



# Hearing the Megillah for Those Who Cannot Go to Shul

**Question:** If one who is not a *ba'al koreh* cannot make it to *shul* to hear *Megillah Esther* (e.g., if the pandemic will preclude one from coming), how else can he fulfill the *mitzva* of hearing it?

**Answer:** (For those who can hear from a distance, not being in *shul* is not a problem; if they miss a few words, they can make them up.) Almost all *poskim* agree that one cannot fulfill the *mitzva* of hearing *shofar* via microphone, telephone or radio (besides *chillul Yom Tov* issues), because one must hear the authentic sound of a *shofar* (Rosh Hashana 27b). The ruling regarding a live *megillah* reading via microphone is less clear. Although one does not hear the actual voice of a valid *ba'al koreh*, but a device-generated reproduction, it is better than a recording in two ways. First, the sound waves that the *ba'al koreh* produces directly cause the almost identical sounds heard. Secondly, the reproduction is heard at essentially the same time and place the *ba'al koreh* reads. Therefore, while most

*poskim* posit one cannot fulfill the *mitzva* via microphone (see *Yechaveh Da'at* III:54; *Minchat Shlomo* I:9), the lenient position is marginally tenable (see *Tzitz Eliezer* VIII:11; *Igrot Moshe*, *Orach Chayim* II:108).

The *gemara* (Sukka 51b) seems to not require hearing the voice of the person reciting, if one knows what is being said. It tells of a huge amphitheater in Alexandria, where flags were waved to inform people when to answer *amen*. However, this source is not sufficient here, because *Tosafot* (ad loc.) explains that the participants did not attempt to fulfill any *mitzva* but just wanted to answer *amen*.

Rav SZ Auerbach (*Minchat Shlomo* *ibid.*) does not allow even answering *amen* regarding via radio and telephone. He argues that the people in Alexandria were close enough to be connected to the *berachot* without hearing them. However, there is no physical connection between the person reciting and the one “listening” remotely via telecommunication. For him, one could certainly not fulfill a *mitzva*

The Orthodox Union - via its website - fields questions of all types in areas of kashrut, Jewish law and values. Some of them are answered by Eretz Hemdah, the Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, headed by Rav Yosef Carmel and Rav Moshe Ehrenreich, founded by HaRav Shaul Yisraeli zt"l, to prepare rabbanim and dayanim to serve the National Religious community in Israel and abroad. Ask the Rabbi is a joint venture of the OU, Yerushalayim Network, Eretz Hemdah... and OU Israel's Torah Tidbits.



this way. Nevertheless, there were serious *poskim* who allowed, in a case of necessity, to fulfill *mitzvot* such as *megillah* and *havdala* via telephone (Minchat Elazar II:72, Igrot Moshe, OC IV:91). Adding in video will not improve things halachically, and all agree that one cannot fulfill a *mitzva* by or even answer *amen* to recorded events because of the total break from the human performance of the *mitzva*.

If one is unable to hear the *megillah* normally, it is worthwhile to hear it electronically. This is not only due to the lenient opinions. Exposure to *Megillat Esther's* content has value (Mishna Berura 692:27), like reading the *parasha* from a *chumash* when one cannot go to *shul* (ibid. 143:9), and it enables one to remember Hashem's kindness (Aruch Hashulchan, OC 691:14). In present difficult times, in many communities, the feeling of comradery is also important, especially on a holiday as communal as Purim. Hopefully, people will not incorrectly learn from this, that if away or infirmed for Purim, they do not need to make an effort to fulfill the *mitzva* properly.

The halachically simple way to fulfill the *mitzva* is for the people to read it themselves from a *kosher klaf* they own or can borrow. (One who *lains* without a *minyan* does not make the *beracha* of *Harav Et Riveinu* at the end of the *Megillah* – Rama, OC 692:1).

A non-proficient *ba'al korei* will need help, not only because of difficult *trop*, which is not crucial, but because of hard words and *kri u'k'tivs*. One who is precise in his reading can help the makeshift reader and correct as needed. It is possible to read along with a live or recorded reading. This is not very practical, especially if reading for others, as they need to hear the person rather than the electronic sound. One can use a recording and start and stop it as necessary. For those who prefer, I have made a (1 hour 8 minutes) video of the *laining* with pauses every few words, so that one can read along at a comfortable pace. It is available upon request at: [info@eretzhemdah.org](mailto:info@eretzhemdah.org). ■

*Eretz Hemdah has begun a participatory Zoom class - "Behind the Scenes with the Vebbe Rebbe" - an analytical look at the sources, methodology, and considerations behind our rulings, with Rav Daniel Mann. Contact [info@eretzhemdah.org](mailto:info@eretzhemdah.org) to join while places are open.*

## Having a dispute?



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