***Shenayim Mikra Ve-Echad Targum***

**Rav Avihud Shwartz[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. **Introduction: *Shomei’a Ke-Oneh* in *Shenayim Mikra Ve-Echad Targum***

R. Ovadia Yosef writes:

A blind man or a man whose eyes are in pain must hear the *parasha* *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* from another man who is obligated to read it, and he fulfills his obligations through *shomei’a ke-oneh* (*Sukka* 38b).[[2]](#footnote-2)

In the footnote there, R. Yosef argues with the Radbaz, who excused a man whose eyes are in pain from the obligation of *shenayim mikra ve*-*echad targum*.[[3]](#footnote-3) R. Yosef proves that such a man is indeed obligated in *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* and that a blind man is similarly obligated. He writes that these men, who cannot read the text themselves, fulfill the obligation through the mechanism of *shomei’a ke-oneh*; when they listen to someone else read the *parasha*, it is considered as if they have read it themselves.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The use of this halakhic concept, as well as the reference to the Gemara in *Sukka*, is surprising. *Shomei’a ke-oneh* is relevant when one must fulfill a verbal obligation, such as prayer or blessings. To make use of *shomei’a ke-oneh*, the speaker must be obligated himself, as R. Yosef notes. In addition, both speaker and listener must intend that the listener will fulfill his obligation through the speaker’s recitation. Does R. Yosef require such intentions for the obligation of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* as well? As a practical application of this question, may one fulfill the obligation by listening to a tape? If the blind man in question knows the Torah by heart, may he fulfill his obligation by thinking the words without saying them?

At the heart of these questions lies a more fundamental question. Is there a requirement to read and verbalize the words of the *parasha shenayim* *mikra ve-echad targum*, a requirement which, according to R. Yosef, can be fulfilled through *shomei’a ke-oneh*? In order to answer this question, we must delve into the basis of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* and the details of its requirements.

1. **The Basis of the Decree – Private and Public Readings**

The Gemara states:

R. Huna bar Yehuda said that R. Ami said: A person should always complete the *parasha* with the *tzibbur* (public), reading it twice and its interpretation once (*shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*), even the *pasuk* “Atarot and Divon…” [whose Aramaic translation is the same as the Hebrew], for one who completes the *parasha* with the *tzibbur* merits longevity. (*Berakhot* 8a)

What is behind this requirement to complete the *parasha* with the *tzibbur*? The Levush writes:

*Chazal* (*Berakhot* 8a) obligated each man of Israel to complete the *parasha* every week along with the *tzibbur*, reading it twice and its interpretation once, in order that he will be an expert in Torah… (Levush, *Orach Chaim* 285:1)

Indeed, this is the simple explanation. The mitzva of learning Torah, the mitzva that is considered as “weighty” as all the other *mitzvot* combined, includes a variety of areas of study. Focusing on these areas may bring a person to abandon the study of the *Chumash*. *Chazal* therefore established the obligation of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* as a set schedule to study the *Chumash*.

But this simple explanation fails to fully explain the halakhic details of the requirement of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*. The Gemara itself presents an interesting discussion of these details:

R. Beivai bar Abaye intended to study all the *parashiyot* of the year on the eve of Yom Kippur… One elder challenged him from a *mishna*, which states not to study the *parasha* earlier or later [than the public reading of the *parasha*]. Similarly, R. Yehoshua ben Levi told his sons: Finish the *parasha* with the *tzibbur*, reading it twice and its interpretation once.

R. Beivai bar Abaye maintains that the requirement is to learn the *Chumash*, and he therefore set aside one day a year for their study in order to ensure that he would not abandon this area of Torah. However, the other sages disagree and emphasize that the edict demands finishing the *parasha* **with the *tzibbur***. It is not enough simply to learn the *Chumash*; the learning must parallel (to some extent) the public reading.

Indeed, the Arukh Ha-Shulchan adds to the Levush’s aforementioned explanation of the edict:

We do not know the reason for the edict of *shenayim* *mikra* *ve*-*echad* *targum*. Presumably, Moshe Rabbeinu established it simultaneous with the establishment of the public Torah reading. The Levush writes that the reason is so that a person will be an expert in Torah. This reasoning is clearly insufficient; apparently, the obligation in Torah is both hearing and learning… (*Arukh Ha-Shulchan* 285:2)

The Arukh Ha-Shulchan notes two points. First, the obligation is defined as “hearing and learning”; second, the edict is parallel to the ancient edict of public Torah reading. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu established that we read the Torah publicly, he established that we read the *parasha* *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*.

Earlier sources in the *Rishonim* point to this fundamental relationship between the public Torah reading and *shenayim* *mikra ve-echad targum*. Rambam, who summarized all the laws of the public Torah reading in chapter 13 of *Hilkhot Tefilla Unesiat* *Kapayim*, concludes the chapter thus:

Although a man hears the entire Torah during the readings on Shabbat, he must read for himself each week the *parasha* of that Shabbat, the text twice and its interpretation once.

Rambam views the obligation of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* as a direct continuation of the public Torah reading.[[5]](#footnote-5)

*Sefer Ha-Chinukh*, in the introduction to the *sefer*, writes even more explicitly about the connection between the public Torah reading and *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*:

One of the commandments – the mainstay and foundation upon which all else rests – is the commandment to learn Torah, for by learning a man may gain knowledge of the commandments and fulfill them. Therefore, *Chazal* (*Bava Kama* 82a) established that we read a portion of the Torah in a place where the people gather, i.e., the synagogue, in order to raise people’s awareness of the words of Torah and the commandments, and that we read a new portion each week until we finish the entire Book. Based on tradition, the custom of most Jews today is to complete the entire Torah in one year. Furthermore, *Chazal* obligated each and every Jew to read the Torah in his house each week just as it is read in the place of gathering. Thus, *Chazal* state (*Berakhot* 8a), “A person should always complete the *parasha* with the *tzibbur*,” so that he may gain a deeper understanding of the matters when he reads in his house.

The *Sefer Ha-Chinukh* begins with a presentation of the basic, fundamental mitzva of learning Torah and proclaims that it must include learning the *Chumash*. This learning is split, according to the *Sefer Ha-Chinukh*, between two edicts of *Chazal*: public Torah reading and reading *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* each week. The *Sefer* *Ha-Chinukh* presents these two edicts in one breath; he clearly maintains that they are inherently related.

A third source, *Terumat Ha-Deshen*, clarifies that there are two aspects of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*:

The main obligation of finishing the *parasha* with the public is in order that each Jew reads to himself the entire Torah, from beginning to end, each year, just as the *tzibbur* does… However, it seems that according to Rabbeinu Chananel… the reason to finish is not to complete the entire Torah each year… rather, perhaps, to familiarize oneself with what the public is reading. (*Terumat Ha-Deshen* 23)

According to the first reason that *Terumat Ha-Deshen* suggests, the edict is to learn the entire Torah, while the second reason views the edict as mandating connection with the public Torah reading. *Terumat Ha-Deshen* adds that a practical difference between these two views arises regarding the Yom Tov readings. According to the second view, there is reason to prepare, through *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*, for the Yom Tov reading as well, while the first view would see no need to learn the Yom Tov reading *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*, since it is a part of the *Chumash* that will be read in its own time in the cycle of Sabbath readings.

Ra’avan expresses the close connection between the public Torah reading and the private *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* in an even more extreme fashion:

It seems to me that [the Gemara, in mandating *shenayim* *mikra ve-echad targum*] speaks of an individual who lives in a city but is unable to read the Torah in a gathering of ten. He must approximate the time the public will read the *parasha* in the synagogue and simultaneously read himself the text twice, corresponding to the two readers in the synagogue, and the translation once, corresponding to the translator in the synagogue, for [having two readers and one translator] was their practice…

If my rabbis were correct in explaining that [the Gemara] speaks of the Sabbath morning reading [of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* before the public reading] that we are used to, why would the Gemara have to add the words “with the *tzibbur*?” Rather, it must be that the individual reads it simultaneous to the public reading. Furthermore, [according to my rabbis,] why would the individual have to read the *parasha* at all? Would he not fulfill his obligation through hearing it in the synagogue?

Nevertheless, our custom [to read the *parasha* individually before the synagogue reading] stands, as sometimes the individual does not properly pay attention to the entire *parasha* in the synagogue, and he must rely upon his previous reading. (Ra’avan 88)[[6]](#footnote-6)

Among his points, Ra’avan notes that if the reason for the edict were to hear the entire Torah, the public reading would suffice. He therefore concludes that the edict of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* applies only to one who does not hear the public reading in the synagogue. In other words, *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* is a substitute for the public reading.

However, Ra’avan ultimately rejects relying on *shenayim mikra* *ve-echad targum* as a substitute for the synagogue reading. This leaves room to argue that *shenayim mikra* *ve-echad targum* is not a substitute, but rather a preparation for the Torah reading in the synagogue. R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (*Shiurim Le-Zekher* *Abba Mari*, vol. 1, *Keriat Ha-Torah Be-Shabbat Be-sheini U-bechamishi*) explains that there is a double fulfillment in the public Torah reading: it constitutes reading verses in public, just as the Torah was given at Sinai, and it also fulfills the obligation of learning Torah, understanding the verses. Both fulfillments require preparation. One who privately learns *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* will gain much more from the public synagogue reading.

There is a well-known conceptual inquiry regarding whether the Torah reading is an obligation upon the *tzibbur* or upon the individual.[[7]](#footnote-7) According to the arguments above, it is possible that Torah reading is indeed a public obligation, while *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* “translates” the public obligation into a private one.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. **Halakhic Details**

The explanation that we have suggested, which ties *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* to the public Torah reading, may clarify several laws about *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*, including the *pesak* of R. Ovadia Yosef with which we began. We will note a number of *nafka minot*:[[9]](#footnote-9)

**a) Reading from a kosher *Sefer Torah***

In the source cited above, R. Ovadia Yosef writes:

One who has a *sefer* *Torah* in his possession and who knows the cantillation and vowels by heart should ideally read *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* from the *sefer* *Torah*, for it is very holy.

In the footnote there, R. Yosef mentions that this was indeed the practice of the Ari. He would go to the synagogue or study hall, take the *sefer* *Torah* out of the *aron*, and read the weekly *parasha* from it. One of his students would stand beside him and read him the translation from a *Chumash*. R. Yosef then cites several sources that indicate that even one who is unable to read from a kosher *sefer Torah* should be careful to read with the proper cantillation and pronunciation, as the Torah is read in the synagogue.

What is the reason for these customs? Apparently, *shenayim mikra* *ve-echad targum* should ideally be as similar as possible to the public Torah reading, due to the intrinsic connection between the two.

**b) Learning during the public Torah reading**

The same section of the Gemara in *Berakhot* (8a) deals with the question of whether one is allowed to learn Torah during the public Torah reading. The Gemara concludes that only one whose livelihood is Torah is allowed to do so. As Rambam writes:

Once the reader has begun reading the Torah, it is forbidden to speak even about Halakha. Rather, all remain silent to hear and pay attention to what [the reader] is reading, as [the verse] says, “The ears of all the nation were toward the *sefer* *Torah*.” It is forbidden to leave the synagogue while the reader is reading, although it is permitted to leave between readers. One who is always studying Torah and whose livelihood is Torah may study Torah while the reader is reading the Torah. (*Hilkhot Tefilla Unesiat* *Kapayim* 12:9)

Although most authorities interpreted the Gemara’s conclusion in this manner, Shulchan Arukh (OC 146:2) permits one type of learning during the reading:

Reading *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* during the Torah reading is allowed.

At first glance, this exception is bewildering. If it is indeed forbidden to learn during the reading, why should *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* be permitted? However, if *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* and the public Torah reading are two related edicts, Shulchan Arukh’s ruling is clear. One who reads *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* is fulfilling the edict that completes the public Torah reading, and his learning thus does not contradict the public reading.

**c) The time to read *shenayim* *mikra* *ve*-*echad* *targum***

As we saw earlier, the conclusion of the Gemara in *Berakhot* is that one should try to correspond the time of the private reading to that of the public reading. The Tur rules:

The entire week, from Sunday onward, is considered “with the *tzibbur*,” since the *tzibbur* begins reading the *parasha* on Shabbat at *Mincha*. (*Tur* 285)

If so, the appropriate time to perform the private reading begins when the public begins to read the *parasha* in the synagogue – that is, *Mincha* on the Shabbat before.

Nevertheless, although this time is appropriate and although Rambam rules broadly to read *shenayim mikra* *ve-echad targum* during the week, many authorities rule that there is special significance to reviewing the *parasha* specifically on Shabbat. The Tur writes as much in the continuation of the aforementioned passage:

It is a *mitzva* *min ha-muvchar* (an ideal performance of the mitzva) to complete the *parasha* before one eats on Shabbat.

The Beit Yosef points to the source of this idea in the *midrash*. He deliberates whether reading during the week (as long as one finishes before the Shabbat meal) is considered within the “*mitzva min ha-muvchar*,” or whether there is special significance to reading specifically on Shabbat before the meal. Magen Avraham (285:6) asks a different question: is the meal to which the Tur refers Friday night dinner or Shabbat lunch?

Based on what we developed earlier, we can answer both questions. The *midrash* quoted by the Beit Yosef means to suggest that one should read *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* privately as close as possible to the time of the public reading in the synagogue – that is, on Shabbat before lunch. Indeed, *Bei’ur Halakha* seems to maintain that the best time for *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* is between Friday night dinner and Shabbat lunch.

**4. Translation and interpretation**

One of the most difficult questions regarding the obligation of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* is the question of translation vs. interpretation. Already in the time of the *Rishonim*, many Jews did not understand Aramaic. As a result, many sought to replace the reading of the Aramaic translation with the study of a clearer interpretation. The *Rishonim* debate whether this is permissible, as Semag notes:

The Gemara in *Berakhot*… obligates a person to complete the *parasha* with the *tzibbur*, reading the text twice and its translation once… I argued before my rabbis that interpretation is more effective than the translation, and they agreed with me. But Rabbeinu Yitzchak disagreed, and Rav Amram noted Rav Natronai’s position that only the Aramaic translation [is acceptable], since it merited being given at Sinai. (*Semag*, positive commandments, 19)

The *poskim* dispute this issue as well. The Tur (285) rules that one may read Rashi’s interpretation instead of the Aramaic translation. Shulchan Arukh rules:

If one learned the *parasha* with Rashi’s interpretation, it is like the translation, and one who fears Heaven should read the translation and Rashi’s interpretation. (*Shulchan Arukh* OC 285:2)

The Chida writes:

Maharshal, in his book *Yam shel Shlomo* … wrote that if one cannot read both, he should read Rashi’s interpretation and not the translation. But the wise men of the truth wrote that there is reason to insist on the translation specifically; therefore, if one does not have enough time to read both, he should read the translation. (*Birkei Yosef, din* 2)

At first glance, this discussion is connected to the fundamental question with which we opened. If there is an obligation of reading, it may be necessary to read the Aramaic translation specifically, since according to tradition, it was given to Moshe at Sinai. But if the obligation is to learn the written Torah, the main point of the translation is to understand the Torah, which may be done more effectively through Rashi’s interpretation or through other explanatory texts. As Mishna Berura writes:

One who does not understand Rashi’s interpretation may read an interpretation of the Torah in Yiddish … that explains the *parasha* based on the interpretations of Rashi and our other sages…

However, we determined that *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* is an obligation of a private reading as a completion of the public Torah reading. Already in the time of the *Rishonim*, most synagogues stopped reading the translation in public. As Tosafot rule (*Megilla* 23b):“We do not translate the *haftara*, nor the *parasha*.” Shulchan Arukh rules this way as well:

Nowadays, the custom is not to translate [in public], for there is no purpose in the translation, since the masses do not understand it. (*Shulchan Arukh* OC 145:3)

Mishna Berura adds:

See the Magen Giborim, who stated in the name of the Tashbetz that it is permitted to translate in Aramaic even when the masses do not understand it, for the Aramaic translation was established with *ruach ha-kodesh* (divine inspiration). *(Mishna Berura* 145:4)

One could argue that even though the Aramaic translation was established with *ruach ha-kodesh* and has special significance, the custom of translating in the synagogue was abandoned. If *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* is only a preparation or completion of the synagogue reading, it is difficult to assume that we would obligate an individual to read the Aramaic translation, which is no longer read in the synagogue. Of course, the element of learning and understanding the text requires an interpretation, but if this is the only basis for the requirement, it is sufficient to use the most understandable interpretation, such as Rashi’s commentary or similar interpretations.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**5. *Shomei’a Ke-Oneh***

We can now understand the ruling of R. Ovadia Yosef with which we opened. If we view *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* as an edict to learn *Chumash*, there is no need for an actual reading; even one whose eyes are in pain or who is blind may hear a recording of the *parasha* or read the *parasha* in Braille. If, on the other hand, we view *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* as a mitzva to actually read, in addition to the basic obligation to learn, the mechanism of *shomei’a ke-oneh* is clearly necessary. Just as a blind person can receive an *aliya* to the Torah and fulfill the obligation through *shomei’a* *ke-oneh* (according to Rema, OC 139:3), one who cannot read *shenayim mikra* himself may fulfill his obligation through *shomei’a ke-oneh*. This is a classic application of *shomei’a ke-oneh*, and it would require the speaker and the listener’s intent in order for the listener to fulfill his obligation. Similarly, a blind person or one whose eyes are in pain would be unable to hear *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum* from a recording, as *shomei’a ke-oneh* would require hearing directly from the mouth of one who is obligated.

1. Translated by Yakir Forman [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Chazon Ovadia*, Shabbat vol. 1, *Shenayim Mikra*, paragraph 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Radbaz (3:425) bases his ruling on a *kal va-chomer* (*a fortiori* argument): if one in pain is excused from dwelling in the *sukka*, a Biblical commandment, he is surely excused from *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*, a Rabbinical obligation. He uses a similar argument (2:687) to allow one who is troubled by long hair to cut his hair during the *Omer*. R. Yosef quotes authorities who express astonishment at Radbaz’s extension of the exemption in the case of *sukka*, which is based on the unique *halakha* of *teshvu ke-ein taduru*, to other halakhic areas. I heard from R. Asher Weiss that despite this argument, Radbaz’s reasoning is supported by Or Zarua (vol. 2, *Hilkhot Erev Shabbat*, 6), who rules that one who is prohibited from exiting a boat because it entails leaving the *techum Shabbat* may do so if he is pained by the rain or sun, just as one who is uncomfortable is excused from *sukka*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Chazal* established that written words of Torah cannot be said orally (without reading from a text). The *Rishonim* discuss whether this applies to Targum as well, and R. Yosef mentions their argument. He concludes that either way, a blind man is obligated in *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Parenthetically, it is worth noting the comment of the *Shevet Ha-Levi* (*Teshuvot* 8:46) on Rambam’s formulation:

*Chazal* stated in *Berakhot* that a person should always complete the *parasha* with the public, reading it twice and its interpretation once (*shenayim mikra ve-echad* *targum*). It is a Rabbinic commandment. Rambam wrote, “[One] **must** read for himself…,” changing the Gemara’s formulation, as one may have thought from the Gemara’s wording that it is only good advice; Rambam thus teaches that it is an absolute obligation. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ra’avan’s *chiddush* is quoted in the *Hagahot Maymoniot* on the aforementioned Rambam (*Hilkhot Tefilla,* chapter 13, letter *shin*), and Beit Yosef (285) copied his words. The questioner of the Rashba in *Teshuva* 1:206 also apparently adopted this position. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Ran on the Rif, *Megilla* 3a, s.v. *havei uvda*; *Birkat Shmuel*, *Yevamot* 21; and *Minchat* *Asher*, *Shemot* 27, among other sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For an extensive discussion of the issues in this section and of the finer distinctions between different formulations of the reasoning behind the obligation, see R. Shmuel Laufer, *Otzar Shenayim Mikra Ve-Echad Targum* (Bnei Brak, 5750), ch. 2. He also deals extensively with Kabbalistic reasons for *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*; our analysis here is limited to the sources in revealed Torah. See also Dr. Chaim Talbi’s article, “*Le-Hishtalshaluta shel Kriat Shenayim Mikra Ve-Echad Targum*,” *Kenishta* 4 (5770), p. 155ff, for an outline of the reasons for *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The practical ramifications noted here are based on the explanation of *shenayim mikra* *ve-echad targum* developed above. A slightly different explanation that leads to similar *nafka minot* is presented by R. Yitzchak Shilat, *Rosh Devarkha* (Ma’aleh Adumim, 5756), pp. 95-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Tur questions why there is no substitute for the Aramaic translation in the synagogue nowadays. He answers (145) that only the Aramaic translation was established with *ruach* *ha-kodesh*. Accordingly, a synagogue cannot appoint a man to stand next to the Torah reader and recite Rashi’s interpretation, for this interpretation was not established with *ruach ha-kodesh* and may therefore not be included in the public reading. This, however, is a technical problem in the public reading; in the private learning of *shenayim mikra ve-echad targum*, it is desirable and recommended to include Rashi’s interpretation. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)