

The Case for Reading the Parsha Twice Each Week



I Read This Over Shabbos is a weekly newsletter about Jewish book culture, book recommendations, and modern ideas. Receive this free newsletter every week in your inbox by subscribing [here](#). Questions, comments, or feedback? Email Rivka at Shabbosreads@18forty.org.

When I think of what it means to read the parsha every week—to consistently “do” Shnayim Mikra, as it’s known—I realized it’s not only about discipline or completion, but rhythm.

The parsha cycle creates a heartbeat for the Jewish year: Reading Bereishit after Simchat Torah signifies new beginnings. I have learned to associate certain times of the year with specific parshiot, the same stories and teachings marking holidays and milestones each year. Around Chanukah we read the Yosef stories, and in the summertime we read the wild drama of Bamidbar. Vayikra, the book I understand the least, fills that strange stretch of the year when time feels both fleeting and still.

We continue to grow and change, but we are accompanied by an eternal and unchanging Torah—one that somehow always speaks to our present moment. Yesterday, we read about the creation of the world and humanity. The early stories in the Torah teach us of the capacities of human evil, and it doesn't take long for God to see "how great was human wickedness on earth—how every plan devised by the human mind was nothing but evil all the time." Reading this verse in Bereishit one year ago was chilling amidst war; it truly felt as though human wickedness knew no limits.

Next week, in Parshat Noach, we'll read of the dove that eventually finds a resting place—a *manoach*—after a devastating flood. The midrash notes that the dove represents the Jewish People; in many ways, the past week has felt like the beginning of the Jewish People finding a *manoach* again. All living hostages are home, soldiers are returning to their families (though not all), and the nation is beginning a long road of healing.

Doing Shnayim Mikra reminds me that the Torah, an eternal and unchanging guide, always finds its relevance in our lives.

What begins as a personal rhythm is, of course, deeply rooted in halachic rhythm. The source for Shnayim Mikra can be found in *Masechet Berachot*, its laws and details in the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Talmud tells us to complete the *parshiot* of the Torah alongside the congregation through *shnayim mikra ve'echad targum*—reading the parsha twice, and the translation (generally understood as the Aramaic) once. Some also include Rashi's commentary as part of this practice.

What most profoundly moves me about Shnayim Mikra is the emphasis on community. A common thread in many halachic sources discussing the laws of Shnayim Mikra is the importance of communal consistency. In the *Mishnah Berurah*, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan writes that a person should not get ahead in the *parshiot*, as we are meant to complete the Torah portions with the congregation. The Talmud, he notes, adds that completing the parsha alongside the community brings long life. To fulfill the obligation and attain a longer life, one must remain in sync with the community.

By pacing our personal Torah study with communal reading, Shnayim Mikra forms a ritual that unites Torah, individual, and community. When I attend Torah reading in shul after learning the parsha on my own during the week, I feel bound to the community through this quiet, weekly learning ritual.

Two years ago, when we launched *Reading Jewish History in the Parsha*, Rabbi David Bashevkin noted that many commentaries explain that when we learn Shnayim Mikra, we are recreating the giving of the Torah itself. When the Torah was given at Sinai, it was first given to Moshe, then repeated to the people, and then translated by the people into values that were passed down through generations. Torah, individual, and community—bound together by a weekly ritual that demands consistency, rhythm, and wholeness.

This year, our *Reading Jewish History in the Parsha* newsletter is taking on a new form. Last Friday, we launched *Your 18Forty Guide to the Parsha*, a new project that encourages individuals of all backgrounds to learn the weekly parsha and stay in sync with the cycle. Shnayim Mikra can seem daunting—it is—so consider this my formal invitation: not just to read the parsha, but to find your rhythm in it.

Each week, as we return to the same words and find them newly alive, we remember that Torah study isn't about finishing—it's about returning. That's the rhythm of a people still listening at Sinai.
