



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE RAV DANIEL MANN



Listening to the Megilla with Limited Concentration

Question: It troubles me that I often daydream and/or doze off for a few words during *Megilla* reading. Do I fulfill the *mitzva* under those circumstances?

Answer: You sound like most people. While almost impossible to pinpoint the level of concentration one needs to fulfill the *mitzva*, sharing what we do know gives a reasonable picture.

The *mishna* (Megilla 17a) states that one who reads the *Megilla* while *mitnamnem* (dozing) fulfills the *mitzva*. The *gemara* (ibid. 18b) describes it as one who is neither sleeping nor awake, answers when addressed, cannot explain something that requires logic, but when reminded, he remembers. While this seems to solve your problem leniently, the *poskim*, based on the Yerushalmi, limit this to one who is reciting the reading in this manner. (Reciting something while semi-asleep is demonstrated by many people during *Shemoneh Esrei*. While it seems unlikely to read with one's eyes from the *Megilla* in this state, *b'di'evad* one may read up to half the *Megilla* by heart

(Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 690:3).) In contrast, one who only listens in that state does not fulfill the *mitzva* (ibid. 12). After all, verbalizing a text, even by rote, involves the mind to a greater extent than having sounds go into one's ear without their being processed (Eretz Tzvi, I, 45). Of course, there are different levels of drowsiness, and it is hard to know how much more awake than *mitnamnem* a listener must be.

The more common problem is daydreaming/mind wandering. In two places, the Magen Avraham disallows listening to someone else to be *yotzei* a *mitzva* because one cannot trust himself to listen to each word: 1) 124:16 – One who forgot *Ya'aleh V'yavo* should repeat *Shemoneh Esrei* rather than try to be *yotzei* with *chazarat hashatz*; 2) 193:2 – We prefer reciting *Birkat Hamazon* over being *yotzei* with the *mezamen*. In contrast, regarding *Megillat Esther*, the Magen Avraham (693:15), citing the Rashba (Shut I:467), proves that one does not need first-rate concentration from the *halachot* that a passerby who hears *Megilla* reading from a shul and stops to listen is *yotzei* and that even one who does not read or understand Hebrew can be *yotzei* by listening. Experience teaches that it is hard to decipher to the point one can parrot a string of words he hears in a foreign language, and yet that is halachically sufficient. We suggest another source that indicates that a normal person, with a wandering mind, likely concentrates

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enough. Although usually one cannot follow two people reciting something together, we assume that for *Megilla*, he can concentrate (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 2; see proviso in Mishna Berura 690:4).

The Magen Avraham's stringencies of not assuming one will listen well are in contexts when there are natural alternatives. In contrast, when most of us listen as well as we can and still our mind wanders or if one does not understand the *Megilla*, we will assume he fulfilled the *mitzva*. *Acharonim* disagree about the level of concentration the Magen Avraham said sufficed (see Levushei S'rad ad loc. and She'arim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha 141:13). If one is following along with a *sefer* (as he should) and after breaking out of the lapse is up to the *ba'al korei*, he can assume he concentrated sufficiently (Eretz Tzvi ibid.; Dirshu 690:35, citing Rav Elyashiv). A wandering mind, while better avoided, can still basically follow a familiar text. Consider that people can simultaneously drive, listen to music and a passenger,

and worry about being late.

The way to navigate failure or doubt about concentration is to read over with lips the words he may have missed (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 3-4). People with severe concentration problems may need to read along with their lips (see recommendations in Living the Halachic Process III, D-14 in different circumstances). One who really cannot follow the *ba'al korei* effectively will likely need to read the whole thing from a kosher scroll after *shul*, and if he is not proficient, the special recording we made for people who cannot make it to shul can be helpful (contact our office). ■

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