

Women and the Reading of the Megilla

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Sources And Reasons

The Sages of the Talmud specifically included women in the obligation to hear the Megilla of Esther read aloud on Purim:

Women are obligated in the reading of the Megilla [even though it is a mitzvah which occurs only at a certain time—Purim—and generally women are absolved of mitzvot which are time-bound] since they too were [saved] in that miracle.¹

The question we will address in this study is whether a woman may read the Megilla aloud for a group and thereby exempt others, including men and women, or perhaps only women.

Before entering into a detailed discussion of the halachic criteria delineating this question, it would be most instructive to pursue this inquiry as part of a broader understanding of Jewish law as it pertains to women. One of the components of halacha, as in other systems of law, is that it seeks to develop principles which apply in consistent fashion to similar situations. Thus, it would seem desirable to seek a

1. *Megilla* 4a. Rashi explains that Haman's decree was issued against all Jews—men, women, children.

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definitive answer for our question within the context of other mitzvot which seem to apply equally to men and women, and to find the rationale employed by the halacha in arriving at its conclusions.

In general, a person cannot fulfill a mitzvah for someone else unless he/she has the same level of obligation (*chiuv*) in the mitzvah. Therefore, the first issue we have to clarify is whether a woman's obligation for that mitzvah is equivalent to that of a man. If we say that it is, then it should follow that a woman would be qualified to discharge the obligations for others (barring other reasons not to permit the practice). However, if there is a difference in their level of obligation, women would not be able to discharge men.

The question whether women can act for the group in discharging their mitzvah to hear the Megilla is analogous to other situations where men and women are called upon to perform the same mitzvah.

For example, in *Berachot* 20b, the Gemara discusses whether the obligation for women to recite *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) is a biblical or a rabbinic requirement. What is the difference, the Gemara asks, what the source of the mitzvah is? The answer given: "*le'afukei rabim yeday chovotam*", meaning that it is important to know the level of women's obligation so that we may determine whether they "can exempt others"—i.e., men.

Another case in point is Havdala after Shabbat, about which there are conflicting opinions. Rambam considers that Kiddush and Havdala are both required by the Torah.² But the Rosh³ and subsequently R. Akiva Eiger⁴ rule that it is

2. *Mishnah Berurah, Orach Chaim* 296:1.

3. *Ibid.*, and *Responsa Rosh*.

only a rabbinic innovation. The *Shulchan Aruch* rules that women cannot discharge men from their obligation to make Havdala,⁵ as do *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 296, *Aruch Hashulchan*, and *Pri Megadim*. However, if there is no one else who can do it for him, *Halichot Beita* 15:33 does permit it.

The rationale for these rulings has generated debate,⁶ since there are a variety of reasons which might have engendered them:

It is questionable whether Havdala is an aspect of the mitzvah of Shabbat, which applies equally to men and women, or whether, since it takes place *after* Shabbat, it is a time-bound biblical mitzvah, from which women are technically exempt.

Kiddush is an additional example of the situation we are discussing: Women as well as men must hear Kiddush on Friday night, and indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that a woman's recitation of Kiddush is sufficient "to discharge the obligation for the men present also, inasmuch as they [women] are obligated by the Torah."⁷ However, *Bach*⁸ and others do not accept this and rule that a woman should not recite the Kiddush for a man. Their reasoning is that it is comparable to the question of Megilla—and just as we do not accept that a woman's recitation discharges a man's obligation to hear the Megilla, so too, her recitation of

4. *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 296:16.

5. *Ibid.*, 8.

6. One question which arises is why there should be any difference between Havdala and the kindling of Chanuka lights, which a woman is permitted to do for a man. See the *Mishnah Berurah*, Laws of Megilla.

7. *Orach Chaim* 271:2.

8. *Ibid.*

Kiddush cannot discharge his obligation.

In another case, the *Biur Halacha*⁹ in *Mishnah Berurah* discusses whether a woman's chanting of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh can exempt a man from his obligation to recite that prayer. Since the *Mishnah Berurah*¹⁰ indicates that reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh is only a custom, which applies equally to men and women, he reasons that there is no reason why a woman should not be able to exempt a man by her public recitation.¹¹

Similarly, we know that women must participate in the Seder and recite the Haggada. We would, think, therefore, that a woman could recite the Haggada aloud at the Seder on behalf of all assembled. Yet, writes the *Pri Megadim*,¹² a woman's recitation of the Haggada does not exempt a man from his need to recite it, for the nature of her required participation is not clear—we are not sure whether this is a biblical command for her or one that the rabbis imposed.¹³

Returning to our original question about the Megilla reading, we find two schools of thought emerging: one group of scholars considers that women's obligation with respect to the Megilla is identical with that of men,¹⁴ and another group of authorities posits that it is less. In the latter group,

9. 422, s.v. *hallel*.

10. *Ibid*.

11. He leaves the issue unresolved.

12. 479 1:1, No. 2. See also *Sefer Hachinuch*, Mitzvah 21:6, regarding women discharging for men the mitzvah of relating the story of the Exodus.

13. See Tosafot, *Megilla* 4.

14. Meiri, *Berachot* 47b; Rashi, *Erechin* 3a; Ran, *Megilla*, chapter 2; Rambam, *Megilla* 1:1; Meiri, *Megilla* 2; Rashba, Ritva, Rosh, in *Megilla* 4.

we find Tosafot¹⁵ who cite *Behag*, maintaining that therefore women cannot act to discharge men's obligations for them.

The Tosafists¹⁶ reason that there are two ways to approach the issue of a women's degree of obligation in this mitzvah: the Talmud could have stated that "women are obligated to read the Megilla", which would put their obligation on a par with men's. An alternate method would have been to write that "women are obligated to hear the reading of the Megilla," which is not quite the same thing, and would denote a somewhat lesser level of obligation. The text we have cited in *Megilla*, as well as one in *Erechin* 3a, clearly does indicate that the Talmud considered a woman's obligation to be identical to a man's. However, Tosafot¹⁷ cite a text in the *Tosefta* which reads that women are obligated to *hear the reading* of the Megilla, the implication being that it is only the hearing, and not the reading, in which they are obligated. Consequently, Tosafot opine that a woman's public reading would not discharge men from their obligation to read the Megilla.

So far, we have shown that there is lack of agreement on the key issue of whether men and women have an identical or equal responsibility to fulfill the mitzvah of Megilla.

As with many other issues on which the *Rishonim* disagree, we turn to the *Shulchan Aruch* for guidance: does that Code cite both positions, or does it mention only one as being the definitive position of Jewish law? In fact, the

15. *Megilla* 4a, *Erechin* 3a. In *Mikraei Kodesh*, Purim 33, R. Tzvi Pesach Frank raises the question if a woman is permitted to write a Megilla.

16. *Ibid.*, s.v. "*nashim*".

17. *Megilla* 4a; *Tur* 689.

Shulchan Aruch is somewhat ambiguous, first ruling that both men and women must hear the Megilla, but then mentioning that "there are those who maintain" that a woman's reading cannot exempt men.¹⁸

The Ramo adds a comment:

There are those who say that if a woman is reading for herself, she should recite the blessing "...[who has commanded us] to hear the reading of the Megilla" inasmuch as she is not bound to read.¹⁹

Based on this text, the Gaon of Vilna also rules that a woman should not read the Megilla aloud on behalf of a man since her obligation is only to *hear* the reading. The *Magen Avraham*²⁰ even considers that it is preferable for a woman to hear the Megilla being read by a man rather than to read it herself. However, if this option is not available to her, she may and should read it for herself.²¹

Other Reasons

Does the rationale for the *Shulchan Aruch's* ruling lie in acceptance of the statement of *Behag*, that a woman cannot read for a man since her obligation is of a different nature,²² or does it arise from a different source altogether? Thus, the

18. 689:2.

19. Nevertheless, the Gra, the *Kaf Hachain*, *Turei Even Megilla*, rule that a woman should recite the same blessing as do men, not make a different one. These opinions, however, are all expressed by Ashkenazi rabbinic authorities, and would not impact on the normative practice of Sephardic Jews, who follow the author of *Shulchan Aruch* (see Note 18).

20. No. 6.

21. *Mishnah Berurah*.

22. As cited by *Tosafot*, *Megilla* 4a.

*Mishnah Berurah*²³ explains that women should not read the Megilla for a group due to the similarity between reading the Megilla and reading the Torah—and the Gemara has ruled that a woman should not read publicly from the Torah.²⁴

Moreover, the position of *Mishnah Berurah* is that even though women do not read publicly from the Torah because of *Kevod HaTzibbur* (the dignity of the group),²⁵ nevertheless, even in the privacy of their home, a woman should not read the Megilla for a man. Apparently, once halacha accepts a principle, it applies across the board (*Lo pelug*).²⁶

A further reason for a woman's not exempting men by her reading is advanced by the *Kol Bo*.²⁷ His reasoning is based on the principle that *kol be'isha evra*, loosely translated

23. 689:7.

24. *Megilla* 22.

25. *Ibid*.

26. As noted in the text, the reason for disallowing a woman's public reading aloud from the Torah is due to the principle of "the dignity of the group." What if the "group" is prepared to forego this aspect of its "dignity" and wishes to have a woman read aloud? Are they permitted to do so? In *Orach Chaim* 54, the *Beit Yosef* writes that "accordingly, if they want to forego their 'honor', it seems that this option is in their hands." However, the *Bach* does not agree that a group's foregoing their "honor" can affect the normative practice. Thus, he writes, "And in my humble opinion, it seems that also the Rambam and Rashba would not accept the group's foregoing [their dignity]...and it is not within the option of the group to forego." In *Orach Chaim* 53:23, the *Mishnah Berurah* rules, without mentioning any dissenting opinion, that the group's forgiving the infringement of their *kevod* does not change the basic ruling that a woman may not read aloud for the group.

27. No. 45.

as meaning that a woman's voice is erotic. Since the reading of the Megilla involves a lengthy singing of the scroll, it is not proper that a woman should be reading it publicly for men.

However, if this principle does indeed apply to recitation of the Megilla, how could any halachic authority ever have considered it, under any circumstances? Yet we have seen that the question has been seriously considered; albeit rejected for a variety of reasons, it was never on the grounds of *erva*. The closest we have seen is that women should not be called up to read from the Torah because it is not "honorable" for the group.²⁸ We must therefore conclude that a woman's reading from the Megilla does not qualify as "*erva*".

The *Turei Even*²⁹ and *Or Sameach*³⁰ have a different reason for disallowing a woman's exempting a man through her reading of the Megilla. Their understanding is that even in rabbinic mitzvot there are two variations: one is a rabbinic level of obligation (*derabbanan*) while the other is termed *divrei kabala*, and is of a higher order or imperative. Thus, women were included by the rabbis in the obligation (*derabbanan*) to hear the Megilla, inasmuch as they too were saved by the miracle; but men have to hear it, *midivrei kabala*. Since they have a higher level of obligation, the woman's

28. Unlike nowadays, when the honoree simply makes a blessing, in the days of the Gemara, the person who was called up to the Torah chanted the portion which he was called up to read. Moreover, in talmudic times, each person who was called up to the Torah (*aliya*) chanted his portion himself. Thus, if a woman's reading aloud is an *erva*, the Gemara would have cancelled the practice on those grounds, and not be invoking the concept of *kevod hatzibbur*.

29. *Megilla* 4.

30. *Megilla*, chapter 1.

reading is not sufficient to exempt a man from his *chiuv*.

On the other hand, the *Avnei Nezer*³¹ and *Marcheshet*³² argue that when the Megilla is being read, two obligations are being fulfilled: (a) *pirsum hanes*, publicizing the miracle of G-d's salvation on Purim, and (b) remembering always that we must eradicate the memory of Amalek, the enemy of Judaism since its inception. Since women are not included in the command to "wipe out Amalek" inasmuch as they do not participate in military battles,³³ therefore they do not have the same obligation as men when it comes to the mitzvah of eradicating Amalek. It follows, then, that they cannot exempt a man from his obligation in this part of the mitzvah inherent in Megilla.

Thus, we see that various reasons have been proposed by halachic authorities who do not accept that a woman should read the Megilla aloud for a group:

1—*kol b'isha erva*;

2—similarity to reading the Torah, which the Gemara says not to do;

31. *Orach Chaim* 511.

32. I, 22.

33. *Sefer HaChinuch*, end of *Ki Tetzeh*. Our understanding of the woman's obligation will impact on how we rule on various ancillary halachic issues. For example, is a deaf woman obligated to read the Megilla? Is there a difference if she reads in the morning and not in the evening, since the reading at night is only *midrabbanan*, and not *midivrei kabala*? What if the woman did read for men—do they have to hear it again? The resolution of these and other questions depends on the status of a woman's obligation—if it is different from a man's, she cannot exempt him. See *Biur Halacha* 689:2; *Mikraei Kodesh* 29; *Avnei Nezer*, *Orach Chaim* 501.

3—their obligation is of a lesser status;

4—reading the Megilla fulfills other mitzvot (such as remembering to wipe out Amalek) which do not apply to women;

5—rabbinic mitzvot apply differently to men and women.

Innovation

In considering whether women may read the Megilla aloud, even if only for other women, where the issue of unbecoming or immodest behavior does not arise, there is a very important question which must be addressed. Regardless of any issue's merits on its own, there must always be taken into consideration an "extraneous" question—why is this innovation being contemplated? For two thousand years, Jews have been fulfilling the mitzvah of Megilla in a certain way. If some would like to make changes in that manner of observance, it is not unreasonable to inquire as to their reasons for wanting to make that change. If the motivation for innovation is innocuous, we may be able to proceed. However, such is not always the case, and it would be disingenuous to gloss over that possibility.

The question of changing an old custom or instituting a new one occurs in many situations. A number of years ago, Rav Moshe Feinstein was approached on the issue of women's prayer groups. In his response, he referred to an earlier responsum of his (*Iggeret Moshe O.H. IV 49*) concerning women donning the *tallit* during prayer. There he had indicated that the crux of the matter was really the motivation of the person who want to make some innovation in the accepted practice. If women are donning the *tallit* or attending special prayer groups in an implied rejection of Torah values which consider these things unnecessary, or doing it as an act of rebellion against rabbinic rules, then their mitzvah is actually an *aveirah*.

On purely intellectual or halachic grounds, he concedes that there is nothing wrong per se with a women's *minyan*. However, he continues, it is difficult to find at these prayer groups many women who are motivated primarily by a sincere desire to be able to pray more effectively; most come out of a sense of rebelliousness or rejection of tradition.³⁴

Rabbinic decisors have to be concerned lest some innovation, however innocuous, might be suggested in imitation of trends current in popular culture, or arise from a sentiment that perhaps the way things are done on the American scene are more attractive, more desirable, than traditional Jewish custom. There is something disquieting in the current push to create an identity, or even interchangeability, in the roles of men and women. It is very possible that creating opportunities for women to read the Megilla for a group appears desirable to many because it would parallel women's increased participation in all aspects of modern society. Yet the Torah specifically cautions us: "*bechukoteihem lo teileichu*", do not copy the styles, or customs, or values of other societies. The Vilna Gaon defines it as any custom, fashion, or institution which Jews would not have done on their own, but want to do in imitation of Gentile standards.

In *Chullin* 41a, the Mishnah discusses whether a certain manner of slaughtering an animal is halachically acceptable. Even if technically it is permissible, the Mishnah warns not to adopt it, since it is in "imitation" of a heretical sect. Rashi there explains that fostering such an impression would "strengthen the hands of scoffers." This alone suffices to place the suggestion beyond the pale of feasibility.

Thus, aside from the question of whether a suggested

34. See A. Cohen, "Celebration of the Bat Mitzvah", *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, Vol. XII, p.5.

innovation is acceptable according to the letter of the law, rabbinic decisors also regard the motivation and the context of a proposal as the seminal issue.³⁵ If Orthodox Jews "imitate" practices accepted by secular society or by Jews not committed to Torah values, even if those practices may be innocuous in and of themselves—it lends an aura of legitimacy to the secular style—and for that reason alone, it ought not be sanctioned.

There are definitely times when it becomes necessary to conform to the norms of the general society, particularly if failure to do so would arouse hostility and rejection in the hearts of many Jewish people. In this century, the author of *Seridei Eish*³⁶ permitted girls to join with boys in singing *zemirot* at a communal Sabbath meal, for he saw it as an essential step in making observance of Jewish ritual more attractive to young people. On the other hand, R. Yechezkel Landau some two hundred years ago was quite hesitant about permitting innovation in the construction of synagogues.³⁷ When asked if a new synagogue could be erected in a circular shape rather than the traditional rectangular one, he responded that, while there was clearly no law requiring a shul to be rectangular, it would be important to know why a novel design was being contemplated. If it were due to the popularity of that design in current architecture, it could not be countenanced.

Consequently, it may really be that the question we should address is not *whether* a woman may read the Megilla publicly—but why she would want to. And that is quite a different issue than the one we have been discussing so far.

35. See Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman, *Melamed LeHo'il*, I, 16.

36. II, 8.

37. *Noda Biyehuda*, *Orach Chaim* 18.

Women Reading For Women

Let us re-phrase our original inquiry: if we concede that a woman should not read aloud for a mixed group, may she yet discharge other *women*? And even if she cannot discharge others, is she at least able to fulfill her own obligation to hear the Megilla by reading it herself?

In his Code, the author of *Mishnah Berurah*³⁸ distinguishes between a woman's reading for another woman or two, which he permits, and between her reading for a group, which he disallows.³⁹ The source of his ruling is the opinion of Tosafot to *Succah 38a*, (*dezila beha milta*), and is brought by *Korban Netanel*⁴⁰ to prohibit a woman reading aloud in order to exempt other women.⁴¹ However, the *Korban Netanel* himself concedes that *Magen Avraham*⁴² interpreted the Tosafot's term *zila beha milta* (improper), as applying only to a woman reading for men.⁴³

38. 689:7.

39. *Sh'ar Hatzion* 9.

40. To *Rosh*, *Megilla*, Chap.1, sec.4, note 40.

41. Judaism is guided by the principle "*kol Yisrael arcivim zeh bezeh*", all Jews are "responsible" for one another. Generally, this means that even if I have performed the mitzvah, I can act to help you discharge your obligation in the mitzvah. But whether this dictum applies in the case of a woman who has already fulfilled the precept of hearing the Megilla, who wants to read it aloud for another woman, is a matter of dispute among the *Rishonim*. See *Rosh* and *Rashi* to *Rosh Hashanah* 29a and Tosafot to *Megilla* 4a, as well as the *Biur Halacha* 689.

42. 271:2.

43. I have seen it reported that there are modern *poskim* who accept the contention of the *Magen Avraham* and who dispute the position of the *Korban Netanel* which led to the ruling of *Mishnah Berurah*. It is said that they are or may be prepared to sanction a woman's reading for other women. Purportedly,

Based on the ambiguity which seems to attach to this question, it appears arguable that there are situations in which it might be permitted for a woman to read for other women: for example, if a group of female students were on a trip to Russia, where they might not be able to attend a regular Megilla reading, it is feasible that they would be allowed to have one read for all the others. But this theoretical situation is a far step from sanctioning a woman's *minyan* for the reading of Megilla under ordinary circumstances. It is common knowledge that Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik expressed to many American rabbis his opinion that it is improper to permit a special service in shul, whether for prayer, reading of the Torah, Megilla, or *hakafot*.⁴⁴

Minyan

Regardless of whether a woman may read aloud for an entire group and exempt men, another question arises with respect to the reading of Megilla: The *Shulchan Aruch*⁴⁵ rules that the Megilla should preferably be read in the presence of at least ten. This ruling is predicated on the principle that *pirsumei nisei*⁴⁶ optimally requires ten people; there is also the principle *berov am hadrat melech*, "a large

these include R. Moshe Feinstein (according to R. Tendler); the Bostoner Rebbe, R. Pinchas ha-Levi Horowitz; R. David Feinstein, as well as R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

44. Rabbi H. Schachter, *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 145; see also Rabbi M. Meiselman, *Ha-Isha haYehudiah ve-haHalacha*, end of chapter 20.

45. 680:18, "Rav said, 'The Megilla should be read at its proper time, even by a lone individual; [if it is read] not at its proper time, [it requires] ten people.' Rav Asi says, '[It requires ten], regardless of whether [it is read] at its proper time or not at its proper time.'"

46. Rashi, *Megilla* 5a.

multitude is more grandeur for the King".⁴⁷ Now the question is — do we count women as part of the ten, since they too are included in the miracle and in the requirement to read the Megilla, or do we say that in this case, as in all other situations which require a *minyan*, we do not include women in the requisite ten?⁴⁸

47. *Ran*, *ibid*.

48. Recently, it has become the practice in certain places to have a second reading of the Megilla, for women. If a woman attends such a reading, does she fulfill her obligation to participate in *pirsum hanes*? What about men who have not attended a regular reading of the Megilla—can they attend this reading? Are they fulfilling their obligation of *pirsum hanes*? The *Magen Avraham* 689 writes that the custom was for women to have the Megilla read for them at home. Evidently, they are not obligated to be concerned with the principle *berov am hadrat melech* or with *pirsum hanes*. Many halachic authorities consider that women have to hear the public reading of *parashat zachor* before Purim. *Binyan Tzion* 8, however, maintains that even according to these opinions, she would not be counted as one of the ten people required for the public reading of the *parasha*. Rav Frank even goes so far as to disallow reading *parashat zachor* only for women, since it is part of the Reading of the Torah, which requires the presence of ten men.

There is a mitzvah of *kiddush hashem* (sanctifying G-d's name) which is incumbent on both men and women. For an act to be considered a "sanctification of G-d's name", or the reverse, a *Chilul Hashem*, a desecration, it must be done publicly—i.e., in the presence of ten Jews. Do we count women among the ten? See *Pitchei Teshuva* Y.D. 157:7; *Ba'er Hetev* Y.D. 2:15; *Respona Rav Pe'alim* II O.C. 62. It is even questionable if an act done before ten women, without any men, would be considered a "desecration" or "sanctification." See *Kaf Hachain* Y.D. 2:49; *Minchat Chinuch* 296; *Margaliot Hayam*, *Sanhedrin* 74a; *Gilyon Hashas*.

However, with respect to a *Brit Milah* where the presence of a *minyan* is desirable, a woman would be considered as part of the ten. Possibly this is because (a) the need to have ten people present is so that it will be publicly known that the child has

The Ramo writes that "it is questionable if women are included in the ten." There are a number of reasons adduced for the Ramo's doubtfulness, which are not necessarily germane to the question of *minyán*.

Women and men do not join together for *zimun*, the formal invitation to recite Grace after Meals together, since it is considered *peritzut*, licentious behavior.⁴⁹ So how could they join together for Megilla, even were we to stipulate that they qualify for the quorum of ten?⁵⁰ However, we can make a distinction⁵¹ in that the *zimun* occurs directly after a session of eating and drinking, where the mood might be conducive to improper behavior. The reading of the Megilla, however, takes place prior to eating, and therefore this fear does not seem to be appropriate.

been circumcised, or (b) perhaps the only ones who don't count for this particular quorum of ten are the uncircumcised, and here the woman is considered as equivalent to circumcised.

49. *Berachot* 47b. See the Meiri, footnote 149, who says that a woman should not join in *zimun* even with her husband. As for women joining with the men for recitation of the Hallel at the Seder, see *Orach Chaim*, 479.

50. According to this reasoning, if ten women joined together, they should certainly be considered a *minyán*. See *Chazon Ish O.H.* 155, especially para. 2, who seems to indicate that women are considered part of the ten. See also *Tzitz Eliezer* 13:73.

Furthermore, there is a special *beracha* recited at the conclusion of the Megilla reading, if there is a *minyán* present (*harav et riveinu*). Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank raises the question whether this blessing may be recited by a *minyán* of women. In his note 2, he argues that the Ramo does not raise a question about a *minyán* of ten women, which he would certainly find acceptable, but is only concerned about a *minyán* which is created by the joining of women with men to constitute the quorum. See *Mikraei Kodesh*, Purim 35.

51. This is another opinion cited by the Meiri.

But the Ran⁵² reasons as follows: It is not the eating and drinking which necessarily create an atmosphere prone to licentiousness. Rather, it is the fact that when women join the group, a change takes place in the status of the group. That is to say, if two men eating together are joined by a woman, her presence changes the status of the group, and they now have to recite the Grace with *zimun*.⁵³ In the same way, if six men are joined by four women, the obligations of the group now change, and they can chant the Megilla publicly, with a different blessing than they would otherwise. It is this change in the status, wrought by the inclusion of women, which engenders the fear that an atmosphere of license might be created.

Conclusion

Our inquiry into the question of women's reading the Megilla indicates the consensus of halachic opinion to be negative, since the obligations in this mitzvah are not the same for men and women.

The issue of women reading for women is more complex than appears at first glance, but we may conclude that under certain circumstances it might be permissible for one woman to read aloud for others. Nevertheless, for this mitzvah as for all others where a quorum of ten is required, it would be advisable for a woman to hear the Megilla read with a *minyán* of ten men.

52. *Megilla*, end of second chapter, s.v. *matni, hakol kesherim*.

53. Both Ritva and Ran to *Berachot* 47 state that if three men are joined by one woman, there is no difference in the *Birkat Hamazon* and in fact, the woman joins in the *zimun*.