

RETURNING THE SEFER TORAH

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

At the conclusion of Kerias ha-Torah, the Sefer Torah is returned to the aron, there to remain until the next time it will be used. Returning the Torah to the aron, however, is a procedure unto itself involving the following steps:

After the keriah is over, a half-kaddish is recited. Whenever there is a maftir aliyah the kaddish is recited before maftir; when there is no maftir the kaddish is recited after the last aliyah.⁽¹⁾ This kaddish should be recited by the Reader⁽²⁾. If a mourner or one who has a yahrtzeit received the last aliyah (shelishi on a weekday or the last aliyah on Shabbos or Yom Tov) he may recite this kaddish.⁽³⁾ Other poskim maintain that this kaddish belongs to a mourner or one who has a yahrtzeit even if he was not called up for the last aliyah,⁽⁴⁾ and some congregations follow this opinion.⁽⁵⁾

If, by mistake, the kaddish was omitted before maftir, it is recited after the final blessing after the haftarah.⁽⁶⁾ If, on a day that three Sifrei Torah are used, the kaddish was mistakenly recited after the keriah of the first sefer, the kaddish is repeated before maftir.⁽⁷⁾

HAGBAHAH

When the keriah is over, the Torah is raised so that it can be viewed by the entire congregation. Since the entire congregation must be able to see the writing, the Torah should be rotated slowly to face both sides of the shul, first to the right and then to the left.⁽⁸⁾ One who merely raises the Torah but does not display it to the entire shul commits a grave sin.⁽⁹⁾

Even though receiving hagbahah is considered a greater honor than gelilah,⁽¹⁰⁾ one who is honored with hagbahah but feels that he does not have the strength to lift the Torah and hold it up long enough for the entire congregation to see, should decline the honor.⁽¹¹⁾

The magbiah should maneuver the Torah so that the connecting stitches show in the center. This is done in case the Torah tears during the gelilah process - the stitches will tear and not the panels themselves.⁽¹²⁾

Before the Torah is lifted, it is unrolled⁽¹³⁾ so that at least three columns⁽¹⁴⁾ are visible when it is

raised.

As the Torah is lifted up high, it is a mitzvah for all of the men and women⁽¹⁵⁾ in shul to direct their gaze⁽¹⁶⁾ at the "face" of the written parchment⁽¹⁷⁾ and to recite the verse⁽¹⁸⁾ Vezos ha-Torah.⁽¹⁹⁾ One who is not facing the Torah as it is lifted is not allowed to recite Vezos ha-Torah.⁽²⁰⁾

GELILAH

The Torah is rolled up by a person chosen for this honor; often, a minor. This is considered proper chinuch for mitzvot.⁽²¹⁾

It is common practice to set the Bereishis side of the Torah above the Devarim side.

The Torah is bound with its special sash (the gartel) around its upper half. The knot should be tied on the side of the Torah facing "up" so that when it is used next, it is ready to be unrolled without turning it over.

When the Torah is rolled up, care should be taken that the parchment is not touched with one's bare hands. Similarly, if the panels need to be adjusted or tightened, they may not be touched with bare hands even if one washed his hands before. If any adjustment needs to be made, a tallis or the mantle should be used.⁽²²⁾ [Other scrolls, such as Megillas Esther or a scroll used for the haftarah, may be touched with bare hands only if one previously washed his hands.⁽²³⁾]

Some poskim⁽²⁴⁾ rule that it is prohibited to make a single knot and a bow [or a single knot with the ends tucked in under the sash] when putting away the Sefer Torah on Shabbos at Minchah. Since this knot will remain intact for over twenty-four hours, it should not be made on Shabbos. The custom in most places, however, is to be lenient, and many poskim accept this leniency.⁽²⁵⁾ Another option is to wind the sash around the Sefer Torah without making any knot at all, and then to tuck the ends underneath.⁽²⁶⁾ [Those congregations that use a band with metal clasps or a special band called a wimple⁽²⁷⁾ avoid this potential problem altogether.]

Whoever chants the haftarah should not begin until after gelilah is finished. But on Monday and Thursday when Yehi ratzon is recited, there is no need to wait for gelilah to be over before beginning the Yehi ratzon.⁽²⁸⁾

RETURNING THE TORAH

When returning the Torah to the aron, one must approach the aron from the right side of the shul facing the aron. The magbiah and the gollel, as well as those by whom the Torah passes, should follow along as the Torah makes its way through the shul towards the aron.⁽²⁹⁾ On Shabbos the congregation recites Mizmor l'David as the Torah is carried to the aron, while during the week [even on Yom Tov] l'David Mizmor is recited.⁽³⁰⁾

Once the Torah is back in the aron, it is prohibited to remove it for any other purpose⁽³¹⁾ except for Kerias ha-Torah in the same shul.⁽³²⁾ According to some poskim⁽³³⁾ it is even prohibited to take it to

another room in the same building, even for Kerias ha-Torah. The custom, however, seems to follow the lenient opinions who allow transferring a Torah to another room in the same building.(34)

It is permitted to temporarily move a Torah to another location,(35) such as a house of a mourner or a groom, if the Torah is brought to the other location in advance, placed in a spot prepared for it especially, and will be returned to that spot after the keriah is over. It is common practice to transfer a Torah to another place only if it will be used at least three times at the temporary location.(36) While this is a proper custom that should be upheld, it is not mandatory and can be disregarded when difficult to fulfill.(37)

There are some exceptions to the above rule about transferring a Torah to a temporary location even if a place for it was not prepared in advance:

1. If an important Torah sage needs a Torah for Kerias ha-Torah, it is permitted to bring the Torah to him.
2. If ten or more people are unable to come to where the Torah is housed, e.g., they are in a hospital, it is permitted to bring the Torah to them.(38)
3. For the reading of Parashas Zachor it is permitted to bring a Torah to a sick or elderly person or to anyone who cannot make it shul.(39)
4. On Simchas Torah it is permitted to bring a Torah to shul just for the hakafo.(40)
5. A privately owned Torah may be taken from the owner's home to shul even for one time and then returned.(41)

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FOOTNOTES:

- 1** Whenever a keriah takes place before Shemoneh Esrei, the kaddish is delayed until after the Torah is returned to the aron.
- 2** Mateh Efrayim (Kaddish 3:1); Sha'arei Efrayim 10:9.
- 3** Ibid. Harav S.Z. Auerbach explains that this kaddish was specifically reserved for those who passed away and do not have a relative to say kaddish for them. This kaddish, therefore, should not be recited by an individual mourner or someone who has a yahrtzeit, unless he was called for the last aliyah (Halichos Shelomo 12:27). See Sdei Chemed (Aveilus, 163).
- 4** Elef ha-Magen (Kaddish 3:3).
- 5** Orchos Rabbeinu, vol 2, pg. 31; Shevet ha-Levi 8:163-3.
- 6** Mishnah Berurah 282:29.

7 Igros Moshe O.C. 1:101.

8 If the congregation surrounds the bimah from all four sides, then the Torah should be rotated in a complete circle starting from the right side; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 12:28).

9 See Ramban, Devarim 27:26, based on Yerushalmi Sotah 7:4.

10 Mishnah Berurah 147:19.

11 Mishnah Berurah 147:7.

12 O.C. 147:3. See Sha'arei Efrayim 10:17.

13 It is also permitted to raise the Torah while it is closed and then unroll it while raising it, but this should only be attempted by one who is strong enough to do so; Sha'arei Efrayim 10:14.

14 A stronger person should unroll the Torah more widely than three columns' width; Mishnah Berurah 134:8.

15 When a woman is a niddah, however, she should not gaze upon the Torah during hagbahah; Mishnah Berurah 88:7.

16 Although not recorded in any of the classical sources, it has become customary to point at the Torah during hagbahah; see Teshuvos Lev Chayim 2:167. Conversely, while Shulchan Aruch rules that one ought to bow during hagbahah, it is not customary to do so; see Har Tzvi O.C. 64.

17 The Kabbalists recommend that one place himself close enough to the Torah so that he can actually make out the letters; Mishnah Berurah 134:11. But this should be done only by one who is recognized as a person whose actions are l'shem Shamayim; Sha'arei Efrayim 10:13.

18 In most siddurim the wording is: Vezos ha-Torah asher sam Moshe lifnei Bnei Yisrael al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe. Several poskim, however, note that such a verse does not exist; see Siddur ha-Gra and Aruch ha-Shulchan 134:3.

19 Although some poskim consider the recital of Vezos ha-Torah to be so vital that an individual interrupts his Birchos Kerias Shema in order to recite it (Birkei Yosef 134:4; Sha'arei Teshuvah 134:2), many other poskim disagree and hold that it should not be recited even during Pesukei d'Zimrah ;see Chayim Sha'al 68; Tehillah l'David 66:8; Kaf ha-Chayim 134:20.

20 Mishnah Berurah 134:12.

21 Mishnah Berurah 147:7.

22 Mishnah Berurah 147:2.

23 Rama O.C. 147:1 and Beir Halachah (s.v. v'tov).

24 Minchas Shabbos 80:155. According to this view, it is also prohibited to tie a knot on a sash of a

Sefer Torah in this fashion on Thursday, since it has be untied on Shabbos morning.

25 Ketzos ha-Shulchan 123:9; Tzitz Eliezer 7:29; Harav S.Z. Auerbach quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 15, note 178 and Halichos Shelomo 12, note 91.

26 See explanation in The Weekly Halachah Discussion, pg. 173.

27 Used mainly in German congregations. According to Harav S. Schwab (quoted in Knots on Shabbos), this type of band was introduced in order to avoid the issue of knotting on Shabbos.

28 O.C. 147:7.

29 Rama O.C. 149:1.

30 Mishnah Berurah 147:8.

31 It is permitted, however, to remove a Torah from its place for repairs or to air it out. According to some opinions, it is even permitted to remove a Torah in order to display its beauty, as this is considered an honor to the Torah; see Kaf ha-Chayim 135:79.

32 It is also permitted to read Shnayim mikra from a Sefer Torah; Mishnah Berurah 285:1.

33 Ma'asei Rav 129; Sha'arei Rachamim quoting several opinions.

34 Da'as Kedoshim Y.D. 282; Beis Shelomo O.C. 34.

35 It is customary that when a Torah is moved it is wrapped in a tallis. The source for this custom is unknown; Tzedakah u'Mishpat 16, note 3. When a Torah is temporarily relocated, ten people should accompany it (Kaf ha-Chayim 135:74), but this does not seem to be common practice.

36 Aruch ha-Shulchan 135:32.

37 Igros Moshe Y.D. 4:61-13. See Sha'arei Rachamim 22 who refers to this custom as a "minhag ta'us." See also Emes l'Yaakov O.C. 135:14; Halichos Shelomo 12:38 and Kinyan Torah 4:18.

38 Beiur Halachah 135:14.

39 Mishnah Berurah 135:14.

40 Mishnah Berurah 669:9.

41 Kaf ha-Chayim 135:82.