**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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Megilla Reading

What is the nature of women’s obligation in megilla? Who Makes a quorum for a reading? May a woman read for herself or others?

# The Mitzva

The mitzva of reading *Megillat Esther* on Purim goes back to the days of Mordechai and Esther. The megilla itself provides a basis for the obligation to read it:

*Esther* 9:28

And these days are remembered and done in every generation, every family, every state, and every city, and these days of Purim will not pass from among the Jews and their memory will not be ended from their progeny. And Queen Esther, daughter of Avichayil, and Mordechai Ha-Yehudi wrote with all force to uphold this second Purim epistle.

The Talmud compares the phrase "these days are remembered" to the Torah's admonitions to remember Amalek, since both employ the same Hebrew word root, *zayin.kaf.reish*:[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Megilla* 18a

Rava said: It is derived from "Remembering"-"Remembering." Here it is written "and these days are remembered," and there it is written "write this as a remembrance in the book" (*Shemot* 17:14). Just as there it is in a book, so, too, here it is in a book. And whence [do we know] that this remembering is reading aloud? Perhaps it is simply looking it over? It wouldn't arise in your thoughts, for it is taught "remember." Could that be by heart? When it says "don’t forget" behold, forgetting of the heart is already spoken for. Thus what do I establish [from] "remember"? Verbally.

Just as we [remember Amalek](https://www.deracheha.org/arba-parashiyot/) by reading aloud from a Torah scroll, we remember the miracle of Purim by reading from the megilla aloud. The Talmud teaches that the mitzva of reading the text of the megilla from the scroll includes an additional component beyond reading, publicizing the miracle:

*Megilla* 18a

It is a mitzva of reading and of publicizing the miracle.

The mitzva of megilla reading is sufficiently important that all should pause involvement with other *mitzvot* in order to hear it,[[2]](#footnote-2) and sufficiently beloved that we can rely on listeners paying careful attention.[[3]](#footnote-3)

A person obligated in reading can read for others and [discharge their obligations](https://www.deracheha.org/discharging-anothers-obligations/):

Rambam, Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 1:2

Both the reader and the one who hears from the reader discharge their obligation, and that is when he hears from someone who is obligated in reading it [the megilla].

This works through the halachic mechanism of *shomei'a ke-korei*, that a listener is tantamount to a reader.[[4]](#footnote-4) Some halachic authorities prefer, when possible, that only one reader read the megilla for a group.[[5]](#footnote-5) Others permit more than one reader to split the reading, on condition that each reader listen attentively both to the *berachot* before the reading and to the **entire** megilla.

*Mikra'ei Kodesh* (Harari Purim) 7:26 Note 91

In the matter if it is permissible from the outset to divide megilla reading among a number of readers, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu told me that the matter is permissible if all of the readers heard the first *berachot* and all of the reading from its beginning…He does not have to go back to the beginning, but just from the place where the previous reader stopped.

Though the megilla must be read in its entirety,[[6]](#footnote-6) listeners who miss a few of the reader's words may read them to themselves until they catch up.[[7]](#footnote-7)

We read the megilla twice on Purim, once at night and again during the day. A later authority, Marcheshet, suggests that the daytime reading also incorporates a fulfillment of the [mitzva to remember Amalek](https://www.deracheha.org/arba-parashiyot/).[[8]](#footnote-8) The Talmud's discussion of the two readings centers on two different prooftexts, each from a chapter of *Tehillim*, with thematic connections to the Purim story:

*Megilla* 4a

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi sad: A person must read the megilla at night and repeat it during the day, for it says "My God, I call by day and You don’t respond, and night and there is no silence for me" (*Tehillim* 22:3)…Rabbi Chelbo said Ulla Bira'a said: A person must read the megilla at night and repeat it in the day, for it is said "In order to sing honor to You and not be silent, God my Lord forever I will thank you" (*Tehillim* 30:13).

The first verse emphasizes calling to God day and night in distress, while the second highlights constant (or repeated) expressions of joy and gratitude at redemption. When read with reference to the megilla, both verses imply that reading the megilla is a form of prayer. Similarly, the Talmud records a view that reciting megilla fills the role of *Hallel* on Purim day:

*Megilla* 14a

Rav Nachman said: Reading it [megilla] is *Hallel*.

The Berachot

We recite three *berachot* before reading the megilla. "*Al mikra megilla*," "on reading *megilla*" is a version of the standard *beracha* over a mitzva thanking God for sanctifying us with this mitzva. *"She-asa nissim*," "who has performed miracles" expresses gratitude for the miracle, and *she-hechiyanu* expresses gratitude for having reached this occasion. These *berachot* are obligatory.

*Megilla* 21b

Before it [megilla reading] it is a mitzva to recite *berachot*…Before it what does one recite? Rav Sheshet from Katarziya happened to come before Rav Ashi and recited the *berachot* *mem-nun-chet*.

Rashi ad loc.

Mem-nun-chet: *Al* ***m****ikra megilla* [on megilla reading], and *she-asa* ***n****issim* [Who performed miracles], and *she-he****ch****iyyanu*.

Shulchan Aruch, following Rambam,[[9]](#footnote-9) treats the daytime reading as a repetition of the mitzva already performed at night, and thus rules that we do not recite *she-hechiyyanu* in the daytime. Rema, following Tosafot,[[10]](#footnote-10) treats each reading as an independent mitzva and attributes greater significance to the daytime reading. He thus calls for reciting *she-hechiyyanu* at both.[[11]](#footnote-11)

After the reading, it is customary to recite a *beracha* of praise and thanks to God *"ha-rav et riveinu*," "Who has fought our fights" and redeemed us.[[12]](#footnote-12)

*Megilla* 21b

[Mishna] In a place where it is customary: to recite the *beracha*—he should recite it, and [where it is customary] not to recite the *beracha*—he shouldn't recite it. [Gemara] Abbaye said we only learned this after it [the reading]…And after it what blessing does one recite: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the world, Who fights our fight and judges our judgement and avenges our vengeance and punishes our attackers and repays all the enemies of our soul. Blessed are you who extracts punishment for Israel from all its oppressors. Rava said: The God who saves. Rav Papa said: Therefore, we should say both of them: Blessed are You who exacts punishment for Israel from all its attackers, the God who saves.

We discuss the necessary conditions for reciting this final *beracha* a little later.

# Obligation

Reading the megilla is a positive time-bound commandment, so we might expect women to be exempt from it. This seems to be the position taken by the Tosefta, which starts by including "all" in the obligation, but concludes by exempting women:

Tosefta *Megilla*, Lieberman edition 2:7

All are obligated in reading the megilla…women and bondsmen and minors are exempt…

The Babylonian Talmud, however, cites a baraita, a mishna, and Rabbi Yeshoshua ben Levi to establish that women are in fact obligated in the mitzva:

*Arachin* 2b-3a

"All are obligated in megilla reading," "All are fit to read the megilla" (Mishna *Megilla* 2:4). To include what? To include women, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Women are obligated in megilla reading because they indeed were included in that miracle.

According to a simple reading of the Talmud, women are not only obligated in hearing the megilla, but are also considered fit to **read** the megilla. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi grounds a woman's obligation in women's having been included in the miracle, a Talmudic principle known as [*af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*](https://www.deracheha.org/af-hen/). This could refer either to Esther's central role in bringing about salvation, or to women's having been endangered by Haman and thus being full beneficiaries of the miracle:

Rashi *Megilla* 4a s.v. *She-af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*

For they also were included in that miracle - For also upon women did Haman decree to destroy and kill and cause to perish, from youth to elderly, children and women.

Tosafot *Megilla* 4a s.v. *She-af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*

For they indeed were included in that miracle - Rashbam explained that the essence of the miracle was [accomplished] through them: on Purim through Esther…

A parallel discussion, taking a view of *af hen* similar to Rashi’s, appears in the Jerusalem Talmud:

Talmud Yerushalmi *Megilla* 2:5

Bar Kappara said he must read it before women and before minors for they too were at risk. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi did thus, he would gather the female and male members of his household and read it [megilla] before them.

Here, Bar Kapara derives from women's inclusion that men must read the megilla for women, and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi acts accordingly for his household. No explicit mention is made here of a woman's fitness to read, though.

Where do these sources leave us? The Talmud is more authoritative than the Tosefta, so there is halachic consensus that women are obligated in megilla. The question is the nature of the obligation. A number of early halachic authorities, including Rambam, rule that women are fully obligated to read the megilla:

Rambam Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 1:1-2

Reading the megilla in its time is a positive rabbinic mitzva, and the matters are known that it is a decree of the prophets, and all are obligated in reading it, men and women…

This ruling follows from a simple reading of the Babylonian Talmud and aligns well with the Jerusalem Talmud, though it goes against the less authoritative Tosefta. Behag, however, reads the Talmudic texts in a less straightforward fashion that reconciles them with the tosefta. This leads him to a different halachic conclusion:

*Sefer Halachot Gedolot* 19, Laws of Megilla

(Tosefta 2:7) "All are obligated in reading the megilla…women and bondsmen and minors are exempt from reading the megilla" but they are obligated in hearing, why? For all were at risk of being destroyed and killed and made to perish, and since all were at risk, all are obligated to hear [megilla]. (Yerushalmi 2) "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi would gather all members of his household and read Megillat Esther before them"…

The tosefta began by referring to "reading the megilla," so Behag interprets its exemption of women as limited to **reading**, leaving women obligated in **hearing** the megilla. Behag's understanding of the tosefta works well with the Jerusalem Talmud, which he cites, since the Yerushalmi teaches that men read the megilla for women, who thus hear it.

Behag's interpretation works less well with the passage in the Babylonian Talmud. The statements that women are obligated in megilla reading could perhaps refer to **hearing** megilla reading. But the Talmud also includes women in the statement that "all are fit to **read** the megilla," which clearly does not refer to hearing. Tosafot suggest a possible explanation of this statement that would square with Behag's position:

Tosafot *Arachin* 3a s.v. *Le-atoyei nashim*

To include women: For they are obligated in reading megilla and fit to read…the language of Rashi, but Behag did not rule thus…Therefore one must explain here that women [reading] only discharge the obligation of women, but not men…

One person can [discharge another's halachic obligation](https://www.deracheha.org/discharging-anothers-obligations/) only if the level of obligation of the one doing the discharging is higher or equal to that of the one being discharged. Tosafot propose that the Talmud meant that women are fit readers only for other women, who share the same level of obligation, and not for men, whose obligation is different.

Why should women and men have different levels of obligation? A few possible answers emerge from the writings of later halachic authorities. Marcheshet writes that the obligation to **hear** the megilla corresponds to the obligation of publicizing the miracle, in which women are included, while the obligation to **read** the megilla derives from a second mitzva—either [*zechirat Amalek*](https://www.deracheha.org/arba-parashiyot/)[[13]](#footnote-13) or reciting [*Hallel*](https://www.deracheha.org/hallel/) on Purim—from which he considers women exempt. (Others disagree, viewing women as subject to these two mitzvot.)[[14]](#footnote-14)

Marcheshet 22:2, 9

(2) In this the view of Behag that women are only obligated in hearing the megilla is explained well, and this is: Since the essence of their [women's] obligation is for publicizing the miracle, if so, it is enough for them [women] only to hear it, for this is publicizing. Which is not the case for the men, [who] aside from the mitzva of publicizing the miracle are also obligated in the mitzva of remembering [Amalek], and this is the obligation of reading…(9) Additionally, it is possible for me to say regarding the reason of Behag, that women don’t discharge the obligation of men, in accordance with the view of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak brought in the Talmud, that we don’t say Hallel on Purim because reading it [megilla] is *Hallel*. Behold that the mitzva of reading *Hallel* is also included in the mitzva of reading the megilla, and women are exempt from *Hallel*…

Alternatively, Chavot Yair suggests that men's obligation derives directly from the megilla and is in force by the Torah's admonition to follow the sages' rulings, and thus differs from an obligation deriving from *af hen*:[[15]](#footnote-15)

Responsa Chavot Yair 10

…For they [women] indeed were included in that miracle, and if not for this reason, they would not be obligated because they are exempt from positive time-bound commandments…Since they [women] are obligated [in *megilla*] based on the general rationale that they, too, were part of that miracle, and men are obligated based on the prohibition of straying from the sages’ directives, which is akin to a Torah law, if so, for this reason women do not discharge men’s obligation.

Finally, Rav Yosef Soloveitchick suggests that the difference stems from men's obligation in the formal mitzva of Talmud Torah:

Gri"d Soloveitchick, *Reshimot Shiurim Sukka* 38a, p. 184

…For in reading megilla there are two [mitzva] fulfillments: 1) Talmud Torah of reading sacred texts: 2) Publicizing the miracle. Men are obligated in both fulfillments. Women are obligated only for the reason of fulfilling the mitzva of publicizing the miracle…

Beracha

In light of Behag's view, Ra'avyah maintains that, at a reading for a woman or group of women, a *beracha* on **hearing** the *megilla* should replace the usual *beracha* of "*al mikra megilla*," on **reading** the megilla.

Ra'aviyah II *Megilla* 569

It seems to me that women recite the *beracha* "*al mishma megilla*" on hearing the megilla, and even if they read it to themselves.

He specifies that even a woman who in fact reads the megilla recites this *beracha*. Although Shulchan Aruch makes no mention of this position, Rema cites it:

Rema Shulchan Aruch OC 689:2

Gloss: And there are those who say that if a woman reads for herself she recites the *beracha* “*li-shmo’a megilla*” (to hear the megilla), for she is not obligated in reading…

Since Shulchan Aruch does not raise the issue, Sefaradim typically recite "*al mikra megilla*" in all instances. Ashkenazi women, too, simply respond "*amen*" to "*al mikra megilla*" when hearing megilla from a male reader who is also discharging his own obligation or the obligation of one or more male listeners.

The possibility of reciting a different *beracha* arises with respect to Ashkenazi practice for a woman reading the megilla for a woman or a group of women, or for a man reading only for women (after already having fulfilled his own obligation).

Magen Avraham rules that a man reading megilla for women should recite "*li-shmo’a megilla*." Mishna Berura adds that a woman reading for herself should also recite this *beracha.*

Magen Avraham 692:5

If a man recites a *beracha* for women [when reading megilla for them] he should recite the *beracha* to hear the megilla.

Mishna Berura 689:8

And she recites the *beracha* "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to hear the megilla reading."

Tzitz Eliezer agrees, adding that the *beracha* should specify the nature of the obligation even when a man reads for a woman:

Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* 19:67

For she recites the *beracha* *li-shmo'a megilla* [to hear the megilla] because she is not obligated in reading, and she is obligated in hearing; therefore, she must recite a *beracha* over the obligation, which is the hearing. This is also the law when another reads it before her to discharge her obligation, he also recites the *beracha* "*lishmo'a*."

On the other hand, Behag's view is not universally accepted, and some authorities reject the proposed new *beracha*:

Peri Chadash OC 689:2

That which Rema wrote, "there are those who say [if a woman reads for herself she recites the *beracha* "*lishmo'a megilla*"] etc." These are not essential matters to rely on them, but rather they [women] recite the *beracha* "*al mikra megilla*" like the men, and this is simple.

Rav Moshe Sternbuch presents a number of arguments in favor of reciting "*al mikra megilla*," though he ultimately rules that a woman reading for herself should recite "*li-shmo'a megilla*."

Responsa *Teshuvot Ve-hanhagot* I 403

…The fundamental practical halacha is for him to recite the *beracha* "*al mikra megilla*" even though he reads only for women. Firstly, because according to the majority of halachic authorities women are like men and are obligated in reading…And according to their approach, when she recites a *beracha* on hearing, a *beracha* on the reading in which she is obligated is lacking. Which is not the case when they recite "*al mikra megilla*," according to all opinions she discharges her obligation, for in synagogue she discharges her obligation even though she hears the *beracha* "*al mikra megilla*." Furthermore, even if women are exempt from reading, the reason is because it is a positive time-bound mitzva, and for the reason of being included in the miracle, we obligate only hearing, but when she fulfills the mitzva through reading it is not worse than any positive time-bound mitzva from which [women] are exempt and are still also able to recite the *beracha* when they fulfill the mitzva. And this is also a reading, for one who hears is akin to one who recites [*shomei'a ke-oneh*] and is able to recite a *beracha* on reading, which she fulfills….And that which Rema rules, that a woman recites the *beracha lishmo'a mikra megilla*, does this not deal explicitly with her reading for herself? But when a man reads for her, he recites the *beracha al mikra megilla* and she discharges her obligation.

In a reading only for Ashkenazi women, the correct *beracha* to recite remains a matter of debate.

Who recites the beracha?

A separate question concerns someone who reads only for women (after having already discharged their own obligation). Should the reader recite the *beracha*, or should one of the listeners?

A few later authorities, including Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, suggest that the reader should recite the *beracha*:

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 141:16

One who already discharged the obligation of megilla reading and reads to discharge the obligation of another, if the one who needs to discharge the obligation knows how to recite the *berachot* himself, he should recite the *berachot* for himself. And if it is a woman, it is better that the reader recite the *beracha* and say "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to hear the megilla [*li-shmo'a megilla*]."

However, it is not clear if he assumes that women do not know how to recite the *berachot*. Furthermore, in the analogous case of someone who has already heard shofar blowing shofar for others, [[16]](#footnote-16) the preference seems to be for the hearer to recite a *beracha*, though this is not common practice:[[17]](#footnote-17)

Beit Yosef OC 485

It is written in Terumat Ha-deshen that one who already discharged the obligation of [hearing] shofar blowing, and will blow in order to discharge his fellow's obligation, that according to the fundamental law the blower should not recite the *beracha* but rather the hearer should recite the *beracha*. But custom is not that way.

Following the view that a listener should recite the *beracha* in this case, Minchat Yitzchak rules that it is preferable for each woman to recite the *berachot* for herself in a reading for women.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In practice, although these possibilities (and even skipping the *berachot* entirely)[[19]](#footnote-19) each have halachic support, a strong argument can be made in favor of a woman reciting the *berachot* for all women present: [[20]](#footnote-20)

Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, *Lu'ach Le-Eretz Yisrael*, Adar

If they [women] did not hear [megilla] in synagogue, and a man who has already heard megilla reads for them – one of them should recite the three *berachot*…

# A Quorum

Now that we've learned about women's obligation, we can explore practical questions related to the quorum for megilla reading.

Even if it is a form of prayer, megilla doesn't require a minyan,[[21]](#footnote-21) and is not considered a *davar she-bikdusha*.[[22]](#footnote-22)

*Megilla* 5a

Rav said: Megilla at its time, we read it even as an individual.

Still, as we have seen, one component of megilla reading is *pirsumei nisa*, publicly proclaiming the miracle of Purim. Therefore, it's preferable to hear megilla with ten or more people. Reading with a large group also fulfils the halachic principle of *be-rov am hadrat melech*, in the multitude of people is the glory of the King (*Mishlei* 14:28), that we glorify God by coming together *en masse* to perform ritual acts.

Aruch Ha-shulchan OC 690:25

Halacha was decided like Rav [*Megilla* 5a] that megilla reading in its time we read it even as an individual…From Rif and Rambam and Rosh and Ramban, it becomes clear that certainly for glorifying the mitzva and publicizing the miracle, Rav also concedes that ten is preferable…And thus is the custom and the bigger the congregation, the more glorification, for "in the multitude of people is the glory of the king" (*Mishlei* 14:28), but if in the synagogue it is impossible to hear well because of the tumult of banging for Haman and the like, it is better to read it in a group of ten at home.

Aruch Ha-shulchan recognizes that large crowds, while glorifying the mitzva, can also make it difficult to hear the megilla. He allows for creating additional readings, keeping the number to a bare quorum, if the larger reading ends up interfering with attendees' ability to hear.

At the same time, we saw that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi would gather his wife and other members of his household to read privately for them, seemingly with no need for a quorum. Mishna Berura rules that this type of reading is appropriate:[[23]](#footnote-23)

Mishna Berura 689:1

A man must read it in his home before the maidens and the [female] servants, and in a few places they have the practice to go to the synagogue to the women’s section to hear the reading. Indeed, this requires study how the women there discharge their obligations, for it is impossible to hear there in accordance with the law.

Echoing the Aruch Ha-shulchan, Mishna Berura notes that a woman cannot fulfill her obligation at synagogue if the reading is inaudible from the women's section, opening up the possibility of her hearing the megilla in other settings. Indeed, Chelkat Ya'akov rules that women need not make a special effort to attend a reading with a minyan, which is inherently public, though sees no problem with a woman attending a public reading.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Counting for Ten

May women count toward a quorum for megilla reading? Some early halachic authorities rule this out, in two ways. First, Kolbo writes that a quorum of ten is **always** a [minyan](https://www.deracheha.org/minyan/) of ten men:

Kolbo 45

It is not fitting to complete the [quorum of] ten [for megilla reading] with them [women], for in every place in which they [the sages] required ten, we need men.

This view would rule out either women combining with men to form a quorum, or an all-women quorum for megilla.

Second, Ba'al Ha-ittur says that just as men and women don't form a [*zimmun*](https://www.deracheha.org/zimmun-part-2/) together, they may not combine to form a minyan for megilla reading:

*Sefer Ha-itur Aseret Ha-dibberot* Laws of Megilla 110a

…Women are obligated in megilla reading for they indeed were included in the same miracle. And it makes sense, that just as women recite *zimmun* [for themselves] and don’t combine [with men to make a quorum] for *birkat ha-mazon*, here too they don’t combine *le-chatchila* [from the outset].

Note that Ba'al Ha-itur would consider a group of ten men and women to be a quorum for megilla reading *bedi'avad*, after the fact. This ruling also leaves room for an all-women's quorum, comparable to an all-women's [*zimmun*](https://www.deracheha.org/zimmun-part-1/).

Other early halachic authorities, including Ritva, reject the comparison of a mixed quorum for *zimmun* to a mixed quorum for megilla reading.

Ritva Megilla 4a

Since we follow the halachic position of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that they [women] are obligated [in megilla]…It follows that they [women] combine [for a quorum]. [And the fact that they don’t combine] for *zimmun*, that case is different because there is a major combining, for there is a change in *birkat ha-mazon* on their account, to add *birkat ha-zimmun* on their account, and one should be concerned for immodesty. But here there is no difference in megilla reading or in its *berachot*, whether [recited] individually or with ten, and it is not considered to be such a combination that we should be concerned for immodesty…

According to Ritva, the case of megilla is not comparable to *zimmun* because *zimmun* entails unique modesty concerns. (Learn more about *zimmun* [here](https://www.deracheha.org/zimmun-part-2/).) Therefore, women count toward the quorum for megilla reading by virtue of their obligation. It would seem to follow that an all-women's group of ten or more would be considered a quorum as well.

Rema leaves the question of women joining with men to form a quorum unresolved:

Shulchan Aruch OC 690:18

Megilla on 14 and 15 [Adar] one must strive for ten, and if it is impossible [to find] ten, we read them as individuals. Rema: And it is doubtful whether women combine [with men] for the ten.

Aruch Ha-shulchan leans toward the view that women and men may **not** combine to form a quorum,[[25]](#footnote-25) while Mishna Berura leans toward **permitting** it, since women contribute to publicizing the miracle.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In practice, ten or more women are accepted as a quorum by a range of recent authorities, including Rav Ovadya Yosef (below), Chazon Ish,[[27]](#footnote-27) and Tzitz Eliezer:[[28]](#footnote-28)

Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* 13:73

Here, in my opinion it is simple that we can read before them [women] when they are ten, and we don’t need that there be ten men, for they [women] are also obligated in reading megilla, and therefore they are well able to combine to create ten on their own and to read before them…For the intention of Rema and also of Magen Avraham is just regarding whether they can combine to create ten together with men…or whether they do not combine similar to *zimmun*, but everyone agrees that they can read and combine on their own. Therefore, halachically the matter is clear and simple that women can even *le-chatchila* [from the outset] gather for themselves ten women in their home to hear megilla reading and recite the *berachot*…

Final Beracha

Note that Tzitz Eliezer states that women may form a quorum to "recite the *berachot*." This is noteworthy because Rema suggests that the final *beracha*, *ha-rav et riveinu*, should only be recited in the presence of a *tzibbur*, congregation. His logic may be that a *tzibbur* would make publicizing the miracle more complete.

Shulchan Aruch OC 692:1

After it [megilla reading] the custom is to recite the *beracha* of *ha-rav et riveinu* etc…Rema: And one should only recite a *beracha* after it *be-tzibbur*.

Mishna Berura rules that the final *beracha* should not be recited for an individual, since it is not fully obligatory in any event, and since we don't recite *berachot* when the obligation to do so is in doubt:

*Bei'ur Halacha* 692:1 s.v. *Ela be-tzibbur*

It seems that it is not worthwhile to recite a *beracha* after it [megilla reading for an individual] for without this factor [lack of a *tzibbur*], this *beracha* even in a *tzibbur* is not obligatory, and depends on custom, as appears in the Talmud. And who will say that the custom has spread today to recite a *beracha* [after reading] for an individual. And so wrote Peri Megadim, that in doubtful situations with *berachot* we are lenient [and omit them].

In contrast, Aruch Ha-shulchan rules that even an individual reading megilla should recite the final *beracha*:

Aruch Ha-shulchan 692:5

Our Rav, Rema, wrote that the *beracha* after it is only in a *tzibbur*. And one can say that the reason is that—since it doesn’t apply to the megilla but rather is a *beracha* of gratitude in order to publicize the miracle—it was only enacted in the *tzibbur* where there is publicizing, and not for an individual. And know that they brought this in the name of the Yerushalmi, but I didn’t find this in this Yerushalmi, and not a single one of the early authorities mentioned this. And in Shibbolei ha-Leket he brings a custom of [the] two *yeshivot* to recite the *beracha* afterwards, even for an individual [reading], and it seems that this is the general practice.

Returning to the question of a quorum of women, Rav Ovadya Yosef, like Tzitz Eliezer, permits such a group to recite the final *beracha*:

Responsa *Yabi'a Omer* 8 OC 56

All this is to combine women to create a group of ten with men. But when there are ten women, without any combining [with men], since the rationale that the final *beracha* requires a *tzibbur* is on account of publicizing the miracle…Therefore whenever there are ten women there is fine publicizing of the miracle and they recite a *beracha* after it…And in these days for some years I have instituted with God's help in many neighborhoods of Jerusalem that after megilla reading in synagogue for men, about an hour later women come *en masse* to the synagogue and the *shali’ach tzibbur* reads the megilla for them precisely and with its cantillations and recites the *berachot* for them before the megilla and afterwards.

Rav Yosef would organize megilla readings in Yerushalayim by experienced male readers for groups of women. **All** *berachot* were recited at these readings, because each group of ten or more would constitute a quorum.

# Reading for Herself

May a woman read megilla for herself? Since she is obligated in megilla reading, it would seem clear that she could. In a cryptic passage, however, the Zohar seems to call this assumption into question.

Zohar Chadash II Rut 47b

…They [women] are obligated in reading megilla to hear it from the mouth of the reader.

The Zohar implies that a woman needs to hear megilla read by a male reader. Interpreted in this way, though, the Zohar would contradict the Talmud.[[29]](#footnote-29) It should come as no surprise then that a number of authorities, including Rosh, clearly reject the Zohar's position:

Rosh *Megilla* 1:4

For you should not say that even women discharge their obligation only with an important reading by men.

Furthermore, as we saw above, Rema discusses the proper *beracha* that a woman reading for herself should recite, and presents her reading for herself as perfectly legitimate, as opposed to the implication of the Zohar.

Rema Shulchan Aruch OC 689:2

Gloss: And there are those who say that if a woman reads for herself she recites the *beracha* "to hear the megilla" …

Magen Avraham there, however, cites the Zohar to the effect that a woman should **not** read for herself:

Magen Avraham 689:6

If a woman reads [for herself] - But in Midrash Rut Ha-ne'elam it is written that she should not read for herself, rather that she should hear from men.

Although Magen Avraham's ruling seems to go against Rema and the Talmud, it has been accepted by significant modern authorities.[[30]](#footnote-30) Chayyei Adam connects the ruling to Behag's position that women's obligation is only to hear the megilla, suggesting that she must hear it from one obligated to read it:

Chayyei Adam, 2-3, Kelal 155

So women even though they are obligated, in any case they do not have the obligation of reading, but the obligation of hearing, that she is obligated to hear from a man, and she should not read even for herself but rather a man should read before her. (This language that Magen Avraham wrote is not found in the Zohar on Rut…and it is not dispositive whether [instead] it intended to say that she does not read for others, but reads for herself and it requires study). In any case, it seems to me that if she doesn't have someone to read before her, she should read for herself from a kosher megilla…

Even so, Chayyei Adam acknowledges that the Zohar does not make this ruling explicit and that a woman may read for herself if she has no other option. Though Mishna Berura follows Chayyei Adam, he, too, raises questions about whether the Zohar rules out a woman reading for herself in his *Sha'ar Ha-tziyyun*.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Still, the meaning of the Zohar here is unclear and this ruling contradicts an authoritative Talmudic passage, as well as the rulings of those who permit women to read the megilla for others. It is therefore of questionable halachic weight.

# Reading for Others

Who can read megilla for whom? A man can read for other men, for a mixed group, for a woman or for a group of women. A man can [discharge a woman's obligation](https://www.deracheha.org/discharging-anothers-obligations/), since his obligation is on at least the same level as hers. He does so through the halachic mechanism of *shomei'a ke-oneh*. He can do so even if he already discharged his own obligation in megilla, based on the halachic principle of *areivut*, mutual guarantorship. (Read more [here](https://www.deracheha.org/discharging-anothers-obligations/).)

May Women Read for Men?

May a woman discharge a man’s obligation? Differing approaches to this question tend to correspond to differing positions with regard to a woman's level of obligation. Let's look at the main views on this issue:

**I. Women Can Read for Men** Halachic authorities who view a woman's obligation as equivalent to a man's often maintain that a woman can discharge a man's obligation. Rashi rules this way:

Rashi *Arachin* 3a s.v. *Le-atoyei nashim*

To bring in women - For they [women] are obligated in megilla reading and are fit to read it and to discharge mens' obligation.

This also seems to be a straightforward reading of Rambam:[[32]](#footnote-32)

Rambam Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 1:1-2

Reading the megilla in its time is a positive mitzva…and all are obligated in reading it, men and women…both the reader and the one who hears from the reader discharge their obligation, if he hears it from someone who is obligated in reading it…

Shulchan Aruch seems to rule this way as well, though he cites a dissenting view:

Shulchan Aruch OC 689:1-2

All are obligated in reading it [megilla], men and women…both the reader and the one who hears from the reader discharge their obligation, and that is if he hears from one obligated in reading it…and there are those who say that women do not discharge men's obligation.

More recently, Rav Ovadya Yosef has ruled that a woman may discharge a man's obligation in megilla, arguing that this is the proper understanding of Shulchan Aruch.

Responsa Yechaveh Da'at 3:51

Truly we maintain as halacha that even for reading the megilla women discharge men's obligation, in accordance with the Rambam and Rashi in *Arachin*…and so ruled our master Shulchan Aruch without qualification, though he ended afterwards: And there are those who say that women don’t discharge men's obligation. And the rule is known that an unqualified statement followed by "and there are those who say," the halacha is in accordance with the unqualified statement.

We find a novel suggestion regarding women discharging men's obligations in Marcheshet. In an attempt to explain Behag, Marcheshet suggests that men's and women's obligations differ only on Purim day, when men's obligation also includes the mitzva to [remember Amalek](https://www.deracheha.org/arba-parashiyot/) or to recite [*Hallel*](https://www.deracheha.org/hallel/)—*mitzvot* restricted to the daytime. Men and women would have equivalent obligations at night, though, in which case women could read for men at night.

Marcheshet 22

…There is a difference regarding this between the obligation of the day and the obligation of the night, for in the day its mitzva is also because of remembering the obliteration of Amalek, but at night the mitzva of reading it is only because of publicizing the miracle…therefore at night the obligation of men's and women's reading is equivalent, for with both of them the mitzva is only to publicize the miracle, Thus at night also according to Behag, women discharge men, for in this their obligation is equal.

Rav Zvi Pesach Frank agrees.[[33]](#footnote-33) Read in context, Marcheshet's argument seems to be more of a theoretical suggestion than a practical ruling. Additionally, as above, one can question elements of this analysis.

In any case, as we will see, a number of those who acknowledge that a woman has the ability to discharge a man's obligation, explicitly object to women reading for men in practice, viewing other factors as determinative.

**II. Women Cannot or May Not Read for Men** Those who maintain that there is a difference between men's and women's obligations generally do not permit a woman to discharge a man's obligation. This is how Tur explains Behag:

Tur OC 689

…Behag wrote even though they [women] are obligated in megilla reading, they do not discharge men's obligation…

Some of those who maintain that men and women have the same level of obligation nevertheless rule against a woman discharging a man's obligation in practice. This view appears in a Ge'onic responsum:

Responsa of the Ge'onim, *Sha'arei Teshuva* 345

A woman is obligated in megilla reading but should not discharge the obligation of the *rabbim* [public].

Halachic authorities suggest a few different reasons why a man should not discharge his obligation through a woman's reading, even if we understand their obligations to be equivalent. Ran writes that we should be stringent out of concern for Behag's position:

Ran on the Rif Megilla 2b (Rif pagination)

…There are those who say that since they [women] are obligated, they discharge males' obligations, for whoever is obligated in a matter discharges the obligation of the public…but in the name of Behag they wrote that the [women] are obligated to hear the megilla but are not obligated in reading it and therefore they don’t discharge the obligation of the public…And this is unclear, but it is fitting to be concerned for his [Behag's] words, to be stringent.

Kolbo suggests that women may not discharge men's obligation in megilla as a matter of [*kol isha*](https://www.deracheha.org/kol-isha-3-in-context/),[[34]](#footnote-34) Ritva suggests that it is an issue of [*kevod ha-tzibbur*](https://www.deracheha.org/keriat-ha-torah-3-kevod-ha-tzibbur/),[[35]](#footnote-35) and Tosafot write that it has to do with megilla reading being public, and thus a woman's reading for men being undignified for them—a related, but more loosely defined concept. (See [here](https://www.deracheha.org/discharging-obligations-in-practice/) for discussion of indignity in this Tosafot.)

Tosafot *Sukka* 38a, s.v. *Be-emet*

In the Tosefta it teaches regarding *birkat ha-mazon* that “a woman, a bondsman, and a minor do not discharge the obligation of the masses”…Women do not discharge … because it is *rabbim* [lit. many], the matter is undignified for them. For regarding *megilla*, in which women are obligated, Behag explained that women do not discharge the obligation of the *rabbim*in *megilla*.

The most straightforward understanding of Tosafot here is that "*rabbim*" (many) refers specifically to a group that includes men. The reference to indignity rather than to different level of obligation suggests that Tosafot view Behag differently from what we saw earlier.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Since a woman's level of obligation may not be at the same level as a man's and since these other halachic reservations have been raised about men discharging their obligations through a woman's reading, women do not read for men under ordinary circumstances. But women might read for men in a pressing situation, at least in a private setting (where, for example, one could argue that concern about a public reading does not apply in full force). This ruling of Rav Ovadya Yosef's son, Rav Yitzchak Yosef, is typical of contemporary rulings on the subject:

*Yalkut Yosef Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* OC 689 That all are obligated in megilla reading

…In any case it is correct to be concerned for the view of those who are stringent, that a woman should not discharge a man's obligation *le-chatchila* [from the outset] unless it is a pressing situation…

May Women Read for Women?

According to the position that a woman is permitted to read megilla for herself, may she read it for other women? Tosafot understand the Talmud in this way, and Rosh concurs:

Tosafot *Arachin* 3a s.v. *(Pasak)*

…Therefore one must explain here that women [reading] only discharge the obligation of women, but not men…

Rosh *Megilla* 1:4

That which he said in *Arachin* that all are fit to read to include women – not that they should discharge men's obligation with their reading, but specifically women…this comes to teach that a woman discharges the obligation of her fellow woman.

Rosh also reflects this position in his version of the Tosafot:

Tosafot Ha-Rosh *Sukka* 38a

…It is undignified for men that women discharge their obligation…

According to Rosh, the indignity would not apply to women reading for women. But Korban Netanel, who likely lacked access to Tosafot Ha-Rosh, quotes the version of Tosafot printed in the Talmud, and since Behag has another reason not to permit women reading for men, Korban Netanel suggests that indignity would be a concern even when a woman reads for a group of other **women**.

Korban Netanel *Megilla* 1:4

What that Tosafot wrote in *Sukka* 38…perforce is that a woman does not discharge the obligation of many **women** because the matter is disgraceful…

Mishna Berura quotes Korban Netanel,[[37]](#footnote-37) but other halachic authorities, including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, have rejected his view here:[[38]](#footnote-38)

Halichot Shelomo, *Mo'adei Ha-shana Tishrei-Adar* 19:3

That which Tosafot wrote in *Sukka* 38a, that a woman should not discharge the obligation of the *rabbim* [public] in megilla reading…this is to discharge men's obligations, but it is fine for a woman to discharge other women's obligations…

Concluding Thoughts

What of public megilla readings for women by women? Piecing together what we've learned, there are two main halachic reasons to object to women reading for other women: Magen Avraham's interpretation of the Zohar that a woman should not read megilla even for herself, and Korban Netanel's reading of Tosafot that a woman reading publicly for other women is undignified. Both of these positions have been debated, with a number of halachic authorities ruling differently. Some are nevertheless cautious and take these views into account.

A third objection is the technical uncertainty about which *beracha* a woman should recite, and a fourth is a broader concern about a group of women choosing to separate themselves from a main synagogue reading, as opposed to maximizing the potential of reading megilla *be-rov am*. This last concern was voiced by Rav Hershel Schachter as part of a larger argument against women's tefilla groups.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Other sources seem to leave much room for women to read megilla for other women. We saw that the Yerushalmi describes women hearing megilla at home, that there is a clear halachic preference for a smaller reading when hearing conditions at a larger one may be poor, and that, according to some, there is not even a halachic preference for a woman to hear megilla in the synagogue.

Should these sources nudge us in the direction of smaller, home-based readings for women without a quorum as were apparently common in the past? And do they allow for women to gather in larger groups, especially since a group of ten women may be considered a full quorum for this purpose?

Many halachic authorities strongly prefer for as many community members as possible to hear megilla read by a man in the synagogue. For example, here is an online response by Rav Yaakov Ariel:[[40]](#footnote-40)

Rav Yaakov Ariel, Megilla Reading by Women, Online Response, Tevet 5774

*Be-rov am hadrat Melech*. Megilla reading should be heard in the synagogue. One should not separate from the community only in order for women to read the megilla. Only in a second minyan of women caring for children can a woman also read.

Others come out more strongly in support of women reading for other women, especially—but not only—when a synagogue would offer additional readings in any event:[[41]](#footnote-41)

Rav Yehuda Henkin, "Women and Megillah Reading," *Equality Lost* (Jerusalem: Urim 1999), 59

…There are a number of possible reasons why women should attend the regular megillah readings by men in the synagogue, all things being equal. These include: the preference (hidur) of having as many participants as possible in one large public reading rather than fragmented into smaller ones; the initial obligation to read the megillah in the presence of ten men or ten women, which is often possible only at the synagogue reading; questions as to the proper blessing to be recited; and the general desirability of performing a mitzvah sooner rather than later. All things are often not equal, however: 1) It is often impossible to hear properly from the *ezrat nashim*. The inaudibility of even one word from the megillah reading means that the listener has not fulfilled her obligation. 2) Women, and particularly mothers, are often unable to come to the synagogue at the specified times. For these and other reasons there has emerged a widespread practice to have a second megillah reading for women, and in such circumstances it is entirely proper for a woman or women to read the megillah.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein was known to permit women's megilla readings at institutions for women's Torah study. It is unclear under what circumstances he would permit or encourage them in a community, where *be-rov am hadrat melech* may lead toward making even second readings accessible to all (and not just women).

His son and successor as Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion, Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein, views women's readings under the auspices of a synagogue as satisfying *be-rov am hadrat melech*, and takes a positive view of women's readings.

Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein, Message to Har Etzion Rabbinic Alumni, 11.3.16

If a women's megillah laining is done under the auspices of the shul, it forms part of the communal unity, along the lines of orchestral harmony which is achieved by different instruments contributing to an overall harmony rather than having a single instrument create a mono-vocal harmony. Thus, if we view it as part of a communal framework, all that is left is indeed *be-rov am*, and I don't think that it should necessarily be the overriding factor in this case…. Allowing the group to express itself *lifnei Ha-Shem* [before God] in a manner that is halakhically appropriate is the right thing to do for their *avodat Ha-Shem* [service of God]. These women sincerely desire to be *ovedot HaShem* and they should be allowed the channels to do so. "*Ken benot Tzlofchad doverot*," ["The daughters of Tzelofchad speak right," (*Be-midbar* 27:7)] There are so many avenues of worship that are cordoned off to sincere halakhic women – it is therefore crucial to allow those that can be allowed. I assume that circumstances such as these surely qualify for what Chazal had in mind when they spoke about *la'asot nachat ruach le-nashim* [women's gratification] as a halachic factor.

Another current Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Baruch Gigi, has also voiced support for women's megilla readings as a forum for a bat mitzva celebration.[[42]](#footnote-42) Because of the opportunity for serving God that they offer women of all ages, megilla readings by and for women have become increasingly popular in recent years.[[43]](#footnote-43)

What factors should go into a woman's choice of megilla reading, and why might a woman choose a women's reading?

In many communities, women have a range of halachically-sanctioned options for megilla reading. A woman's choice of where to hear megilla often combines spiritual aspirations with mundane concerns. The expertise of the readers and the quality of the overall experience, as well as family and community responsibilities, will factor into her decision.

A large reading in the synagogue, with more of the community, is an opportunity to come together be-rov am to publicize the miracle.

On the other hand, accessibility issues make more than one reading necessary, and it can be easier to concentrate on hearing every word at a smaller, calmer reading.

Many women are content, like their mothers and grandmothers before them, to hear megilla read by a man in the synagogue or a private setting. Other women prefer to attend a women’s reading, either as readers or as listeners.

It is to our community's advantage for many options to coexist.

Why might a woman choose a women's reading by women?

Women's readings afford women a halachically-sanctioned opportunity to take a leading role in ritual. A woman reading the megilla connects to God through her voice alongside other women, in a way that is not usually available in other settings.

Women's readings can also create a communal ritual space where women assume leadership and share responsibilities in a spirit of kindness and friendship. Hadassah Levy describes the evolution of a woman's megilla reading in her community:[[44]](#footnote-44)

Hadassah Levy, Interviewed at the Jewish Food Hero Blog

When my children were young, I used to go to a secondary Megillah reading (after the main one my husband attended), where a man read the Megillah for a large group of women while their husbands watched the kids. But then a woman in our neighborhood volunteered to read for women, and we formed a small group that enjoyed her reading for a few years. That woman moved away and we decided that we preferred hearing the Megillah from a woman (it is, after all, a woman’s story), so we split up the chapters and found women who had experience reading or wanted to learn....The feeling of empowerment from reading for other women and helping them fulfill a mitzvah is unparalleled. Participating in a women’s reading allows me to fully celebrate Purim as a holiday dedicated to the power of women to effect change, even under difficult circumstances....Our Megillah reading is very friendly and inviting. If we know a woman is on her way but running a little late, we wait a few minutes. If a reader makes a mistake, we correct her politely, and we compliment each other when the reading is done. The blending of empowerment with friendship and kindness.

Levy hints at another factor, as well. According to Rashbam, the halachic principle of af hen, which obligates women in megilla reading, may derive from a link between all Jewish women and Esther's role in bringing about the miracle. The centrality of Esther to the megilla's narrative, coupled with the joyous nature of megilla readings, may also incline women to seek to celebrate specifically with other women, especially when women are reading. There is a sense of a special connection to Esther, who learns to use her voice to save our people.

Though women may feel a unique kinship with Esther, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein reminds us of the significance Esther's character for everyone:[[45]](#footnote-45)

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, Learning from Esther, VBM Transcription

The story of Esther is not merely of historical significance. This story serves as a model of a process that every person must undergo in the course of maturation. Through the character of Esther, the megilla gives us a real-life lesson in developing inner strength, and in forming a mature personality out of the raw material of childishness.

Celebrating the miracle, and Esther's part in it, can fit into a number of different halachically acceptable frameworks for megilla reading. Women should feel comfortable choosing among the options. These can include all-women's readings, following Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein's assessment that “allowing the group [of women interested in all-women's readings] to express itself lifnei HaShem in a manner that is halakhically appropriate is the right thing to do for their Avodat HaShem.”

# Further Reading

Rav Aryeh Frimer, "Women’s *Megilla* Reading," in *Traditions and Celebrations for the Bat Mitzvah*, ed. Ora Wiskind Elper, (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2003), pp. 281-304. Available here: http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/english/tfila/frimer2.htm

Rav Yehuda Henkin, "Women and Megillah Reading," in *Equality Lost* (Jerusalem: Urim, 1999), pp. 54-65. Available here: https://www.nishmat.net/Uploads/files/R\_Henkin\_Women\_Megilla\_Reading.pdf

Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld, "Women and Megilla," in *Hilkhot Nashim*, ed. Rahel Berkovits (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2018), pp. 207-390.

1. This type of textual derivation is more commonly used with Torah-level mitzvot and with verses from the Torah itself. However, the sages teach that halacha can also be derived from the verses of *Megillat Esther*:

Yerushalmi *Megilla* 1:1

Rav Chelbo Rav Huna in the name of Rav "And these days are remembered and done," remembered through reading and done through feasting. This is to say that *Megillat Esther* was given over to be expounded. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Megilla* 3a

*Kohanim* at sacrificial work and *levi'im* on their platforms and Israelites at their stations, all cancel their service and come to hear megilla reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Megilla* 21b

Since it is beloved: they give mind to it and listen. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Chiddushei Maharik, Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 1:2

Both the reader and the listener discharge the obligation. Whence?...For the hearer is akin to a reader. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The initial halachic discussion regards whether a second reader can pick up where the first one left off, at least where splitting the reading was unplanned.

Magen Avraham 692:2

…If the reader becomes silenced in the middle of the megilla, the second needs to begin at the beginning as was written in 284, but he does not need to recite a *beracha* first, for he discharged the obligation with the *beracha* of the first [reader] who made the *beracha* on behalf of the whole congregation …

Rav Ya’akov Reischer ruled that the second reader may begin where the first left off, especially since going back to the beginning would impose an undue burden on the congregation:

Responsa *Shevut Ya'akov* 1:42

Rather it seems in truth to one who investigates the source and the foundation of this halacha will see that there is no one who disagrees, that he begins only at the place where the first stopped…for the first recited a *beracha* to discharge the obligation of the whole *tzibbur* and they discharged it with that *beracha*. If so, what further need is there to begin from the place that the first began? It suffices if he began from the place where the first stopped…And if one would say what difference does it make to begin from the beginning, you can respond to him that our sages were very particular about burdening the congregation…

In his *Sha’arei Teshuva*, Rav Mordechai Margoliyot indicates that the decision of where to pick up the reading depends on the circumstances, and on the community’s preference:

*Sha'arei Teshuva* 692:1

It seems that if [the first reader] only read a few verses, it does not lengthen the burden and [the second reader] should begin from the beginning. It also seems that if most of the congregation agree that he should begin from the beginning. If Purim night is on *motza’ei Shabbat*, it is good to begin from the beginning that their souls not be distressed with a divided reading, but if it is on another day, when the fast is difficult for them, one should be lenient.

Rav Kanievsky rules that splitting up the reading is acceptable when necessary.

Letter from Rav Chayyim Kanievsky, *Mikra'ei Kodesh* (Harari) Purim, Appendix 15

I asked…about the matter of some places that I saw, that they divide megilla reading among a number of readers and even a number of versions [of cantillation]…And I asked if they acted well...And this is his response: In a place of need it is permissible. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mishna *Megilla* 2:3

From where does a person read the megilla and discharge his obligation? Rabbi Meir says: All of it.

Mishna Berura 690:5

One needs to read all of it: And that is absolutely required [to fulfill the mitzva]. And the view of most halachic authorities is that even if he missed just one word of it, he did not discharge his obligation. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This halacha combines a reader's permission to read some words by heart with the listener's status as akin to a reader.

*Megilla* 18b

Our Rabbis taught in a baraita: If the scribe left out [of the megilla] letters or verses and the reader read them aloud [from memory] like a *meturgeman* recites the translation, he has discharged his obligation. Objection from a baraita: If there were faded or torn letters in it [a megilla], if their impression is recognizable, it is fit, and if not, unfit. This is not difficult, this [the requirement that at least the impression of the letters be recognizable] is for all of it [the megilla], and this [being able to recite missing portions from memory] is for some of it.

*Sefer Ha-ittur Aseret Ha-diberot Megilla* 112:3

Therefore the *tzibbur* is permitted to read by heart with the reader for some of the verses.

*Peninei Halacha Zmanim* Chapter 15 Halacha 10

If one missed a word while hearing the megilla reading, the solution is to read the missed word or words immediately from the printed megilla one is using. If, in the meantime, the reader continues to read ahead, one should continue reading until he catches up with the reader. Even though the printed book in front of him is not a kosher megilla, he may use it to fill in the missing words, *be-di’avad*, since he hears most of the megilla from a kosher scroll.

Available here: https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/05-15-10/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Available here: https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=14660&st=&pgnum=97

*Marcheshet* 22

…According to the words of the Chinuch that the mitzva of remembering [Amalek] depends on the mitzva of war, according to this at night, which is not a time of war…there is a difference between the obligation of [reading *megilla* during] the day and the obligation of the night. For during the day, its obligation is also because of remembering the obliteration of Amalek, but at night the mitzva of reading [megilla] is only on account of publicizing the miracle… [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rambam Megilla and Chanuka 1:3

…During the day he does not go back and recite *she-hechiyyanu*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tosafot *Megilla* 4a s.v. *Chayyav*

Ri says that even though he recites *she-hechiyyanu* at night, he goes back and recites it during the day, for the fundamental publicizing of the miracle is in the daytime reading… [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Shulchan Aruch OC 692:1

The one who reads the megilla recites three *berachot* before it: *al mikra megilla*, and *she-asa nissim*, and *she-hechiyyanu*, and during the day he does not go back and recite *she-hechiyyanu*. Rema: And there are those who say even during the day he recites *she-hechiyyanu* and so we practice in all these provinces, and one [person] can recite the beracha and a second can read. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Shulchan Aruch OC 692:1

Afterwards the practice is to recite the beracha of *ha-rav et riveinu* etc… [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Compare Or Sameach, who suggests that women do have an obligation to read, but not on the same level as men's because men's obligation to read also derives from the mitzva of *zechirat Amalek*:

Or Sameach Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 1

…For it is written (*Shemot* 14:14) "This remembrance in a book," that "in a book" is expounded as megilla reading in accordance with Rabbi Elazar Ha-Moda'i, and this verse is said regarding obliterating Amalek, and the Chinuch wrote that women are not subject to the mitzva of remembering and obliterating Amalek, "for they are not conquerers." If so, with women who do not have a basis [for the obligation to read megilla] with this verse, for them it is written to read on the basis of the Sacred spirit, that is from *divrei kabbala* [rabbinic law with some of the force of Torah law], but to read [specifically] from the written text [on the scroll] is only obligatory on a rabbinic level… [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Follow the links infra to see other views on the subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Turei Even and Aruch Ha-shulchan write in a similar vein to explain Behag:

Turei Even *Megilla* 4a

For the essence of the obligation of megilla reading for women is not from the Divine spirit but from the sages' addition.

Aruch Ha-shulchan 689:5

But the essence of the matter is not understood, for why are they obligated in hearing and not in reading? And it seems to me that Behag thought that it is impossible to say that from the rationale of inclusion in the miracle there would be a full obligation like a man…Rather certainly from this rationale there is not a full obligation like a man for reading but rather hearing is sufficient. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Women hearing megilla are analogous to men hearing shofar. Women hearing shofar are a slightly different category, because women's obligation to hear shofar is by force of a binding custom. See more here: [https://www.deracheha.org/the -mitzva-of-shofar/](https://www.deracheha.org/the%20-mitzva-of-shofar/) and here: <https://www.deracheha.org/blowing-shofar/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Some have challenged this analysis, for example, Peri Chadash:

Peri Chadash OC 585

Beit Yosef wrote "… that one who already discharged the obligation of [hearing] shofar blowing, and will blow in order to discharge his fellow's obligation, that according to the fundamental law the blower should not recite the *beracha* but rather the hearer should recite the beracha. But custom is not that way." This is not so, for the custom is proper, and what does it matter if the blower has already discharged his obligation, doesn't he blow only to discharge his fellow's obligation, and with all *berachot* even though he has already discharged his obligation, he can discharge another's obligation, except for the *berachot* over bread and wine, as at the end of the third chapter of *Rosh Ha-shana* (29a), and he discharges even for one who is expert. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. He cites a view that without a minyan each person should ideally read for themselves, reasoning that, since women do not constitute a minyan, each woman should at least recite her own *berachot*.

Responsa *Minchat Yitzchak* III:53

For it is brought in Shulchan Aruch (689:5) that in a place where there is no minyan, if all know how, everyone should read for himself…If so, the halacha of the *beracha* over the megilla is certainly like the megilla in this respect, that if there is no minyan, each one recites the *beracha* for himself, if they all know how to recite the *beracha* (and in any case, there is no proof from what Mateh Efraim wrote, for shofar is not similar to *tefilla*, as Magen Avraham wrote…), and therefore even if the reader discharges the women's obligations in megilla reading, since they do not know how to read for themselves, but he cannot discharge their obligations in *berachot* that they know for themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ben Ish Chai First Year *Tetzaveh* Laws of Purim

…If he read it [megilla] in synagogue and goes back and reads for women, he does not recite a *beracha* for them and they too do not recite a *beracha*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Rav David Auerbach concurs with this opinion in *Halichot Beitah Petach Ha-bayit* 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The exception is when the reading, as in the days of the Mishna, would have been moved up to market day, in which case a minyan would be necessary to publicize the miracle properly. There is some halachic discussion regarding whether megilla reading in a walled city requires a minyan for Purim Meshulash, when 15 Adar falls on Shabbat so the reading is moved to 14 Adar. This discussion depends on whether Purim Meshulash is considered to be a reading "at its time." In practice, one should make a special effort on Purim Meshulash to hear megilla with a minyan. See more here: https://www.deracheha.org/answers/purim-meshulash/ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. It does not appear in the list of *mitzvot* requiring a minyan in Mishna *Megilla* 4:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Magen Avraham 689:1

Women- And therefore he needs to read it in his home before the maidens. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Responsa *Chelkat Ya'akov* OC 232

For reading in the congregation is only for publicizing the miracle, and for "in the multitude is the glory of the King," and only from the outset [*le-chat'chila*]. If so, since "all the honor of a daughter of the King is within" applies to women …the preference for the congregation is inapplicable to them [women] and so it seems to me because of "all the honor of a daughter of the King is within." And even though some of our women go to the *beit midrash* to hear megilla reading, it is not applicable to say that this is akin to obligation for them… [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Aruch Ha-shulchan OC 690:25

It is doubtful whether women combine [with men] for the ten and it seems that they don’t combine. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Mishna Berura 690:63

If women etc. For it is possible that, since it is only on account of publicizing the miracle, it is sufficient also with women. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Chazon Ish* OC 155:2

…It implies that women certainly are included in ten, for they are subject to the obligation and there is publicizing the miracle…There is no place to set conditions for publicizing the miracle, and to exclude women. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Chazon Ish and Tzitz Eliezer discuss the case of Purim falling out on Shabbat, when the megilla reading in Yerushalayim is moved to Friday, which may require a quorum. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Arachin* 2b-3a

…"All are fit to read the megilla" (Mishna Megilla 2:4). To include what? To include women… [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ben Ish Chai, First Year, *Tetzaveh*, Laws of Purim 1

All are obligated in reading megilla, men and women, but women even though they know how to read should hear from men, and thus is the custom in the Holy City, may it be rebuilt, that it was never heard that a woman read megilla.

Mishna Berura 689:8

If a woman reads - and see Magen Avraham who proposes that she not read for herself at all and only hear from men. All this is when she has someone from whom to hear, but if she doesn’t have someone to read before her, she should read for herself from a kosher megilla… [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Sha'ar Ha-tziyyun* 689:16

…For according to the first position, which is the main one, women are obligated in reading…and even if we rule like "those who say" [i.e. the other view], isn't it also proven that she can read for herself, even though she recites the *beracha* "*lishmo'a megilla*." And that which Magen Avraham brought from the Zohar on Rut, that she should not read for herself, see Chayyei Adam, that it is not found in that language there…and it is not dispositive that she cannot read for herself, and especially if she does not have someone to read before her she can certainly read for herself… [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Maggid Mishna, Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 1:2

…But a woman, it seems from the words of our Rabbi [Rambam] that she discharges others, and this is the fundamental law. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Mikra'ei Kodesh 29. (See scans here.) The chapter is entitled "Behag's View that Women Don't discharge Men's Obligations," and is structured as an exploration of different readings of Behag that might limit that conclusion. After Rav Frank presents Marcheshet's reading of Behag, under the sub-heading, "At the Megilla Reading at Night a Woman can Discharge Men's Obligations," he presents Marcheshet on this point. He goes on to show that Turei Even's and Or Sameach's readings of Behag could lead to a similar conclusion. Rav Frank phrases each point as "*le-fi devarav yotzei*" "in accordance to his view, it comes out." He does not conclude with a practical ruling based on the views in aggregate, but rather proceeds to the next point in his exploration of consequences of various readings of Behag. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Kol Bo 45

The author of *Aseret Ha-dibrot* (Ba’al Ha-itur) wrote that women do not discharge men’s obligations with their reading, and the reason is *kol be-isha erva*…

We discuss dissenting halachic views on this issue here: https://www.deracheha.org/kol-isha-3-in-context/ [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Chiddushei* Ha-Ritva, *Megilla* 4a

Since it is accepted for us according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that [women] are obligated [in megilla reading], and even discharge obligations, but this is not *kavod*for the *tzibbur* and they are in the category of *me’eira*…from my teacher.

See here <https://www.deracheha.org/keriat-ha-torah-3-kevod-ha-tzibbur/> for a discussion of this position, and for the related position that this idea is relevant specifically when a man has more of an obligation than a woman, in which case *kevod ha-tzibbur* of this sort might not apply to megilla. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Tosafot here seem to present a different possible understanding of Behag, as invoking *zila milta* as a factor in women's not discharging men's obligation.

Rav Yehuda Henkin, "Women and Megillah Reading," *Equality Lost* (Jerusalem: Urim 1999), 57.

Were the view ascribed here to Halachot Gedolot…that the mitzvah of megillah for women is less than and different from that of men, there would be no cause to compare it with *zila beho milta in birkat hamazon.* [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Sha'ar Ha-tziyyun* 689:15

But for many women, a woman does not discharge their obligation, for it is undignified [Korban Netanel in the name of Tosafot]. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Rav Yehuda Henkin, "Women and Megillah Reading," *Equality Lost* (Jerusalem: Urim 1999), 58-59.

...Korban Netanel, mistakenly assumed that the opinion attributed to Halachot Gedolot by the Tosafot in Sukkah is…that women are less obligated than are men….His view is cited by the Mishnah Berurah, the normally authoritative commentary on the Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim. In this case, however, neither the Korban Netanel nor the Mishnah Berurah knew of the Tosfot haRosh on Sukkah, which was not yet in print. Had they seen it, they would not have written as they did. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Rav Hershel Tzvi Schachter, *Tze'i Lach Be-Ikvei Ha-Tzon*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Available here: https://www.yeshiva.org.il/ask/85217 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Available here: https://www.nishmat.net/Uploads/files/R\_Henkin\_Women\_Megilla\_Reading.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Rav Gigi also provides practical guidance regarding the presence of men at such a reading:

Response of Rav Baruch Gigi, *Bat Mitzva*, Sara Friedland Ben-Arza ed., )Jerusalem: Matan, 2002) 519.

Regarding the matter of reading it [Megillat Esther] by a bat mitzva girl in a *tzibbur* of women—it seems that the matter is possible, and it is even recommended to do this, in order to give a religious-spiritual expression to the bat mitzva…Regarding the matter of men being present at the time of the reading, not in order to discharge the obligation…in my opinion one should avoid this, except in the case of the bat mitzva girl's father or grandfather. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Aryeh A. Frimer, "Women’s *Megilla* Reading," in *Traditions and Celebrations for the Bat Mitzvah*, ed. Ora Wiskind Elper (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2003), 281-304.

R. Aharon Lichtenstein, conversation with R. Chaim Brovender, March 1992 and February 1994, and to Dov I. Frimer, October 21, 1992 and February 19, 1994, also permits a women’s *Megilla* reading. Nevertheless, R. Lichtenstein does advise Jerusalemite women not to hold such a reading when the fifteenth of *Adar* falls on *Shabbat* (known as *Purim me-shulash*). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Available here: <https://jewishfoodhero.com/jewish-women-reading-megillah-purim/> [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Available here: https://www.etzion.org.il/en/learning-esther-0 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)