a company of ten.' Rav Assi, however, said: 'Whether on the actual day or on the alternative days, it should be read only in a company of ten.' In an actual case, Rav gave weight to the opinion of Rav Assi [and extended himself to assemble ten persons]."

Rif concludes: "Even though Rav gave weight to the view of R. Assi, we follow the view of Rav, because Rav Yohanan follows this position."⁸⁶ On the day of Purim, therefore, one may read the Megillah individually, although it is preferable that it be read with a minyan. On alternative days it should only be read in a company of ten.

Rabbenu Tam states that one need not pursue a minyan to read the Megillah even *le-kbathilla*.⁸⁷ This applies to the fourteenth (or fifteenth), the day of Purim itself. However, Bahag concludes that the Megillah must always be read before ten people.⁸⁸ *Bah* notes that Bahag follows the view of Rav Assi that ten are required at all times, even *bi-de'avad*.⁸⁹

Sbulhan Arukh concludes: "On the fourteenth or fifteenth day [the fifteenth is the proper time to read the Megillah in a city surrounded by walls from the time of Joshua], one must seek out ten [before whom the Megillah should be read], and if ten were not found, an individual may [nevertheless] read the Megillah."⁹⁰

Assuming that women are obligated to read the Megillah, and that a minyan is necessary or at least preferable, the question is whether women may be counted toward such a minyan. There are three approaches to this question.⁹¹

The first approach clearly restricts participation in a minyan to men alone. The exclusion may be based on the talmudic statement (*Berakhot* 45b), "*ve-ha me'ah nashai kitrei gavrei daniyan*," a hundred women are compared (from this legal perspective) to two men. Rashi understands this phrase to refer exclusively to the obligation of *zimmun*, the quorum needed to introduce the Grace After Meals. In his words: "They are not obligated to participate in *zimmun*, but if they wish they may."⁹² Tosafot, on the other hand, associates the phrase with "*le-'inyan kibbuz tefillah u-le-'inyan kol davar she-be-'asarah*," indicating that women are not counted as part of a minyan for "public prayer and everything that requires ten." From the perspective of Tosafot, women are excluded, in all circumstances, from being counted into a minyan for prayer, or for that matter, for any other purpose that "requires ten" according to Jewish law.⁹³

Beyond the legal exclusion of women from being counted for a minyan,⁹² there emerged a school of thought which defined a minyan as a group of ten people united by a common obligation. From this perspective, there is no absolute declaration that women are neces-

sarily ineligible for a minyan. Participants in a minyan must share a mutual obligation. If women share the obligation equally, they are counted; if not, they are excluded. Indeed, in matters concerning a minyan, Meiri points out: "There are those who say that in cases where women are equally obligated as men, they are counted toward the ten."⁹⁵

From this perspective it would follow that if women are mandated to read the Megillah, they may be counted toward a Megillah minyan. So declares Meiri⁹⁴ and Ran. In the words of Ran: "How is it possible that women can fulfill the obligation of men to read the Megillah and not be counted with them as part of the [Megillah] minyan? Certainly they can be counted."⁹⁵

Rama leaves the question of including women in the Megillah minyan unresolved as it would depend upon the degree of obligation that women have with respect to that *mizvah*. If a woman's obligation is on the same level as that of a man (i.e., *kri'ah*), they are counted into the minyan. If not (and their obligation is only *shmi'ah*), they may not be part of the minyan.⁹⁶

Rabbi Aryeh Frimer suggests that there is a third approach to minyan. He writes: "It is necessary to differentiate between two types of minyanim. Normally, the Sages required ten male adults as a prerequisite for the performance of particular rituals, generally communal in nature. However, in certain cases, the minyan is not intrinsic to the performance of the *mizvah*, for the obligation is essentially the individual's. Rather, the minyan is needed only to give 'publicity' to the performance. In such a case, women are counted even if their obligation is not equivalent to that of men."⁹⁷

Separate from the issue of whether women can be counted with men to make up a Megillah minyan is the question of whether women can make up the necessary quorum of ten by themselves for a women's Megillah reading. R. Zevi Pesach Frank,⁹⁸ R. Yehudah Eliezer Waldenberg⁹⁹ and R. Ovadiah Yosef¹⁰⁰ agree that they can. For a women's Megillah minyan, women can be counted for one of two reasons: either because they are all on an equal level of obligation, or because the public reading of Megillah is based on the principle of *pitsumei nisa* where women can be equally included. In the words of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef: "We reject that which R. Menasheh Klein wrote in *Mishneh Halakhot* against the custom of women to make a minyan for themselves to read the Megillah. His arguments are not clear. On the contrary, we should encourage such activities, provided the reader is an expert able to read correctly."¹⁰¹

VI. Conclusion

The issue of women reading Megillah for others touches the very core of the process of *pesak*. There has emerged in contemporary times a popular pattern of *pesak halakhah* which places almost exclusive reliance on the *Misbruh Brurah*. According to those who follow this position, women should not read Megillah even for other women.¹⁰²

By contrast there is no Rishon who explicitly states that a woman may not read the Megillah for other women. Moreover, many Ahronim support the position that women are permitted to read the Megillah for other women. This is not only the dominant position throughout Jewish history, but also the position in greatest conformity to the talmudic *sugya*, as we have seen.

Our analysis further indicates that while many authorities did not demand a minyan for Megillah reading (certainly when Megillah is read on Purim day), even if deemed necessary, women can make up that quorum for themselves.

The issue of women reading Megillah for men is more complex. Here, even the early authorities are divided. Later authorities seem more inclined to permit this kind of reading at night rather than during the day.¹⁰³

Whether women can be counted with men to make up a Megillah minyan—if a minyan for Megillah is necessary—is a subject of considerable debate. Of course, if ten men are present, there would be no need to even deal with the question, as a minyan would already be present.

It would be difficult to prohibit women's Megillah reading based on the *rov 'am* principle as there are countless examples of many Megillah readings sponsored by individual shuls. It is precisely because *rov 'am* is not mandatory that some *Puskim* have even suggested that women hear the Megillah at home, arguing that it is often difficult to hear the Megillah in the women's section as it is being read.¹⁰⁴

While rabbis are within their right to rely on the minority opinion of halakhic authorities who prohibit women's Megillah reading, they fall short if, in this process, they do not give credence to those who, basing themselves on sources clearly rooted in Halakhah, permit a woman to read the Megillah for other women.¹⁰⁵

It is important—especially at a time when *ahavat Yisrael* is so desperately needed—that every one involved in this intense debate realize that the Halakhah on this matter is not monolithic. Within clear guidelines there can often be two legitimate opposite opinions—and

both may be correct in the spirit of "elu ve-elu divrei Elokim hayyim" (*Eruvin* 13b). All sides in this debate should heed the words of Dr. David Berger: "Controversies over women's issues have lately created a particularly great danger of fragmentation, and we must beware of making disagreements which do not touch upon fundamentals of the faith the cause of schism within Modern Orthodoxy itself."¹⁰⁶

One other point needs to be made. The argument that women asking to read Megillah are motivated by insincere feminist quests is particularly unfortunate.¹⁰⁷ Having met countless numbers of women in my synagogue, in my Torah classes at Stern College of Yeshiva University,¹⁰⁸ in our Torat Miriam fellowship, and in communities around the world who are seeking to participate in women's Megillah reading, I know first hand of their sincere motivation.

The right of women to read the Megillah has a clear basis in Halakhah. Their quest through this experience to reach higher religious levels of learning and spiritual striving is exemplary and should be applauded.

Notes

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1. In general, women can fulfill the obligation for men only if they share the same level of obligation. For example, since women and men are equally obligated to light Hanukkah candles, a woman may light Hanukkah candles for a man. See *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 675:3, and *Taz, ibid.*, 675:4, s.v. *she-af bi hayyevet*.
2. I have not followed the common practice of translating *avadim* as "slaves." The concept of slavery as understood in contemporary times is foreign to Jewish thought, and "slaves," therefore, would be a misleading and inappropriate English translation.

There are several terms in the Torah that have no suitable English equivalent. Such terms should not be translated. Leaving them in the original Hebrew makes the reader understand that a more detailed analysis of the word is necessary. See my "Women and Sister Torah," *Tradition* 20:2 (Summer 1982):106-18, where the term "tumah" is also not translated for this reason.

3. *Or Zarua: Hil. Megillah* 2:368.

4. *Het ha Behirah, Megillah* 4a. Meiri adds, "or from the Jerusalem Talmud." Meiri is here referring to the statement in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Megillah* 2:5) that R. Yehoshua b. Levi gathered his children and family together and read the Megillah for them. Some commentators suggest that this proves that women cannot read

- for others. However, argues Meiri, positions in the Bavli take precedence over those found in the Yerushalmi. It could also be added that it is not necessarily the case that the Jerusalem Talmud is positing that women cannot read for others, for it may simply be recording a particular incident where a man read for his children and family, not precluding the possibility of women reading for others as well. The statement of Bar Kapparah in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Megillah* 2:5) that one must read the Megillah before women and minors may mean that women are also obligated in Megillah.
5. Rashi, *Arukhin* 3a, s.v. *la-atarei*.
 6. Rashba (R. Shlomo ben Avraham Ibn Ader, late 13c., Spain), *Megillah* 4a, presents a similar position. After quoting the Bavli as the source for the view that women are obligated to read the Megillah and can, therefore, fulfill the obligation for men, he quotes the Tosefta as the source supporting the position that women are obligated only to hear the Megillah and can therefore not fulfill the obligation for men. Rashba then declares that the Tosefta is an erroneous text (*shubshetu bi*). Hence, R. Ovadiah Yosef in *Sefer She'elat u-Teshuvot Yehaveh Da'at* 3:51, lists Rashba as supporting the position that women can fulfill the Megillah obligation for men.
 7. *Sefer ha-Mikhtam, Megillah* 4a.
 8. *Piskei ha-Rid, Megillah* 2:3; Riaz quoted in *Shiltei Gibborim* on R. Alfasi's commentary to *Megillah* 4a, n. 2.
 9. *Nimukei Yosef, Megillah* 4a, s.v. *she-ef*, 9a. *Sefer ha-Ma'orot* (R. Meir ben Shimon mi-Narbonne Ila-Me'ila, 13c., Provence), *Megillah* 4a, also states that women can read for men. However, in his commentary to *Megillah* 19a, he is more stringent. Note also *Bab* (R. Yosef Sirkes, 16c., Poland) to *Tur Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 689, s.v. *u-Ba'al ha-Itur katan*, who quotes the *Itur* (R. Yizhak ben Abba Mari, 12c., Provence) permitting women to read for men. However, a reading of the *Itur* indicates that women cannot read for men. See *Aseret ha-Dibrot, Hilkhot Megillah*, 110a, 113b.
 10. Rambam, *Hil. Megillah* 1:1.
 11. *Maggid Mishneh* in his commentary to Rambam, *ibid.*, 1-2. See also *Shiltei Gibborim* to *Megillah* 4a, n. 2, who concurs.
 12. *Sefer Yere'im, 'amud sav, issurim na'asim ve adani na'aseh va lu-shumeim va-la la-briyot*, p. 124a.
 13. *Sefer ha-Manbig, Hilkhot Megillah, siman* 25-28, p. 249. *Sefer ha-Manbig* links these cases, as Esther in the Purim story and Yehudit in the Chanukkah story were each involved in bringing about the miracle.
 14. *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim*, 675:3.
 15. The position that women can fulfill the obligation of men is implicit in other Rishonim who do not distinguish between men and women in Megillah reading. See *Rif* (R. Alfasi, 11c., N. Africa), *Megillah* 4a. See also *Ey ha-Hayyim* by R. Ya'akov Hazzan mi-Lundritz (13c., England), *Hilkhot Megillah*, beginning of the second perek. *Perush Rabbeinu Yehonatan me-Lunel* (12c., Provence), *Megillah* 2b; *Shibbolei ha-Leket* (R. Binyamin ben Avraham ha-Rofe, 13c., Italy), siman 195, p. 75.
 16. *Sefer ha-Meorot, Megillah* 19b.
 17. See *Orhot Hayyim, Hilkhot Megillah u-Purim*, siman 2 and *Kol Be* to *Megillah* 103. Cf. R. Ovadiah Yosef, *Sefer She'elat u-Teshuvot Yehaveh Da'at* 3:51 who quotes *Hiddushot ha-Rashba, Berakhot* 24a, that "The law of *kol isbah ervah* only applies to songs or greetings of an endearing nature, but words alone (*kol derarin be-'alma*) are permitted." In a conversation I had with R. Ovadiah Yosef he told me that a woman reading the Megillah is not a violation of *kol isbah*. Also see R. Saul J. Berman, "Kol Isbah," in *Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume*, ed. R. Leo Landman (New York, 1980), 45-66.
 18. See also Auerbach's edition of *Sefer ha-Eshkol* (R. Avraham Av Bet-Din, 12c., Provence), *Hil. Hasmuklav u-Purim*, siman 9, which also states that women may

not read Megillah for men because of *kol ishab*. However, the Auerbach edition of the *Misur* is known to have questionable veracity. See Israel Ta-Shema, *R. Zerachyah ba-Levi Ba'al ha-Ma'or u-Veney Hugo* (Jerusalem, 1992), 40-41; see also Hanokh Albeck, in his introduction to *Sefer ha Eshkol. Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2:147 concludes: "Although there are no grounds for accusing Auerbach of willfully tampering with the manuscript, the version of the Eshkol that Albeck had in hand is undoubtedly the authentic one."

19. *Tosafot, Sukkah* 38a, s.v. *ha-emet amru*. This is the first of many different ways to understand the Bahag's position, as will be explained later on.
20. *Semag, Mizvat Aseh* n. 4 of *Dvoret Sofrim*.
21. *Ritva, Megillah* 4a, s.v. *ve-amar R. Yehoshua b. Levi* Ritva states that if women read Megillah for men "it is not *kevod le-zibbur* and falls into the category of *me'erab* ('shame')." Note *Semak (Sefer Atzevot Katan* of R. Isaac of Corbeil, 13c., France), *Yom Shlishi*, 299, who writes that while women are obligated to read Megillah, they cannot fulfill the obligation of men. However, *Semak* does not say which external reason prevents women from fulfilling the Megillah obligation for men.
22. See above, n. 20.
23. *Beit ha-Behrab, Megillah* 4a. Meiri argues that if the text reads "*nashnim peturin*," women are exempt, why is there a need for the Tosafot to then say "*sbe-ein mazi'in*," that they cannot fulfill the obligation [of others].
24. *Hiddushei ha-Rushba, Megillah* 4a.
25. *Hiddushei ha-Ran, Megillah* 4a.
26. See *Tosafot, Arakhin* 3a, s.v. *le-atuyei*.
27. Rabbeinu Hannanel, *Megillah* 4:1, s.v. *ve-amar R. Yehoshua [ben Levi]*.
28. *Roke'ah, Hilkhot Purim*, n. 236.
29. *Asevet ha-Dvoret, Hilkhot Megillah*, s.v. *mi kore*, p. 226.
30. Rabbeinu Simhah is quoted in *Haggabot Maimoniyot* to Ramban. *Ill. Megillah* 1:1. See also *Leket Yasher* (R. Yosef b. Moshe, 15c, Germany) (Jerusalem, 1964), 156. He argues that since women are only obligated in *shmi'ah*, they need not hear a clear enunciation of every letter of the Megillah, "*hitukh ha-atuyot*." It should be noted that in *Leket Yasher*, R. Yosef b. Moshe was presenting many of the customs and laws of R. Israel Isserlein, the *Terumat ha-Deshen* (15c., Germany).
31. *Hiddushei ha-Ran to Megillah* 4a, s.v. *nashnim hayayot*. See Ran to Rif, *Megillah* 4a, who after quoting the Tosafot states that it is not correct, "*emo mehavet*," in the end, however, Ran states "it is proper to be concerned with his [Baltag] words and, therefore, be stringent." Here it appears that Ran is less enthusiastic in his support of Bahag, although he concludes that it is best to "be stringent."
32. *Tosafot, Arakhin* 3a, s.v. *le-atuyei*, writes that the Tosafot ends with the words "women... are exempt from reading Megillah." *Tosafot* then adds: "And Halakhot Gedolot [Baltag] adds, 'but they [the women] are obligated to hear.'"

It should be noted that the *Tosafot* in *Megillah* 4a, s.v. *nashnim hayayot be-mikra Megillah*, has an alternative version of the Tosafot that does not include the final phrase of "women are exempt." From *androgynus*, however, one can deduce that women cannot read the Megillah for men. If an *androgynus*, whose status is "female plus" cannot fulfill the reading obligation of a male, certainly a woman cannot. It follows that while women cannot read for men, they can read for other women as their obligation is the same, to *hear* the Megillah.
33. *Rosh, Megillah* 4a.
34. *Hiddushei ha-Ran, Megillah* 4a, s.v. *nashim hayayot*.
35. Note *Shittah Mekubetzet* (R. Bezalel Ashkenazi, 16c., Erez Yisrael), s.v. *Tosafot le-atuyei*, who cites a text of the Bavli that reads "*le-atuyei mai? Le-atuyei katan*." "What does the word '*ha-kol*' mean to include? It is meant to include a minor." Accordingly, the Bavli would not be in conflict with the Tosafot.
36. Perhaps this relates to the general question Rav Yusef Dow Soloveitchik, of

- blessed memory, often raised of whether the *musaf ha-berakhah* describes the *ma'aseh ha-mizvab* or the *kinyum ha-mizvab*.
37. Ra'avyah, *Masokhei Megillah*, n. 569. Ra'avyah also writes: "It is obvious (*davar pashut*) that women can read for themselves (*le-azman*)."
 38. Mordekhai to *Megillah* 4a. It must be noted that many later Rishonim, mostly German, quoted both Bahag and Kaslu without taking a position on the issue. For example, see Rosh (R. Asher ben Yehiel, 13c., Germany/Spain) to *Megillah* 4a; *Haggabot Maimoniyot* (R. Meir ben Yekutiel ha-Kohen, 13c., Germany) to Rambam, *Hil. Megillah* 1-1; *Sefer ha-Aquddah* (R. Alexandria Zuslan ha-Kohen, 14c., Germany) to *Arakchin* 3a, s.v. *ha-kol, Hu-Agur* (R. Yaakov Landau, 15c., Germany), *Hil. Harnukkah, siman* 43, p. 164; Rabbenu Yeruham (ben Meshulam, 14c., Northern France and later Spain — a major pupil of the Rosh whose roots were in Germany), *Toledot Adam ve-Havah, Netiv 'Asiri, Hefek bet*, p. 63.
 39. *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 689:1,2. Note *Shabb* (R. Shabtai b. Meir ha-Kohen, 17c., Moravia), *Yoreh De'ah* 94:3, who rules that whenever *Shulhan 'Arukh* quotes an opinion and then states "yesh mi she-omer," the Halakhah always follows the first opinion. It is likely that this applies to "yesh omrin" as well.
 40. *Magen Avraham* to *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 689:5 quotes the Re'em (R. Eliyahu ben Abraham Mizrahi, 16c., Turkey) who argues that this would apply to a woman reading even for one man. The principle of *lo plug*, making no distinctions, applies in this case. Just as she cannot read for many men, she cannot read even for one man.
 41. Gaon of Vilna, *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 689, s.v. *ve-yesh omrin she-hanashim*.
 42. Having never seen Ra'avyah's commentary in the original, Rama quotes Mordekhai in Ra'avyah's name. From this perspective, the Rama is not offering a new opinion concerning a woman's reading Megillah for others. What he states is that if one follows the *yesh omrin*, the blessing *Hishmor* should be recited.
 43. See *Darkei Moshe* to *Tur, Orah Hayyim* 689:1. While *Darkei Moshe* also cites *Rush* and *Ram, Megillah* 4a, as supporting Bahag's view, it must be emphasized that these Rishonim make no reference to a woman's inability to read for other women.
 44. See brackets at end of Rama to *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 689:2.
 45. See, for example, *Avnei Nezer* (R. Avraham ben Zev Nahum Bornstein, 19c., Germany), n. 511; *Marheshet* (R. Hanoch Eiges, 20c., Vilna), n.22; *Kebillat Ya'akov* (R. Ya'akov Kanefsky, 20c., Israel), in his "Likutim" 5:50.
 46. *Marheshet*, above. See also *Kebillat Ya'akov*, above. *Marheshet* quotes R. Nahman's comment that "the reading of the Megillah is equivalent to Hallel" (*Megillah* 14a).
 47. *Hedvat Hashem* (R. Shmuel Grunberger, 20c., United States), "*Be-Inyanet Purim*," 5:3. See also *Marheshet* and *Avnei Nezer*, above.
 48. *Kebillat Ya'akov*, above.
 49. The reason is because the recital of Hallel is a positive commandment fixed by time. See *Bi'ur Halakhot* to *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 422, s.v. *Hallel*, end, who concludes that although women are exempt from Hallel, they may recite Hallel with a *berakhah*. However, women from Sephardic communities recite Hallel without a *berakhah*. See Rabbi David Auerbach (20c., Israel), *Halikhot Betab* 8:2, p. 51.
 50. *Marheshet* 22:9. As pointed out in n. 46, *Marheshet* cites R. Nafman's opinion that reading the Megillah is equivalent to Hallel (*Megillah* 14a). Therefore, just as the obligation to recite Hallel applies only to the daytime, so the obligation to read the Megillah as Hallel applies only during the day.
- Note *Emek ha-Berakhah* who disagrees with *Marheshet*, claiming women are obligated in the recital of Hallel of Purim. He reasons that this Hallel is a spontaneous Hallel rather than the classic Hallel recited on Yom Tov concerning which women are exempt. Since women are equally obligated in Hallel on Purim, they may read Megillah for men during the day. See *Emek ha-Berakhah*,

Hil. Keriyat ha-Megillah, 3; see also *Hedvat Hashbem*, above, for an extensive analysis of this position.

51. *Sefer ha-Itrukh* # 603-605.

52. *Hedvat Hashbem*, "Be-Inyanei Purim," 5:3.

53. See, for example, *Sefer ha-Hinukh* # 603, who writes: "and this *mizvab* (of remembering Amalek) applies... to men... and not women." There are authorities who maintain that women are obligated in *rekbitat Amalek*. See, for example, *Minhat Hinukh* (R. Yosef Babad, 19c, Poland), *ibid*.

54. "Be-Inyanei Purim," *Hedvat Hashbem*, 6:2; see also "Likkutim," *Kehillat Ya'akov*, 3:50.

55. Rashi, *Megillah* 4a, s.v. *she-af ben hayu be-oto ha-nes*, suggests that women were involved in the Purim miracle in the sense that Haman had decreed the murder of women as well as men (Esther 3:13). *Tosafot*, *Megillah* 4a, s.v. *she-af ben hayu be-oto ha-nes*, cites two positions: that of Rashbam, who states that the miracle of Purim was brought about because of the merit of Esther and the women of that time, and also the view of Rashi, with which *Tosafot* concurs.

Rashi and Rashbam (R. Shmuel ben Meir, 12c., France), *Pesuhim* 108b, s.v. *she-af ben hayu be-oto ha-nes*, explain "she-af" to mean that the Purim miracle occurred as a result of righteous women, including Esther. *Tosafot*, *ibid*, s.v. *hayu be-oto ha-nes*, citing a passage in the Yerushalmi, states that women were also included in Haman's decree of extinction.

56. *Turei Even*, *Megillah* 4a, s.v. *nashim hayyavot*. See also R. Daniel Shreiber, "Purim—A Halachic Overview," *Alei 'Ezra* (Shevat 5757): 67.

57. "Be-Inyanei Purim," *Hedvat Hashbem* 4:8.

See *Or Same'ah*, *Hil. Megillah* 1-1, who argues that both men and women are obligated in *Megillah mi-divei kabbalah*. However, men are obligated on a higher level as they are mandated to read the text from the scroll while women are only obligated to read it from any text, even by rote. Therefore, during the day when the *divei kabbalah* obligation is operative, women cannot read for men. Rabbinically, however, both men and women are equally obligated to read the *Megillah* from a scroll. It would seem, therefore, that at night, when there is only a rabbinic obligation to read, women could do it for men.

Note also that *Hedvat Hashbem* cites the opinion that [even at night] women cannot be *mazi* men since their obligation is a double *de-rabbanan* (i.e. *Megillah* reading for a woman is *de-rabbanan*, based on *she-af ben hayu be-oto ha-nes*, and *Megillah* reading itself is a *de-rabbanan*), while a man's obligation is a single *de-rabbanan*, and one obligated in a two *de-rabbanan mizvab* cannot fulfill the *mizvab* for one obligated in a single *de-rabbanan*. *Hedvat Hashbem*, however, notes the opinion that two *de-rabbanan*s can be *mazi* one *de-rabbanan*. See "Be-Inyanei Purim," *Hedvat Hashbem*, 4:7.

58. See "Be-Inyanei Purim," *Hedvat Hashbem*, 4:8; 6:2.

59. See *Korban Notanel*, n. 60 in Rosh on *Megillah*, *siman* 4.

60. *Magen Avraham* to *Sbuthan Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689:6. It is possible that *Magen Avraham* understands *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* on *Rut* to mean that women—even if only obligated in *sbuthab*—must hear the *Megillah* from someone who is mandated in *kr'ab*. See *Midrash Rut ha-Ikadash* (which is also called *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*), *Parsbab gimmet*.

61. See "Hilkhot *Megillah*," *Hayyot Adam* 155:11.

62. See *Tosafot* to *Sukkah* 38a, s.v. *be-emet amru*. There *Tosafot* asks, is not the *Tosetta* which states that women cannot fulfill the obligation of men in Grace After Meals proof that women are not obligated biblically (*mi-de-arat*) in that *mizvab*? To this *Tosafot* responds in his second answer that it is possible that women, like men, have a biblical obligation, but they cannot fulfill a man's obligation because of the external reason of *zita mita*. *Tosafot* notes that this is similar to *Megillah* where women may be on the same level of obligation as men but cannot read for them because of *zita mita*.

63. See "*Be-Inyani Parim*," *Hedvat Husbam*, 4:8. Note also that *Korban Netanel* makes his point, about *Tosafot's* understanding of Bahag, on Rosh's comment that a woman can read "*le-bavertab*" (see Rosh, *Megillah* 4a, s.v. *amar R. Yehoshua b. Levi*). Rather than understand "*le-bavertab*" generically, *Korban Netanel* deduces from "*le-bavertab*" that a woman may read for one woman, but not for more than one, i.e., a case which would be "*le-bavertobab*." But Rosh writes "*le-bavertab*" in his analysis that women cannot read for men because their *hiyyus* is less, i.e., one of *shmi'ah* vs. *kri'ah*. To argue that the obligation of *shmi'ah* would only allow a woman to read for one woman but not more is extremely difficult.

Apparently, *Korban Netanel* understands the lesser obligation of *shmi'ah* as being a function of *zila mita*. In other words, the internal deficiency (*shmi'ah* vs. *kri'ah*) is caused by an external flaw (*zila mita*). Given this perspective of *Korban Netanel*, it seems that he did not see the *Tosafot ba-Rosh*, *Sukkah* 38a, s.v. *be-emet amru* (written by Rosh himself), who says that *zila mita* is confined to a woman reading for men. See R. Yehudah Herzl Henkin who makes this very point in *She'efot u-Teshuvot Benet Varim* 2:10. Moreover, in the *Kizur Piskei ha-Rosh* (written by the son of the Rosh, R. Yaakov b. Asher, 14 c., Germany/Spain; *Megillah* 1:4) which summarizes the rulings of the Rosh, it is clear that a woman can read for more than one woman.

64. *Midrash Rut ha-Hadash*, *Parshat gimmel*.
 65. Rabbi Abba's comment follows the words: "We learnt, 'woe to a man whose wife or children say a blessing (Grace After Meals) for him.'"
 66. Note a similar phrase in *Tosefta Megillah* 2:4, "*ve-en mozt'ni et ba-rabbim yedei havatan*," which means that (for Megillah reading) a woman cannot fulfill the obligation for men. Just as the word "*rabbim*" in the *Tosefta* refers to men, so could the word "*aherim*" in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* refer to men.

Note also that Vilna Gaon in his commentary to *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689:2, quotes the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* in his discussion of the second view of the Mehaber in which the Mehaber states that women cannot fulfill the Megillah obligation of men. See *Hur Ha-Gra* to *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689, s.v. *en moztot*.

See furthermore the Gaon's commentary to *Midrash Rut ha-Hadash* where it is not clear that he understands the text to mean that a woman cannot read for other women. When the Gra, commenting on the *Midrash Rut* writes, "*ve-lashon zeb mashma de le-izman yekholim l'krot*," he may very well mean that from this formulation it would appear that a woman may read for other women. "*Le-azman*" does not mean "for herself" (in the singular), but rather "for themselves," that is, for other women.

67. The only deflection would be the forced reading of *Tosafot* in *Sukkah* 38a, s.v. *be-emet amru* and *Rosh* to *Megillah* 4a according to *Korban Netanel*.
 68. This is the opinion of *Semag* quoted by *Magen Avraham* to *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689:15. See *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun* to *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689:13.
 69. This is the opinion of *Tosafot* to *'Amikhin* 3a, s.v. *le-atvei*, quoted by *Bur ha-Gra*, *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689, s.v. *ve-yesh omrim she-ha nushim*. See *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun* to *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689:14.
 70. *Mishnah Brurah* in *Shulhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689:7. In the case of *kenod ha-zbbur*, the principle of *lo plig* is applied. If a woman cannot read for many men, she cannot read for even one man.
 71. *Mishnah Brurah* 689:7; *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun* 689:15. Here, *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun* introduces *zila mita*, which *Mishnah Brurah* does not explicitly mention.
 72. *Mishnah Brurah* 689:8. See also *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun*, n. 16 who disputes *Magen Avraham's* reading of *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* that a woman cannot read for herself. Citing *Gra's* reading in the name of the *Zohar* of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, and *Hayyei Adam's* reading of the *Midrash (Hil. Megillah* 155:11), *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun*

- concludes that a woman can read for herself. Certainly this would be the case if there is no one else to read for her. Cf. above, n. 66.
73. See *Beit Yosef, Tur, Orach Hayyim* 689.
74. Note also that although having taken a restrictive position in explaining Rama, *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun* states that the "first opinion [in Mehaber] that women are obligated to read is the essential one ('ikari)." See *Sba'ar ha-Ziyun* to *Sbullahan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 689:16.
75. *Darkhei Moshe, Yoreh De'ah* 65:12.
76. See *Beit Yosef, Tur Orach Hayyim, siman* 25, s.v. *ve-yevarekbb*. See also the following *poskim* who concur with this position: *Sbe'elot u-Teshuvot Hahbam Zevi* (R. Zevi Ashkenazi, 17-18c.), # 36, s.v. *ve-zurikb*; *Sbe'elot Yu'vez* (R. Yaakov Emden, 18c., Germany), 1:47; *Nodu' bi-Yehudah* (R. Yechezkel Landau, 18c., Prague), *Mabadura Kama, Yoreh De'ah* # 74, s.v. *u me'atab*; *Sbe'elot u-Teshuvot Hatam Sofer, Orach Hayyim* # 36; Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *Iggrot Moshe, Orach Hayyim*, 5:24; R. Ovadiah Yosef, *Sbe'elot u-Teshuvot Yahia' Omer* 6, *Orach Hayyim*, # 2, s.v. *ve-'adaym* and *Sefer Sbe'elot u-Teshuvot Yehavev Da'ut*, 3:70, s.v. *umnam*.
77. See *Darkhei Moshe, Tur, Orach Hayyim* 689:1.
78. *Arukh ba-Sbullahan* to *Orach Hayyim* 689:5.
79. See his "Za'i Lakh be-Ikvei ha-Zon," *Beit Ytzhak* 17 (5745):118.
80. In recent years, great halakhists have been quoted on both sides of the issue. For an extensive list of the views of modern day *poskim* regarding this subject, see R. Aryeh Avraham Frimer and R. Dov Frimer, "Women's Prayer Services – Theory and Practice," *Tradition* 32:2 (Winter, 1998): nn. 44, 78, 79, 106, 220, 221.
81. Rabbi Lichtenstein asked that when Purim is a *midleib* (pushed to another date), a woman should not read for other women.
82. R. Ovadiah Yosef, *Sefer Sbe'elot u-Teshuvot Yehavev Da'ut* 3:51. See also R. Ytzhak Yosef (son of R. Ovadiah Yosef), *Sefer Yalkut Yosef, Hilkhot Mikva Megillah*, n. 12, who states that the essential view is that women can fulfill the Megillah obligation for men, but one should be stringent unless an urgent situation arises. See *Shakh* quoted above, n. 39.
83. See *Mishnah Megillah* 1:1.
84. *Rif* to *Megillah* 5a.
85. Rabbenu Tam as quoted in *Tur, Orach Hayyim* 690. See *Tosafot, Megillah* 5a, s.v. *harub 'urda*.
86. Quoted in *Tur, ibid*.
87. See *Bah* to *Tur, ibid*, s.v. *u-Babag*.
88. *Sbullahan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 690:18.
89. For a general discussion of this subject, see my *Women at Prayer* (Hoboken, 1990), 43-56.
90. Rashi, *Berakhot* 45b, s.v. *do-qfilu me'ab ke-trei yavrei danyan*.
91. *Tosafot, ibid.*, s.v. *ve-ha me'ab nasbei ke-trei gavrei danyan*.
92. See my *Women at Prayer*, p. 46, n. 15.
93. *Beit ha-Behirah, Megillah* 5a. R. Aryeh Avraham Frimer, "Ma'amad ha-Ishah be-Halakhah - Nashim u-Minyan." *Or ha-Mizrah* 34 (Tishrei 5746):69-86, suggests that this may be the position of Rashi recorded above. For Rashi, the absolute exclusion relates only to *zimmun*. In all other areas, it would depend on the correlation principle. If women are equally obligated, they count toward the minyan; if not, they do not.
94. *Beit ha-Behirah, Berakhot* 47b.
95. *Ran* to *Megillah*, chap. 2, end, s.v. *ha-kol kesherim filot ha-Megillah*.
96. See Rama to *Sbullahan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 690:18. From here there may be support for the position that Rama does not offer a definitive *pesak* concerning women reading Megillah for men (*Sbullahan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 689:2). If his position was that women cannot read for men (and, for that matter, for other women), he would unequivocally state that women cannot be counted in a Megillah minyan. This is true unless Rama's position is that the Megillah minyan

- is needed only for *pirsuma nisa*, in which case women can count even if they are not on the same level of obligation as men. See my discussion of this Rama in my *Women at Prayer*, p. 51, n. 30. See also *ibid.* pp. 53-56, where I argue that equality of obligation may be necessary even in a minyan needed for publicity (*pirsuma*).
97. See R. Aryeh Avraham Frimer (above, n. 93), p. 63. Still, in most cases of minyan needed for publicity (*pirsuma*), the connection between equality of obligation and the right to be counted among the ten is evident. See the examples cited in my *Women at Prayer*, pp. 54-55.
98. R. Zevi Pesah Frank, *Mikra'ei Kodesh: Hanukkah/Purim* (Jerusalem, 1982), 131-32, n. 29.
99. R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg, *Ziv Eliezer* 13 (Jerusalem, 1985), p. 145, n. 73.
100. R. Ovadiah Yosef, *Yabia: Omer* 8 (Jerusalem, 1995), *Orah Hayyim*, p. 246, n. 56.
101. *Ibid.* See also Joel B. Wolowelsky, *Women, Jewish Law, and Modernity*, (Hoboken, 1997), 94-98.
102. It is difficult to understand why *Magen Avraham*, *Hayyei Adam* and *Mishnah Brurah* disagreed with virtually every Rishon and were so restrictive. It should be noted that *Magen Avraham* whose view was adopted by *Hayyei Adam* and *Mishnah Brurah*, and, indeed, was the first to understand the Rama as being the position of the *Mishnah ha-Nedam*, often quotes the *Zohar* as being the definitive *posak*, even if it is contrary to the view of the poskim. See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 7:776: "He [*Magen Avraham*] also thought highly of the *Zohar* and of the Kabbalists, R. Isaac Luria, and R. Isaiah Horowitz, occasionally accepting their decision against that of the codifiers." The position of *Korban Netanel* in his understanding of *zila mitla*, as preventing a woman from reading the Megillah for other women, is equally difficult to understand. Perhaps the simple reality that women were not reading Megillah for others prompted the development of this more restrictive school.
103. It might be pointed out that *Hedvat Hashem*, *Kehillat Ya'akov* and *Mar'eshot* quoted earlier were not necessarily offering a *posak halakhab*. Rather, they were making a theoretical point in which they distinguished between Megillah reading at night and during the day.
104. See *Mishnah Brurah* in *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 689:1.
105. On January 14, 1997, the Vaad Harahonim of Queens issued a resolution prohibiting women Megillah readings, amongst other practices. In their statement they declared that "these practices are 'porev geder bi mesorat Yisrael'."
106. "The Sea Change in American Orthodox Judaism: A Symposium," *Tradition* 32.4 (Summer, 1998): 30.
107. See my *Women at Prayer*, pp. 112-15.
108. In Purim of 5757-1997, 175 students (or almost twenty-five percent) of Stern College, Yeshiva University, petitioned to be able to have a women's Megillah reading.

[For other articles on this subject, see R. Zevulun Sacks, "Kri'at ha-Megillah 'al Yedei Nashim," *Tebumin* 18 (5758): 357-60; R. Ariel Dikar, "Kri'at ha-Megillah 'al Yedei Ishah Lifnei Nashim," *Tebumin* 18 (5758): 361-68; R. Alfred S. Cohen, "Women and the Reading of the Megilla," *The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 30 (Fall 1995): 25-41.—ED.]