Shnayim Mikrah #1

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Introduction and The Steipler's Approach

Story:

There is a well-known story that when the Steipler zt"l, was a soldier in the Russian army, he had to stand guard on Friday night deep in Russia, where it was freezing cold. The soldier who had served in the shift before him had left a coat hanging on a tree.

However, the Steipler knew that it is strictly forbidden (*asur*) to use a tree on Shabbos, which includes taking something off of it, putting something on it, or hanging something up. Therefore, he did not use the coat.

Faced with freezing conditions in Siberia, the Steipler reflected on his situation:

> "There is no way that I can survive the night without a coat. It is freezing cold, and there is a nice, warm, *geshmak* fur coat right there. All you have to do is pick it up and take it. Not so bad, right? It is probably okay."

The Steipler did not rely on "it is probably okay"; he knew it was *asur*. At the same time, he realized:

> "But I am not going to survive the night. In this freezing cold, it is plain danger, a matter of *pikuach nefesh* [saving a life]. There is no way I am going to survive the night. What am I going to do? I am going to survive for 10 minutes. Can I survive 10 minutes? Yes."

He maintained this mindset throughout the entire night, telling himself every 10 minutes, "The whole night? No way. But the next 10 minutes, I think I can manage." And he made it through.

This is a tremendous lesson for us: Sometimes we look at challenges in our personal lives and in our spiritual lives (*Yiddishkeit*) and feel they are simply too much for us.

Let us take one example: Shas. Thousands of pages of Shas! How is a person supposed to accomplish that? It is easy to think, "Forget about it!" But if you break it down—a few lines, half an *amud*, an *amud*, a *daf*—can you do something today? You certainly can. So, do what you can today and move on to the next day.

When you look at an accomplishment as a whole, it can look overwhelming. When you split it up into pieces, it completely changes your perspective. That is what the Steipler teaches us.

When you look at the entire Torah—C*hamisha Chumshei Torah*—with all the weekly *parshiyos* and commentaries, it can feel like too much: "I am not even going to know all of this. It is impossible!" But if you divide it into smaller, manageable parts, you will be surprised at how easy it is to reach the finish line.

The Halachah of Shnayim Mikra Ve'Echad Targum

The Gemara in Berachos (Daf 8a) teaches us: "A person should always finish his *parashah* with the community, *shnayim mikra ve'echad targum* [twice the pasuk and once the Targum, translation]."

- Rabbeinu Yonah explains what *im hatzibur* means: you finish it by yourself before the community does. This means you have an entire week to finish the *parashah* before Shabbos, because on Shabbos the community lains (*reads*) the *parashah* in shul.

Status as an *Chiyuv* (Obligation)

The Shulchan Aruch in Orach Chaim (Siman 285) brings this halachah *lema'aseh* and says it's a *chiyuv* (an obligation):

- It is not merely a nice thing to do, nor is it a *reshus* (optional); it is an absolute obligation (*chiyuv*) for every single person to complete *shnayim mikra ve'echad targum*.

The Greatness and Reward of Shnayim Mikra

The Rosh asks: What is the *ma'alah* (great quality) of *shnayim mikra*?

- The Rosh says that when a person does *shnayim mikra*, he is truly reading *Krias Shema*, accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven (*Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim*).

Who instituted this Chiyuv?

- The Aruch HaShulchan says that Moshe Rabbeinu instituted this *chiyuv* for every single person.
- The Chinuch, in his introduction (*hakdamah*), writes that Chazal instituted this so that a person would know Torah better. How do you come to know Torah better? Through *shnayim mikra ve'echad targum*.

The Gemara in Berachos says that the reward for a person who does *shnayim mikra*, receives Arichus yamim—a long life.

The Maharsha explains that people might sometimes think, "It is only Chumash; let me learn something a bit more worthwhile."

- People often feel — "I don't have so much time, I am busy doing this, I am busy doing that, there is so much going on"—**Hashem grants you *arichus yamim* (a long life), and you end up living longer because that makes up for the time you invest in it.**
    - It is an incredible mitzvah, an incredible *chiyuv*, and something we should definitely take upon ourselves. It helps us journey through the *parshiyos* of the Torah—one per week—finishing before Shabbos, and it fundamentally changes our perspective of Chumash and the weekly *parashah*.

The Three-Part System and Historical Context

The Lechem Chamudos explains that this is really a three-part system when the Torah is read B'tzibur:

1. A person is called up for the *aliyah*.
2. A person stands next to him to ensure there are no mistakes.
3. Historically, they had a *meturgeman* (translator). This is the underlying concept of *ma'avir sedrah*—going through the Pasuk twice and the *Targum* once.

The Aruch HaShulchan asks: Why three times?

- It symbolizes the three times the Torah was actually explained: once in *Ohel Moed*, once at *Har Sinai*, and once at *Arvos Moav*.
- Furthermore, when HaKadosh Baruch Hu taught Moshe Rabbeinu the Torah, He said it twice to Himself and once more to Moshe Rabbeinu.

When Does the Obligation Begin?

The Shulchan Aruch notes that the obligation to read *shnayim mikra* begins **after Minchah on Shabbos**, because that is when the community already reads the *parashah* for the upcoming week.

The Most *L'chatchilah* (Optimal) Time

What is the best, most *l'chatchilah* (optimal) time to do it?

- The Magen Avraham brings in the name of the Shlah HaKadosh (based on *kabbalah*) that the most ideal time is Erev Shabbos, a little before or after *chatzos* (halachic midday).

Alternative Schedules

- The Vilna Gaon divided the *sedrah* across the days of the week, doing a little bit each day after Shacharis so he could finish it before Shabbos. The Mishnah Berurah (Siman 285, Seif Katan 30) brings this halachah *lema'aseh*.

What if You Missed It Before Shabbos?

Even if a person did not manage to complete it before Shabbos:

- They can do it Friday night before a meal, or even Shabbos morning before going to shul.
- Even if they missed that, they can complete it after Shacharis before the Shabbos meal.

Tosfos (Brachos 8) brings a Midrash that tells us — **One of the three things that Rebbe instituted for his children to do before he died was not to eat the Shabbos meal until they had completed *ma'avir sedra*.** He wanted to ensure they entered the Shabbos meal fully prepared with that week's *sedrah*, thus fulfilling *m'slim im hatzibur* (completing it alongside the community) and get the *koach* (strength) of the *tzibur*.

Bedieved (secondary / after the fact), if you do not finish by then, you have until **Tuesday**, or— REALLY *bedieved*, you have until **Simchas Torah**.