

LISTENING TO KERIAS HA-TORAH PART 1

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

There are two basic opinions among the early poskim concerning the nature of the obligation of Kerias ha-Torah on Shabbos morning. One opinion[1] holds that every adult male is obligated to listen to the weekly portion read every Shabbos morning from a kosher Sefer Torah. He must pay attention to every word being read, or he will not fulfill his obligation. The second opinion[2] maintains that the obligation of Kerias ha-Torah devolves upon the congregation as a whole. In other words, if ten or more men are together on Shabbos morning, they must read from the weekly portion. While each member of the congregation is included in this congregational obligation, it is not a specific obligation upon each individual, provided that there are ten men who are paying attention.

There are some basic questions concerning Kerias ha-Torah whose answers will differ depending on which of these two opinions one follows:

- Is one actually required to follow each word recited by the Reader, the koreh, without missing even one letter [and, according to some opinions, even read along with him to make sure nothing is missed[3]], or is one permitted - even l'chatchilah - to be lax about this requirement?
- Is it permitted to learn or to recite Shnayim mikra v'echad targum during Kerias ha-Torah?
- If an individual missed a word or two of the Torah reading, must he hear the Torah reading again?
- If ten or more men missed one word or more from the reading, should they take out the Sefer Torah after davening and read the portion they missed?
- If one came late to shul but arrived in time for Kerias ha-Torah, should he listen to the Torah reading first and then daven?
- If a situation arises where tefillah b'tzibur and Kerias ha-Torah conflict, which takes precedence?
- If a situation arises where, by listening to Kerias ha-Torah, one would not be able to daven altogether, which takes precedence?
- Should one interrupt his private Shemoneh Esrei to listen to Kerias ha-Torah?

The answer to these and other such questions depends, for the most part, on which of the two views one is following. Clearly, according to the first opinion, one must give undivided attention to each and every word being read. Davening, learning or reciting Shnayim mikra v'echad targum during Kerias ha-Torah would be prohibited, and even b'diavad one would have to make up any missed

words. But according to the second opinion, the answers to all these questions would be more lenient, for as long as the congregation fulfilled its obligation to read the Torah correctly, and as long as ten men paid attention to the reading, the individual's obligation is no longer a matter of concern.

Shulchan Aruch does not give a clear, definitive ruling concerning this dispute. Indeed, while discussing the laws regarding the permissibility of learning during Kerias ha-Torah, he quotes both opinions without rendering a decision. Instead, he concludes that "it is proper for a meticulous person to focus on and pay attention to the words of the reader." This indicates that Shulchan Aruch and many other prominent poskim[4] hold that while it is commendable to be stringent, it is not absolutely essential. Mishnah Berurah[5], though, quotes several poskim who maintain that the halachah requires that each individual listen to every word of Kerias ha-Torah[6]. Rav M. Feinstein rules that even b'diavad one does not fulfill his obligation if he misses a word, and he must find a way to make up what he missed[7]. There are, however, a host of poskim who maintain that Kerias ha-Torah is a congregational and not an individual obligation[8].

Several contemporary poskim suggest what appears to be a compromise. Clearly, l'chatchilah we follow the view of the poskim that each individual is obligated to listen to Kerias ha-Torah, and it is standard practice for each individual to pay undivided attention to each word that is recited. Indeed, in the situation described above where Kerias ha-Torah conflicts with tefillah b'tzibur, some poskim rule that the obligation to hear Kerias ha-Torah takes precedence, in deference to the authorities who consider it an individual obligation[9].

But, b'diavad, if it were to happen that a word or two was missed, one is not obligated to go to another shul to listen to the part of the reading that was missed. Rather, we rely on the second opinion which maintains that so long as the congregation has fulfilled its obligation, the individual is covered[10]. Accordingly, if listening to Kerias ha-Torah will result in missing davening altogether, davening takes priority, since we rely on the poskim who maintain that Kerias ha-Torah is a congregational obligation[11]. Similarly, one should not interrupt his private Shemoneh Esrei to listen to Kerias ha-Torah[12].

But regardless of the above dispute and compromise, the poskim are in agreement about the following rules:

- There must be at least ten men listening to the entire Kerias ha-Torah. If there are fewer than ten, then the entire congregation has not fulfilled its obligation according to all views[13].
- Conversing during Kerias ha-Torah is strictly prohibited even when there are ten men paying attention. According to most poskim, it is prohibited to converse even between aliyos (bein gavra l'gavra[14]). One who converses during Kerias ha-Torah is called "a sinner whose sin is too great to be forgiven[15]."
- Even those who permit learning during Kerias ha-Torah stipulate that it may only be done quietly, so that it does not interfere with the Torah reading[16].

- "Talking in learning" bein gavra l'gavra is permitted by some poskim and prohibited by others. An individual, however, may learn by himself or answer a halachic question bein gavra l'gavra^[17].

1. Shibbolei ha-Leket 39, quoted in Beis Yosef, O.C. 146. This also seems to be the view of the Magen Avraham 146:5, quoting Shelah and Mateh Moshe. See also Ma'asei Rav 131. See, however, Peulas Sachir on Ma'asei Rav 175.
2. Among the Rishonim see Ramban and Ran, Megillah 5a. Among the poskim see Ginas Veradim 2:21; Imrei Yosher 2:171; Binyan Shlomo 35; Levushei Mordechai 2:99 and others. See also Yabia Omer 4:31-3 and 7:9.
3. Mishnah Berurah 146:15.
4. Sha'arei Efrayim 4:12 and Siddur Derech ha-Chayim (4-5) clearly rule in accordance with this view. This may also be the ruling of Chayei Adam 31:2 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 23:8.
5. 146:15. Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:6 and Kaf ha-Chayim 146:10,14 concur with this view.
6. There are conflicting indications as to what, exactly, is the view of the Mishnah Berurah on this issue; see Beir Halachah 135:14, s.v. ein, and 146:2, s.v. v'yeish.
7. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:23; 4:40-4-5. If ten or more men missed a section of the Torah reading, then they should take out the sefer after davening and read that section over; ibid.
8. See also Eimek Berachah (Kerias ha-Torah 3).
9. Rav S.Z. Auerbach and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling, quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140). See dissenting opinion in Minchas Yitzchak 7:6.
10. Rav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Siach Halachah 6:8 and Halichos Shlomo 1:12-1; see also Minchas Shlomo 2:4-15); Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140).
11. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling, quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140).
12. Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo 1:12-4). [A Diaspora Jew who may have missed an entire parashah when traveling to Eretz Yisrael after a Yom Tov, does not need to make up what he missed (ibid. 6). See Ishei Yisrael 38:29 for a dissenting opinion.
13. Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:5.
14. Bach, as understood by Mishnah Berurah 146:6 and many poskim. There are poskim, however, who maintain that the Bach permits even idle talk bein gavra l'gavra; see Machatzis ha-Shekel, Aruch ha-Shulchan, and Shulchan ha-Tahor. See also Peri Chadash, who allows conversing bein gavra l'gavra. Obviously, they refer to the type of talk which is permitted in shul and/or on Shabbos.

15. Beiur Halachah 146:2, s.v. v'hanachon, who uses strong language in condemning these people.
16. Mishnah Berurah 146:11.
17. Mishnah Berurah 146:6.

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