

HONOR AND RESPECT FOR A SEFER TORAH (PART 1/3)

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(A three-part series)

A Sefer Torah, which is the living testimonial of God's covenant with the Jewish people, must be treated with the highest degree of respect and dignity. Accordingly, there are special halachos which are associated with the removal and returning of the Sefer Torah when it is taken out of the Aron ha-Kodesh for Kerias ha-Torah, the Reading of the Torah. The following is the proper procedure:

The chazan should not be the one to take the Torah out of the aron. To accord the Torah due respect, another person is appointed to open the aron,[1] take out the Torah and hand it to the chazan to carry to the bimah.[2] If no one was appointed to the task, the chazan may "rush to grab this mitzvah for himself." [3]

The Torah is taken out of the aron with one's right hand although the left hand may be used to help. A left-handed person may take out the Torah with his left hand.[4] But the Torah is always handed, received and held with one's right hand[5] even if its being given, received or held by a person who is left-handed.[6]

At the time that the Torah is being taken out of the aron, it is customary[7] to recite Berich Shmei,[8] which is a section of Zohar written in Aramaic.[9] Some recite Berich Shmei before the Torah is removed from the aron,[10] while others insist that Berich Shmei be said only after it has been taken out.[11] One who neglected to recite Berich Shmei at the proper time may recite it until the Torah is unrolled.[12]

When the chazan recites Shema and Echad he should face the congregation. When he recites Gadlu, he turns to face the aron.[13] He should raise the Torah slightly when reciting each of these verses[14].

One is required to stand[15], without leaning, anytime the Torah is "in motion." [Many poskim attempt to give the benefit of the doubt to those who sit on Simchas Torah during the hakafos even though the Torah is in motion.[16] Still, it is proper for a God-fearing person to stand during the hakafos unless he himself is holding a Torah.[17]] Thus when the Torah is being carried from the aron or being raised for hagbahah, one is obligated to stand until it is placed on the bimah or until it is no longer within view.[18]

[When the Torah is not "in motion" the following rules apply^[19] : 1) If the Torah is in the aron and the aron is closed, if it is placed on the bimah or is being held by someone who is sitting down, there is no reason to stand. 2) If it is being held by someone who is standing up (e.g., during Keil maleh rachamim), or it is standing upright in the aron and the door of the aron is open, it has become standard practice to honor the Torah by standing - even though one is not required to do so^[20]. 3) If, while being carried, the person carrying the Torah stops to rest, one is required to remain standing, as this is considered "in motion".]

As the Torah makes its way through the right-hand side of the shul towards the bimah, it is considered proper for the congregants to honor it by following behind^[21] as it passes by them.^[22] Others hold that it is considered "haughty" to do so and it should not be done^[23]. All agree that there is no point for those who are not in the path of the Torah (e.g., their seat is behind the bimah) to come to the front of the shul so that they can follow the Torah.

It is customary and considered correct chinuch for people to bring their young children forward so that they can respectfully kiss the Torah mantle.^[24] Some have the custom that adults also kiss the Torah when it passes,^[25] while others frown upon this custom and allow only touching or pointing at the Torah and then kissing that hand.^[26]

When some people carry the Torah to the bimah, they detour or bend down to allow those who are not within reach of the Torah to kiss it or touch it. Some poskim refer to this as an act of degradation, and those who do so should be strongly reprimanded.^[27]

[End part 1]

When two or more Sifrei Torah are taken out of the aron, the ones that are not currently being used are entrusted to a responsible individual to hold until they are to be used. It is improper to allow a child to hold the Torah^[28], and it is prohibited to leave a Torah unattended even if it is left in a safe place^[29].

It is prohibited to turn one's back to a Torah.^[30] Accordingly, those who sit in front of the shul directly in front of the Torah must turn around during Kerias ha-Torah. When, however, the Torah is read from a bimah^[31] [or from a table which is over forty inches high^[32]], this prohibition does not apply.

Often, those holding a second or a third Sefer Torah (e.g., on Yom Tov) sit behind the Torah reader or the person being called to the Torah, who are then turning their backs towards those Sifrei Torah. While some poskim disapproved of this,^[33] the custom to do so is widely accepted^[34]. Others hold that this is only permitted during Kerias ha-Torah or during haftarah that is read from a klaf. But during a haftarah that is read from a Chumash or during Ashrei, etc., the reader or the chazan should move to the side so that his back is not directly facing the Torah^[35].

Question: If, mistakenly, the "wrong" Sefer Torah was removed from the Ark, may it be returned and

exchanged for the "correct" Torah?

Discussion: Most poskim maintain that it is improper to return a Torah to the Ark once it has been removed.[36] Although using the "wrong" Torah will cause a delay (tircha d'tzibbura) since it will have to be rolled to the correct place, it is still considered degrading to a Torah to be put back once it was taken out of the Ark. There are two notable exceptions to this basic rule:

1.If the Torah was lifted up by the person removing it, but not actually taken out of the Ark, it is permitted to set it back down and remove the correct Torah from the Ark.[37]

On a day when two (or three) Sifrei Torah are taken out of the Ark, and the "wrong" one was laid on the bimah mistakenly, it is permitted to pick up the "wrong" Torah from the bimah and replace it with the correct one.[38]

Conclusion

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.[39] This kaddish should be recited by the Reader[40] . 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.[41] 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[42], and some congregations follow this opinion.[43]

If, by mistake, the kaddish was omitted before maftir, it is recited after the final blessing after the haftarah[44]. 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[45]. 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.[46] One who merely raises the Torah but does not display it to the entire shul commits a grave sin.[47]

Even though receiving hagbahah is considered a greater honor than gelilah,[48] 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[49].

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.[50]

Before the Torah is lifted, it is unrolled[51] so that at least three columns[52] are visible when it is

raised.

As the Torah is lifted up high, it is a mitzvah for all of the men and women^[53] in shul to direct their gaze^[54] at the "face" of the written parchment^[55] and to recite the verse^[56] Vezos ha-Torah.^[57] One who is not facing the Torah as it is lifted is not allowed to recite Vezos ha-Torah.^[58] [End part II]

Gelilah

The Torah is rolled up by a person chosen for this honor; often, a minor. This is considered proper chinuch for mitzvos.^[59]

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.^[60] [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.^[61]]

Some poskim^[62] 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.^[63] Another option is to wind the sash around the Sefer Torah without making any knot at all, and then to tuck the ends underneath^[64]. [Those congregations that use a band with metal clasps or a special band called a wimple^[65] 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.^[66]

Returning the Sefer 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^[67]. 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.^[68]

Once the Torah is back in the aron, it is prohibited to remove it for any other purpose^[69] except for Kerias ha-Torah in the same shul.^[70] According to some poskim^[71] 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.[72]

It is permitted to temporarily move a Torah to another location,[73] 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.[74] While this is a proper custom that should be upheld, it is not mandatory and can be disregarded when difficult to fulfill.[75]

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:

- If an important Torah sage needs a Torah for Kerias ha-Torah, it is permitted to bring the Torah to him.
- 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.[76]
- 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 to shul[77].
- On Simchas Torah it is permitted to bring a Torah to shul just for the hakafo.[78]
- A privately owned Torah may be taken from the owner's home to shul even for one time and then returned[79].

1.It is considered a segulah bedukah for an easy labor, for the husband of a woman in her ninth month of pregnancy to receive the honor of opening the aron; Chida, Avodas ha-Kodesh, Moreh B'etzba 3:4.

2.Aruch ha-Shulchan 282:1, based on Mishnah Yuma 68b.

3.Sha'arei Efrayim 10:2.

4.Sha'arei Efrayim 10:2.

5.Rama O.C. 134:2.

6.Mishnah Berurah 282:1. The Chazon Ish held that the "face" of the Torah should be towards the person who is holding it (Tefilah K'hilchasah, pg. 312), but many people hold the Torah facing away from themselves.

7.German communities do not recite Berich Shmei; Siddur Avodas Yisrael, pg. 122. Many Sephardim recite it only on Shabbos; Ben Ish Chai, Toldos 15.

8.Several Kabbalists attach great importance to the recital of Berich Shmei, since the time when the

Torah is removed from the aron is considered an eis ratzon (auspicious time) in which one's prayers are more readily answered; see Yeshurun Torah Journal, vol. 2, pg. 579.

9. Since Aramaic prayers may be recited only b'tzibur, it is important to recite Berich Shmei together with the congregation; See Mishnah Berurah 101:19. See also Yesod v'Shoresh ha-Avodah 5:8 who says that an individual should recite Berich Shmei even in middle of Ve'hu rachum (during the week). During Pesukei d'Zimrah, however, one should not stop to recite Berich Shmei; Teshuvos Maharshag 1:52.

10. Darchei Chayim v'Shalom 196. This also seems to be the view of Aruch ha-Shulchan 282:1, and is the custom in many places.

11. Mateh Efrayim 619:48; Rav Pealim 3:8; Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:70-9, based on Sha'arei Efrayim 10:1; Az Nidberu 8:48. Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo 12:9) maintains that either way is acceptable.

12. Mishnah Berurah 134:13. Pischei She'arim to Sha'arei Efrayim 10:1 maintains that it may be said during hagbahah as well.

13. Aruch ha-Shulchan 282:1.

14. Mishnah Berurah 134:13.

15. "Stand" means that if one is sitting he must stand up and if one is walking he must stand still (until the Torah passes by); Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 282:3.

16. See Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 282:5; Shulchan ha-Tahor 149:2; Minchas Shlomo 1:33; Halichos Shlomo 12:13; B'tzeil ha-Chochmah 5:139; Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:319 and Tzedakah u'Mishpat 16, note 37.

17. Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 2, pg. 308.

18. Mishnah Berurah 146:17, based on Y.D. 282:2. According to some opinions, the requirement is to stand as long as one can sense that the Torah is being carried, even if it is not visible to him.

19. Based on Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 146:18; Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:38-4; Minchas Shlomo 1:33.

20. Accordingly, a weak or ill person may sit; Meishiv Halachah, O.C. 248.

21. Some poskim mention that it is proper to follow until it reaches the bimah (Chayei Adam 31:42), while others write that it is sufficient to follow along "a bit" (Sha'arei Efrayim 10:4; Halichos Shlomo 12, note 17).

22. Mishnah Berurah 149:7.

23. Aruch ha-Shulchan 149:3; 282:1.

24. Rama, O.C. 149:1.

25. Sha'arei Efrayim 10:4; Kaf ha-Chayim 134:10; 149:10.

26. Pischei She'arim 10:4 quoting Kitzur Shelah; Siddur Tzelosa d'Avraham, pg. 375; Rav Y.E. Henkin (Eidus l'Yisrael 63).

27. Teshuvos Yad Yitzchak, quoted by Beis Baruch 31:171; Teshuvos Rivam Shneituch, quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 12:40. [Possibly, if the detour is for the sake of a person who is unable to come to the Torah, i.e., a handicapped person, it would be permissible.]

28. Mishnah Berurah 147:29.

29. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:38.

30. Y.D. 282:1.

31. Rama, Y.D. 242:18; Mishnah Berurah 150:14.

32. Taz, Y.D. 242:13. See, however, Pischei Teshuvah, Y.D. 282:2, who seems to imply otherwise. See also Minchas Yitzchak 5:78.

33. Mishnah Berurah 147:29.

34. Halichos Shlomo 12, note 21.

35. Emek Berachah, pg. 43.

36. See Yabia Omer 8:15-4, who quotes the various views who rule stringently. See, however, Igros Moshe 2:37, who rules that one may not object if a member of the congregation instructs the chazan to return the "wrong" Torah to the Ark.

37. Eishel Avraham, O.C. 144.

38. Peri Megadim (Mishbetzos) 140:4; Beiur Halachah 684:3, s.v. ve'im ta'ah, quoting Acharonim. Even if the "wrong" Torah was already unrolled to the Torah reading of the day (and even if the one called up for the aliyah already recited Baruch Atah but did not yet say Hashem), it is permitted to roll it up and exchange it for the correct one.

39. Whenever a keriah takes place before Shemoneh Esrei, the kaddish is delayed until after the Torah is returned to the aron.

40. Mateh Efrayim (Kaddish 3:1); Sha'arei Efrayim 10:9.

41. Ibid. Rav 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, is not to be recited by an individual mourner or someone who has a yahrtzeit, unless he was called for the last aliyah (Halichos Shlomo 12:27). See Sdei Chemed (Aveilus, 163).

42. Elef ha-Magen (Kaddish 3:3).

43.Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 72; Shevet ha-Levi 8:163-3.

44.Mishnah Berurah 282:29.

45.Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:101.

46.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; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo 12:28).

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

48.Mishnah Berurah 147:19.

49.Mishnah Berurah 147:7.

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

51.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.

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

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

54.Although not recorded in any of the classical sources, it is customary in many shuls 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.

55.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.

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

57.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.

58.Mishnah Berurah 134:12.

59.Mishnah Berurah 147:7.

60.Mishnah Berurah 147:2.

61.Rama, O.C. 147:1 and Beur Halachah (s.v. v'tov).

62.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.

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

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

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

66.O.C. 147:7.

67.Rama O.C. 149:1.

68.Mishnah Berurah 147:8.

69.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.

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

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

72.Da'as Kedoshim, Y.D. 282; Beis Shlomo, O.C. 34.

73.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.

74.Aruch ha-Shulchan 135:32.

75.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 Shlomo 12:38 and Kinyan Torah 4:18.

76.Beur Halachah 135:14.

77.Mishnah Berurah 135:14.

78.Mishnah Berurah 669:9.

79.Kaf ha-Chayim 135:82.

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