

Instituting Shnayim Mikra in our Schools

By Rabbi Yoel Yormark
with Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Kibel

Hillel was approached by a non-Jew with an outrageous request: “Teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot.” Hillel answered in five words.

Imagine being faced with a similarly daunting question: What can we do to alleviate the following current problems facing the Jewish world today?

- Kriah difficulties.
- Learning disabilities.
- Lack of proficiency in Chumash.
- The need to be mekareiv our non-religious brethren.
- Unmotivated students.
- Children (and adults) going off the derech.

Incredibly, a solution to these problems can be offered in just four words: *shnayim mikra v'echad Targum*.

As we know, Chazal stated that there is an obligation to read the weekly *parshah* twice, and once with *Targum*. Every Friday, I have my class read the first *aliyah* of that week's *parshah* twice, without *Targum*. Parents must sign that their child performed this assignment over the weekend. I even sweeten the deal with Pringles as a reward. I have seen many positive results, including improvement in *kriah* skills.

When second and third graders heard about this, they happily joined in. The students are excited and love doing this, and the parents applaud the idea as well. In fact, some second through fourth grade students are even reading the whole *parshah* twice. The enthusiasm has grown so great that even some parents of first graders told me that their children actually beg them to listen to them read *shnayim mikra*.

Can you imagine your children begging to learn with you, with *shnayim mikra* as part of their regular vocabulary? This is what has happened in our school. Parents have actually thanked me for this homework. How often does a teacher get a “thank you” for homework?

Another outstanding result is that parents tell me that their children now stay in *shul* for *laining*. They read along with the *baal kriah*, so that they can fulfill *mikra* one time. Is there any other assignment that can produce such results?

Shnayim mikra is a tremendous aid in improving *kriah* skills. However, even for those children who have excellent *kriah* skills, encouraging the practice of *shnayim mikra* will establish a deeper connection to Torah and *mitzvos*, helping everyone stay on the *derech*, because if *shnayim mikra* is done week after week, year after year, it will leave a massive impact on all who do it.

As a General Aid to Limud HaTorah

The advantages to doing *shnayim mikra* are numerous. One of the primary benefits, as recorded by the *Levush*, is that it gives one tremendous fluency in *Chumash*, which subconsciously provides one with a deeper connection to Torah and *mitzvos*. If this is done every week, year after year, can you imagine how much more *limud haTorah* and fluency in *Chumash* result from *shnayim mikra* alone? It leaves an enormous imprint.

Every *parshah* contains some or all of the following: *mitzvos*, *halachos*, *mussar* lessons, *hashkafah*, and fundamental *yesodos*. It follows that anyone who does *shnayim mikra* will be left with the long-lasting benefits that such learning provides. All of this is from simply reading *Chumash*, even without translating.

The *Chofetz Chaim* and the *Shulchan Aruch Harav* state that every word of *Chumash* read out loud is a separate *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah*, even if it is not understood. This is as opposed to *Torah Shebaal Peh*, which must be understood in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah*.

The Vilna Gaon says that when Chazal state, “*Talmud To-*

rah keneged kulam,” it refers to even one word of Torah that is learned. In a similar vein, the *Ramchal* says that just reading *Chumash* out loud, even if it is not understood, has a very powerful *hashpa'ah*. The *Tana Devei Eliyahu* goes so far as to say that one who repeatedly reads the *posuk* of “*v'achos Lotan Timna – and the sister of Lotan was Timna*” (*Bereishis* 36:22) all day is equal to one who learns very difficult *masechtos*, such as *Negaim* and *Ohalos*. This shows us the tremendous power of just reading *Chumash*.

[Another plus of this assignment is that it forces the student to actually have eye contact with a *Chumash* for an extended period of time. Teachers are well aware that eye contact with *seforim* is sorely lacking these days. The *shnayim mikra* program helps correct this deficiency.]

During these troubled times, with technology and all the other issues and problems our schools are facing, a *shnayim mikra* program in every school is crucial. We should never underestimate the importance and power of this crucial *mitzvah*.

Dovid Hamelech says in *Tehillim*, “*Toras Hashem temimah machkimas pesi - Learning Torah makes the fool wise*.” When one reads the words of the Torah, even without translating, one becomes smarter. Is there a better way to get one back into learning than through the words of the *Chumash* themselves, which are “*machkimas pesi*”?

There is another advantage for older students. Rav Aharon Feldman, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Ner Yisroel, told me that learning *Targum* is especially helpful, as it aids *talmidim* in their *Gemara* learning.

Rav Aharon Hersh Fried, author of the Torah Umesorah Kriah Scan, related the following insight of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt”l*. He explained that when Chazal said, “*Ben chomeish lemikra*,” they meant that children should be taught and should practice *kriah* with a *Chumash*, not with a *sid-dur* or *Tehillim*. Indeed, the *Shevet Halevi* states that when children reach the age of *chinuch*, they must be taught to do *shnayim mikra v'echad Targum*.

The *Aruch Hashulchan* states that Moshe Rabbeinu himself instituted this *halachah*. [See the *Baal Haturim* at the beginning of *Sefer Shemos*, who finds a *remez* for the *chiyuv* of *shnayim mikra* there, as the word “*shemos*” is the *roshei teivos* of *shnayim mikra v'echad Targum*, hinting to this powerful *mitzvah*.]

This *halachah* has, unfortunately, become weak and neglected. In fact, the *siman* in *Shulchan Aruch* that discusses this *chiyuv* of *shnayim mikra* is *siman* 285, or *reish pey hey*, spelling the word *rafah*, weak.

Shnayim mikra is the only *halachah* in all of *Shulchan Aruch* that requires a set quota of learning per week: the *parshas hashovua* twice, with *Targum* once. There is no *hal-*

achah that you must learn one to two *Mishnayos* per day, or a *daf* a day, or a *halachah* a day. It is true that the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 246:4) mandates that one devote a significant portion of one's day to learning *Gemara*. However, no quota is given, and, seemingly, one is free to choose his own pace. Of course, *Daf Yomi* and other programs like it are all fantastic, but the pace of *shnayim mikra* is a *halachah*, while other learning quotas are not.

Furthermore, considering the weak adherence to this *halachah*, as mentioned above, is it not prudent to initiate an official *shnayim mikra* program? Why is this program, which has its source clearly stated in *Shulchan Aruch*, *Chazal* and *Gemara*, being ignored? This is the missing link in all of the “*yomi*” plans. Why are students learning *Mishnah* at very young ages, without being trained to also do *shnayim mikra*?

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If this plan and sample verification sheet would be a mandatory part of every day school's curriculum, we would reap so many benefits.

To recap, some of the numerous benefits of this *shnayim mikra* program are that it:

- Engenders fluency in *Chumash*.
- Improves *kriah* skills.
- Brings improvement to learning disabled students.
- Helps prevent children from going off the *derech*.
- Motivates learning for the unmotivated.
- Increases *limud haTorah*.
- Encourages a *chiyuv* that is neglected.
- Is a consistent weekly goal.
- Does not interfere with the regular curriculum.
- Grants one a long life.

This program should run year-round throughout the school year.

I have obtained written *haskamos* from both Rav Aharon Feldman and Rav Zev Leff for this *shnayim mikra* plan as a mandatory program in every school, in conjunction with the homework sheet above. Can this *shnayim mikra* plan really do all of this? Yes, it can. It will be a game-changer in the *chinuch* world.

Try it now. You will see amazing results.

“One who finishes the *parshah* with the community will be given extended days and years” - Brachos 8b

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This article was written as a *zechus* for a *refuah shlaimah* for Shlomo Eliyahu ben Miryam Gitel and all *cholei Yisroel* for *arichus yomim veshonim*.

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Here is a shnayim mikra homework sheet:

Name _____

Grade and amount

- 1st grade, until *sheini* - 1x
- 2nd grade, until *sheini* - 2x
- 3rd grade, until *shlishi* - 2x
- 4th grade, until *revi'I* - 2x
- 5th grade, until *chamishi* - 2x
- 6th grade, until *shishi* - 2x, with *Targum*
- 7th grade, until *shevi'i* - 2x, with *Targum*
- 8th grade, entire *parshah* - 2x, with *Targum*

Parent's signature

This sheet can be downloaded from: http://www.chinuch.org/item_detail/Shnayim-Mikra-Initiativewg