

The Shnayim Mikra Initiative

Instituting Shnayim Mikrah 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

And the most serious problem in our time:

- Preventing children (and adults) from going off the derech.

Incredibly, a possible solution to these problems can be offered in just four words:

: Shnayim Mikra v'Echad Targum.

We all are aware of the major catastrophe of our youth (and shockingly, adults too) going off the derech. Many articles have been published on this topic offering different solutions. As a 4th-grade Rebbe for over 20 years, and presently Director of the Resource Room in the South Bend Hebrew Day School, I have been experimenting with a Shnayim Mikra project for a few years that has succeeded beyond my expectations. The implementation of this program has helped immensely in improving kriah skills, in addition to alleviating many other learning problems.

The Shnayim Mikra program is a great means for fluency in Chumash (which is basis for hatzlacha in all areas of Torah learning). This program has also proven to be an effective tool for Kiruv Rechokim. Most surprisingly, I have found that it can help to stem the tide of kids and adults going off the derech.

As we know, Chazal have stated that there is an obligation to read the Parsha twice as well as once with Targum. Every Friday, I assign my class read the first aliyah of that week's Parsha twice—without Targum. Parents must sign that their child fulfilled this assignment over the weekend. I even sweeten the deal with Pringles as a reward. I must say that I have seen many positive results, including improvement in keriah skills, which can contribute to the off-the-derech problem. When 2nd and 3rd graders heard about this, they happily joined in. The students are excited and love doing this, and the parents applaud the idea as well. Indeed, some second through fourth grade students are even reading the whole parsha twice! The enthusiasm of this project has grown so great that even some parents of first graders told me that their children actually beg their parents 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 indeed 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 korei so that they can fulfill Mikra one time. Is there any other assignment that can produce such results?

This plan can be implemented for grades 9-12 as well. It can be presented as a program similar to Daf Yomi, calling it the school's "Chumash Yomi." Introducing such an assignment will be mechaneich students in the mitzvah of Shnayim Mikra V'echud Targum, in addition to receiving all of the many other benefits of the Shnayim Mikra program. A 9th grade Rebbe told me that he now requires his talmidim to do Shnayim Mikra V'Echud Targum, and it is helping them tremendously in many ways. The enthusiasm is so contagious that even his young children are now doing it as well.

At this point, especially for more advanced students, Rashi can be included in the assignment, at least until Sheini. The Shulchan Aruch writes that Shnayim Mikra can be done with Rashi instead of Targum, and a Yarei Shamayim should do Shnayim Mikra with Targum and Rashi. The Mishnah Berurah also recommends learning Rashi when doing Shnayim Mikra, as there are many Parshiyos which are difficult to understand with Targum alone. The addition of Rashi to the Shnayim Mikra regimen gives one a much greater familiarity in all areas of Torah.

Shnayim Mikra 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 give one a tremendous fluency in Chumash, which subconsciously gives 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 is being created from Shnayim Mikra alone? It will leave an enormous imprint. Every Parsha contains some or all of the following: mitzvos, halacha, mussar lessons, deep hashkofos, and fundamental yesodos. It therefore 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. Indeed, the Chofetz Chaim and the Shulchan Aruch Harav write 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 Shebe-al Peh, which must be understood in order to fulfill the mitzvah of Limud HaTorah. I tell students to count the words they read, so that they get a sense of how many mitzvos they are performing! The Vilna Gaon writes that when Chazal say that "Talmud Torah k'neged kulam," that is said even on one word of Torah that is learned! In a similar vein, the Ramchal writes that just reading Chumash out loud, even if not understood, has a very powerful hashpa'ah. The Tana D'Vei Eliyahu even goes so far as to say that one who repeatedly reads the posuk of "V'Achos Lotan Timna" all day is equal to one who learns very difficult Mesechtos, such as Negaim and Oholos! This shows us the tremendous power of just reading Chumash. [Another plus to 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 to correct this deficiency.] The long term effects of such learning cannot be underestimated. Indeed, this type of consistent learning of Chumash will leave students—and adults—with a great sense of accomplishment.

Shnayim Mikra as a Tool to Prevent Children from Going Off the Derech

As we will discuss, Shnayim Mikra is a tremendous aid to increasing Kriah skills. However, even for those children who have excellent kriah skills, encouraging the practice of Shnayim Mikra will give a deeper connection to Torah and Mitzvos, helping everyone to stay on the derech. Indeed, as these students reach their teen years, it can be the consistent learning of the Parsha in their youth that will make them reconsider before going off the derech. I can see

warning signs of potential off-the-derech students in upper grades, and I am now pushing shnayim mikra with them, and I am getting a positive response! For those who are already off the derech, and you feel there is a chance to bring them back, a first step might be to simply encourage them to say shnayim mikra until sheni.

In these troubled times, with internet, cell phones, social media, etc., and with all the other issues and problems our schools are facing today, a shanyim mikra program in every school is very crucial. We should never underestimate the importance and power of this crucial mitzvah of shnayim mikra at this time. In this light, I feel that the implementation of Shnayim Mikra as part of every school curriculum must be mandatory! There are no guarantees, but "habo litaher, mesayin oso."

Shnayim Mikra as a Tool to Motivate Learning:

The mitzvah of shnayim mikra affords amazing siyata dishmaya in motivating students to learn Torah, as evidenced by the following incidents. I had a student who was not in the mood to learn one day. He asked me if he could do shnayim mikra. After reading only until shelishi twice, he told me that he was ready to learn—his head was now clear. All he did was read chumash and he got back on track! This demonstrates the amazing power of shnayim mikra. How can you encourage a Talmid who has difficulty opening up a sefer in his spare time or on Shabbos? I had student who told me that he had nothing to do one Sunday afternoon. He was motivated to learn, but he did not have the energy to learn a more difficult subject such as Mishnah or Gemara. He therefore decided on reading the whole parsha twice. If the concept of learning shnayim mikra was not on this boy's radar, what other activities would he have otherwise involved himself? This method will produce a chain reaction, for consistent learning of Shnayim Mikra will result in a deeper understanding of the parsha, which, in turn, will make it easier to learn other areas of Torah, such as Navi, Mishnah, Gemarah, and Halacha. It 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, it makes one smarter. Is there a better way to get one back into learning than through the words of the Chumash themselves which are "machkimas pesi"?

When a student of mind was not learning well one day, I suggested that he do shnayim mikra for the remaining 10 minutes of class. He eagerly started doing shnayim mikra. When the bell rang, I told him to go to the next class. "Wait," he said, "I want to read a few more pesukim." The next class was gym period, yet he stayed on an extra five minutes to read his pesukim a second time around. If students are bored or not interested one day, you can have the whole class get Chumashim and read the Parshas Hashavua, out loud and slowly, until sheini. [The Rebbe/Morah can take advantage of this Kriah opportunity to do spot checks around the classroom to make sure they are reading correctly.] You will see how the power of Shanyim Mikra will get them back on track! As you can see, if you push shnayim mikra with your students, you will also have amazing stories to tell. Indeed, shnayim Mikra will give a student a totally different attitude and add a spark to their learning. [I will also let you in on a little secret. If a student finishes a test or class work before others are done, I tell them to do Shnayim Mikra, and they are busy reading Chumash for the duration of that gap time.]

There is another advantage for older students. The Rosh Hayeshiva, Rav Aharon Feldman shlita, told me that learning the Targum is especially helpful, as it aids talmidim in their Gemorah learning. At the levayah for my friend, Rabbi Nechemiah Kibel a"h, it was related that when he was a bochur, he had great difficulties in reading Gemara. He was advised to say Shnayim Mikra with Targum. He did so with great diligence, until he eventually became a Gemara Rebbe himself in the yeshivah in Memphis!

Shnayim Mikra as an aid towards improving Kriah and learning disabilities:

Everyone must have a mastery of Kriah, the ability to read Hebrew without hesitating or mistakes, just as one would read English. For many students, this can take a lot of extra practice, and shanyim mikra is a wonderful way to get it done! This even has a source in Chazal. Rav Aharon Hersh Fried, author of the Torah U'mesorah Kriah Scan, related the following insight of Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky zatzal. He explained that when Chazal said "Ben Chomesh LeMikra," they meant that children should be taught and should practice Kriah with a Chumash—not with a siddur or Tehilim. Unfortunately, many who struggle with Kriah in their school years will continue to have reading problems as adults—only then the problem is more magnified and possibly embarrassing.

In addition to helping students with their Kriah, I have also seen amazing progress and improvement with learning disabled students when I have them read 5-10 pesukim of Chumash per day in Chumash in that week's Parshah.

All parents can suggest to their children every Shabbos to just read (not translate) every Parshas Hashavua until sheni/shilishi twice, with a parent listening. Such an exercise does not impose undue pressure on the child, nor does it require the mental effort that a translating assignment would entail. Shabbos is a perfect time for this, as there are fewer distractions, and most children would be receptive to the idea of just reading pesukim. It would make sense to them too, because, after all, this is the parsha of the week. Mistakes in reading can be corrected at that time, and the parents can add in Divrei Torah from the Parsha on the words/pesukim that they are reading! This will encourage deeper learning of the Parshas HaShavua, in addition to providing an opportunity for parents to learn with their children. If this plan is too structured, just give them a Chumash, and ask them to read the parsha out loud, as if they were davening.

A very important reason for using Shnayim Mikra to improve kriah skills is that one is fulfilling the Mitzvah of limud haTorah at the same time as practicing keriah. This is because when one reads Torah Shebiksav, even if you don't know or understand what you are reading, you are considered to be learning Torah. "Talmud Torah keneged kulam." As such, practicing Kriah while doing the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah can possibly cause more siyata dishmaya for hatzlacha in mastering Kriah. This is better than any Segulah, as we say on Simchas Torah, "Ein Segulah KaTorah!" I am successfully using this method with my students, and I encourage you to try it and see the inevitable hatzlacha!

I gave a presentation workshop, entitled "Shnayim Mikra Curriculum Plan," at the Torah Umesorah Convention (May 2014) based on this article. One of the members of the audience asked, "What about girls doing Shnayim Mikra?" I answered them that Rav Ovadyah Yosef zt"l in the Chazon Ovadyah (Shabbat—Vol 1, pg. 328) writes that a woman who wants to read Shnayim Mikrah may do so. Even though women are exempt from this mitzvah, they are allowed to do it, and they can also gain the benefits mentioned above. [When I subsequently discussed this program with Rav Aharon Feldman shlita, he said that girls should not say Targum if doing Shnayim Mikra.] I also mentioned that my friend, Rabbi Nechemiah Kibel a"h, who later served as the principal of a girls high school in Cincinnati, used to encourage his students to learn Shnayim Mikrah, as this would help them "breeze through seminary." Although Shnayim Mikra is not incumbent on girls, the fact is that girls also have kriah problems, and girls also go off the derech. Therefore, what would be wrong if girls did Shnayim Mikra (without Targum) until sheni or shlishi every week? After all, Chumash is already part of their curriculum, and as future mothers in Klal Yisrael, girls also need help in kriah skills and fluency in Chumash. If calling it a "Shnayim Mikra program" will be too controversial, it can be renamed "Back to the Basics Chumash Reading Program." If needed, add a few Perakim of Tehillim to help gain acceptance. Girls urgently need this help also, and reading Chumash until sheni or shlishi

every week consistently—even if they just read each aliyah once—can help them greatly the same way.

Promoting the obligation of Shnayim Mikra in our schools—and beyond:

This Shnayim Mikra plan should be mandatory in every Day School, Cheder, and Mesivta or Yeshiva High School. It should be geared not only for the stronger students, but for the weaker ones as well. There may be an assumption that everyone already does Shnayim Mikra V'echud Targum, but that is simply not the case. This is a mitzvah that everyone must get involved in. Parents must encourage their children to do this mitzvah. Indeed, the Shevet HaLevi writes that when children reach the age of Chinuch, they must be taught to do Shnayim Mikrah V'echad Targum. Schools and yeshivos must make this plan as part of their curriculum. People involved in Kiruv Rechokim should start each lesson reading Parshas Hashavua. Even businessmen should promote the practice of this mitzvah to their friends. The reason this is so integral is that Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum is a chiyuv, and not just a minhag, a chumra, or just a good idea. The Aruch HaShulchan states that Moshe Rabbeinu himself instituted this halacha. [See the Baal HaTurim at the beginning of Sefer Shemos who finds a remez for the chiyuv of Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum there.] If everyone would take this mitzvah more seriously, the results will be manifold. It will greatly increase Limud HaTorah throughout Klal Yisroel. It will increase fluency in Chumash, as well as greatly increase knowledge of halacha, deep hashkofos, and major yesodos, (which are in every Parsha). As noted above, the Mitzvah can even help prevent our youth from going off the Derech!

This halacha has, unfortunately, become a weak mitzvah. Indeed, the Siman in Shulchan Aruch which mandates this chiyuv of Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum is Siman 285, or רפח, spelling the word רַפּוּ—weak.

If you tell a bar mitzvah bochur, he must start now doing Shnayim Mikra with Targum, it will probably not happen....Indeed, the shevet halevi says when children reach the age of chinuch, they must be taught to do the mitzvah of Shnayim Mikra .

Even if you do much learning every day and night, Shnayim Mikra cannot be pushed aside just because there is no time to fit it into your schedule, because this is a chiyuv. It is not optional! This is at least as important, and I think much more important, than all of the other “Yomi” plans. This is because this Shnayim Mikra proposal is based on Halacha, Chazal, and the Gemara, while the other plans are not mentioned at all in Halacha, Chazal, Gemara. If one does not do Shanyim Mikra, he has done an aveira, an issur derabanan. No aveira is done if you do not do Daf Yomi, Mishna Yomi, etc. This is the only halacha in all of Shulchan Aruch which requires a set quota of learning per week: the parshas hashavua twice with Targum once. There is no halacha that you must learn one to two mishnayos per day, or a Daf a day, or a halacha 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, the Daf Yomi and its affiliates are all wonderful programs, but the pace of Shnayim Mikra V'echud Targum is a halacha, while other learning quotas are not. Furthermore, considering the weak adherence to this halacha, as mentioned above, is it not prudent to initiate an official Shnayim Mikra program also? Why is this program, which has its source clearly stated in Shulchan Aruch, Chazal, and Gemora, being ignored? This is the missing link in all of the “Yomi” plans! Why are students learning mishna at very young ages, without being trained to also do Shnayim Mikra? I was told that Rav Matisyahu Solomon, shlita, BMG Mashgiach, has said that Moshiach will come if we all do Shnayim Mikra with Targum and Rashi.

Many schools have their own ideas and programs, and may not want to add this program to their school. However, a Shnayim Mikra program will not interfere or complicate existing curriculum as this plan can be done outside of any school program or homework. This is because the students can read Shnayim Mikra on Shabbos or Motzei Shabbos, e.g. as part of avos u'bonim. Indeed, for some students, this may be the only learning that they do on Shabbos. If this plan is properly implemented as a mandatory program, you will see how it will greatly benefit and improve your school! I strongly recommend that it even be a separate grade on the report card! This grade should be separate from the regular chumash grade, for otherwise it will be viewed as merely tangential and will most likely not get done. The truth is that it may be worth starting this plan during class, having the talmidim read at least until Sheini, twice. Even if this takes class time, it will pay off very big Torah dividends!

We do not know all of the reasons for the takanos of Chazal. Indeed, there are many hidden reasons behind their takanos that were not revealed to us. But perhaps we may suggest that some of the hidden reasons for Shnayim Mikra were to help with Keriah Proficiency, as "Mikra" also means "Reading." Their intent may have also been to gain the other benefits mentioned above, such as fluency in Chumash, help with learning disabilities, and keeping us all on the derech. We dare not underestimate the benefits of adhering to this edict of Chazal of doing Shnayim Mikra week after week, year after year. This plan is a consistent weekly goal which will bring siyata d'shmaya for more hatzlacha in all learning! There are also all of the side benefits to this mitzvah that we discussed above, such as helping those students who cannot concentrate or focus, whether due to distraction, lack of motivation, short attention span (a very common problem nowadays), or laziness. Shnayim Mikra will give everyone the much needed "jump start" that weaker students (and even stronger students) need for hatzlacha in all learning. This is especially necessary in today's troubled times, when there are so many learning problems! Let me emphasize: this is not my idea. I am just trying to promote a halacha from Chazal! Let us not forget the tremendous bracha that Chazal themselves give to one who fulfills this halacha:

כל המשלים פרשיותיו עם הצבור מאריכין לו ימיו ושנותיו (ברכות ח)

One who finishes the parsha with the community will be given extended days and years.

Who would not want to grab this opportunity to be zoche to live a longer life? If you really think about this plan, you will surely become very enthusiastic about it. I personally feel that if you do not try it out, you are missing out on a great opportunity to help Klal Yisroel in these critical and difficult times. Try this plan for a whole school year, and you will be shocked and pleasantly surprised with the results, as you will see for yourself the many benefits and progress that will occur in all the aforementioned areas.

The Shnayim Mikra Assignment:

An example of how one can assign Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum, especially for older grades is as follows:

To complete (with Targum):

Sunday—until Sheni 2x

Monday—until Shelishi 2x

Tuesday—until Revii 2x

Wednesday—until Chamishi 2x

Thursday—until Shishi 2x

Friday---until Shevii—2x

Shabbos—finish it up! 2x

The following is a sample homework verification sheet I use for grades 1-8:

(This sheet, which has haskomos from Roshei Yeshivos, can be downloaded from [chinuch.org](http://www.chinuch.org):

http://www.chinuch.org/item_detail/0/Shnayim-Mikra-Initiativewg

Name _____

Grade and amount

Parent signature

1st grade until Sheini--1x _____

2nd grade until Sheini--2x _____

3rd grade until Shelishi--2x _____

4th grade until Revii--2x _____

5th grade until Chamishi--2x _____

6th grade until Shishi--2x-with Targum _____

7th grade until Shevii--2x-with Targum _____

8th grade-Whole Parsha--2x-with Targum _____

"חייב לקרות לעצמו בכל שבוע פרשת אותו השבוע שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום" (או"ח-סימן רפ"ה סעיף א"

"כל המשלים פרשיותיו עם הצבור מאריכין לו ימיו ושנותיו"

(גמ' ברכות ח)

If this plan and sample verification sheet would be a mandatory part of every Day School's curriculum, we would reap so many benefits. As noted above, this assignment can be modified for grades 9-12 to include Rashi.

Thus, 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 which is neglected
- Does not interfere with regular curriculum
- Brings long, healthy life

This program should run year-round throughout the school year. I have obtained haskomos from Roshei Yeshivos , encouraging Shnayim Mikra, as a mandatory program in every school, in conjunction with the homework sheet above. Parents should strongly encourage and help their children to do this program, because they will benefit, along with all of klal Yisroel, from all the wonderful advantages that this program will give to their children. Can this Shnayim Mikra Plan really do all of this?

YES IT CAN !!!

Try it now, and you will see amazing results! In fact, even after all that was said here, it is probably not even scratching the surface of this powerful mitzvah.

I truly believe that if this plan is properly implemented as a mandatory , not optional, program in every school, it will tremendously help students, adults, and indeed, all klal Yisroel and will help bring the Geula Shlaima.

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This article is L'iluy Nishmas:
Mordechai Aryeh ben Avrohom Yaakov
Miriam bas Tzvi Hirsch HaKohein
Chaim ben Tzvi
Tziril bas Yoseif HaLevi
Nechemiah ben Moshe

And Refuah shlaima for Shlomo Eliyahu Ben Miryam Gittel