

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

While maintenance is done on an *aron hakodesh*, do those present need to stand?

The issues:

A) *Kavod Sefer Torah*, respect for a *Sefer Torah*

B) *The Aron Hakodesh*; keeping it closed

C) Standing for a *Sefer Torah*

A) *Kavod Sefer Torah*

Each aspect of respect one is obliged to show for a *Sefer Torah* appears to have its own source. The main factor is the content of the *Sefer Torah*. As the Talmud says, it has within it the words of the *Luchos Habris*, tablets of the covenant, and must be treated with respect. We are commanded to respect students of the Torah, so we must certainly respect the Torah itself. The other factor is the sanctity with which a *Sefer Torah* must be written, and with which its materials are manufactured.

The sources for the *mitzvah* to respect a *Sefer Torah* include the *mitzvah*, *umikdashi tira'u*, revere [My] sanctuary. This applies to the *Bais Hamikdash*, but also to *shuls* and holy artifacts. A *Sefer Torah* is considered *kedusha atzma*, holiness itself. It is on the highest level of *kedusha* that we have nowadays. Due to this reverence, one may not sit on the same level as a *Sefer Torah*, nor do anything mundane in its presence. It must be treated with extra care, and a special place must be designated for it. Some derive this from the *pasuk* stating that the *Sefer Torah* written by Moshe was placed beside the *Aron Habris*, holy ark in the Tabernacle. This teaches us to treat the *Sefer Torah* with comparable reverence and to designate for it a place of honor. The same *pasuk* states that the *Sefer Torah* will serve as a witness. In its presence one must feel profound awe.

Mipnei saivah takum is the Scriptural *mitzvah* to rise for an approaching Torah scholar and to remain standing until he passes by or reaches his seat. This is also part of a more general *mitzvah* to respect a Torah scholar, which is, in turn, derived from the language of the *mitzvah* to revere Hashem Himself. From this *mitzvah* we learn that if one must rise for those who study the words, one must certainly rise for the *sefer* itself. From a further *passuk* we learn that one must walk along to accompany a *Sefer Torah*, as it says, 'you shall follow behind Hashem your G-d'.

Obviously, one may not behave disrespectfully in the presence of a *Sefer Torah*, even if the disrespect is not directed at the *Sefer Torah*. One may not turn his back on it. Certain bodily functions may not be performed in the presence of a *Sefer Torah*. One may not hold a *Sefer Torah* 'naked'. Some say this means one who is inappropriately clad or unclad may not hold it. Others say it refers to holding it with bare hands, while the *sefer* is 'naked', without its wrappings. One may not stretch ones legs in its presence.

B) The Aron Hakodesh and its covering

In addition to respect, one must beautify the *Sefer Torah*. This is part of the general *hidur mitzvah*, beautifying any *mitzvah*, but for this *mitzvah* in particular stronger terms than the usual are used. *Rambam* uses a term, *lehadro yosair midai*, overly beautify it. It must be written beautifully and adorned with beautiful coverings. The immediate coverings are the *mitpachas*, wrapping, which nowadays is the *gartel*, and *tik*, pouch, which nowadays is the *mantel*. *Sephardic* communities often use a solid case for the *tik*. *Ashkenazim* use a cloth *mantel*. They must be made of superior quality materials.

As mentioned, a special place must be designated for the *Sefer Torah*. This is the source for the *aron hakodesh*. The *aron hakodesh* has a special level of *kedusha*, by virtue of its housing the *Sefer Torah*. It is either built into the Eastern wall of a *shul* and called a *haichal*, or is a self-contained chest called a *taivah*. This word is used to describe both the *aron hakodesh* and the table on which the Torah is placed for reading.

One must accord special respect to the *aron hakodesh*, which has *kedusha* in its own right as a *tashmish*, server of the Torah. The Talmud condemns those who call it *arna*, a box. In Western countries it is placed on the eastern wall, the direction of *Yerushalayim* towards which we stand saying the *amidah*. If it is placed on a different wall, some say that one should face it rather than turn away from it in the direction of *Yerushalayim*.

While one may not usually turn his back on the *aron hakodesh*, the *rav* addressing the congregation, the *kohanim* blessing the congregation and the elders seated at the front face the congregation, do so. This is out of respect for the *tzibur*. The justification for this rests on the principle that the *aron hakodesh* is kept closed at all times, except when the *Sefer Torah* is removed or returned.

In fact, the *poskim* debate whether the size of the 'chest' is sufficient to deem it a separate entity. In regard to ritual defilement, a large chest inside a room is not always considered separate. There is further debate on the purpose of the *aron hakodesh*. Some say it is to keep the *Sifrei Torah* secure, while others maintain that it is to honor them. All agree that it is kept closed, apparently to give the *Sifrei Torah* space of their own. As long as it is closed, some activities otherwise be restricted in the presence of the *Sefer Torah* are relaxed. We are also given instructions about when the *aron hakodesh* is opened during services, and to keep it closed at all other times.

In addition, a *parochess*, curtain, is hung to further adorn and cover the *aron hakodesh* and the *Sifrei Torah*. The Talmud describes a *prisa*. Some say this refers to a cloth lining inside the *aron hakodesh*. This, in turn could be seen as an adornment or a second covering. Others say it refers to the outer curtain. This should also remain closed, except as a sign of mourning, when it is removed or kept open. On the *Yamim Noraim* it should be white. The name *parochess* is modeled on that used in the *Bais Hamikdash*. This indicates that it is more decoration than a second covering. [See *Brochos* 25b-26a, *Eruvin* 91a, *Megilah* 26b (Tosefta 3:14) 32a, *Kidushin* 33a-b, *Avos* 4:6, *Sofrim* 3:11-13, *Poskim*. *Rambam Tefila* 11:2 *Sefer Torah* 10:2-11 (*Kiryas Sefer*). *Tur Sh Ar OC* 147:1 154:3-6 *YD* 282, commentaries. *Shaarei Efrayim* 10:20. *Igros Moshe OC IV:40:22.*]

C) Standing for a Sefer Torah

We have mentioned the respect given to the *Sefer Torah* by standing up when it is

carried. One should also follow it for a short distance. The Talmud gives the source for standing for it as it passes as a derivative of the *mitzvah* to honor a scholar. The Torah says *mipnei saivah takum vehadarta penei zakain*, you shall rise before the elderly and show honor before the wise. If one rises for a scholar because of the Torah he studies, one should certainly honor the *Sefer Torah* itself. The rules for rising in the presence of a scholar apply as long as he is in sight and moving. Once he comes to his place, one may sit down. This is derived from the way the *Benai Yisroel* honored Moshe even after he had passed by, until he arrived at his tent. Following behind the *Sefer Torah* is derived from the *passuk*, “You shall follow behind Hashem your G-d”. Behaving respectfully in the presence of a *Sefer Torah* is part of the *mitzvah* of *morah mikdash*, to revere the temple and all holy things. Some connect this to standing for the person performing the *mitzvah* of carrying the *Sefer Torah*. We find this with regard to the *bikurim*, first fruit offering. It is taken to the *Bais Hamikdash* in a procession. When it passes by, people stop work and stand. This honors those doing the *mitzvah* of taking it. While parallels exist with regard to other *mitzvos*, this applies to one passing by in the act of an actual *mitzvah*. Taking the *Sefer Torah* from the *aron hakodesh* to the bimah is not a *mitzvah* in its own right. Rather, the honor is shown to the item being carried, the *Sefer Torah*.

Sifrei Torah are removed from the *aron hakodesh* to read from them, to fix them, to use them as a holy item accompanying a special utterance, such as *kol nidrei*, and in their honor or the honor of other *Sifrei Torah*, such as when all are removed before reading on *Simchas Torah* and we dance with them. As mentioned, there are parts of the service for which the *aron hakodesh* is opened but *Sifrei Torah* are not removed. One source for this is that when the people prostrated themselves, there is an opinion that it is only permitted in the presence of the *aron*, referring to that of the *Bais Hamikdash*. Thus, the prostrations of the *Yamim Noraim* services are based on these. This concept is extended to other parts of *tefillah* that are considered deep supplication. The presence of the *aron hakodesh* itself allows certain things to be done that may not be done in its absence, such as *tachanun* falling on one's face and *magen avos* on *Shabbos*. It gives a holy stability to the shuil. Opening it and showing the *Sifrei Torah* also adds to the potency of the *tefillah*.

When the *aron hakodesh* is opened on these occasions the congregation stands in respect. The question is, why do we stand? There does not appear to be a Talmudic source for this. In fact, there is a Scriptural source that seems to say that when “it” was opened, the people stood. In that context, “it” refers to the actual *Sefer Torah*. This might imply that listeners must stand when the *Sefer Torah* is opened to read it. [The *korai* and the *oleh* must stand for a different reason.] Indeed there is such a view. Most poskim maintain that “stand” in that context refers to being silent while it was read. In fact, the consensus is that there is no requirement to stand during the reading, even for special sections. [Some object to standing for certain sections while remaining seated for the rest.] However, one may stand, and if the entire congregation stands, one may not remain seated. This seems to show that there is no need to stand when the *aron hakodesh* is opened, for even when the *Sefer Torah* is removed, one need only stand when it is being carried. Therefore, while it is stationary in the *aron hakodesh*, there is no reason to stand either.

In some congregations it is indeed not considered necessary to stand merely for the

opening of the *aron hakodesh*. They stand for certain *tefilos*, such as the Thirteen Attributes, that are said with an open *aron hakodesh*. However, in many other congregations, especially *Ashkenazi* ones, it is common practice to stand when the *aron hakodesh* is opened during services. The main reason for standing seems to be *kavod* and *hidur*. This word can mean *hidur mitzvah*, glorifying and beautifying the *mitzvah*. It can also refer to *hidur*, the respect shown for elders, and in this case, for the *Sifrei Torah* inside the *aron hakodesh*. The poskim debate whether this is an obligation or a *chumra*, a stringency that was adopted. The issue seems to be: how strong was the initial adoption? There is another reason given. The reason not to stand when listening to the reading is that once the *Sefer Torah* has been put down on the *bimah*, it is itself in a 'sitting' position. However, as long as it is 'standing', one should not remain seated in front of it.

In any event, the custom does not seem to relate specifically to the particular prayer being said at the time. It relates to showing respect for the *Sifrei Torah* when they are not concealed. Accordingly, one should stand at any time the *aron hakodesh* is opened. However, by the same reasoning one could argue that the custom applies when the *aron hakodesh* is opened in order to show the *Sifrei Torah*. In that case, if the *aron hakodesh* is opened for another reason, one would not be required to stand.

In our case, the maintenance is being done to the *aron hakodesh*, rather than to the *Sifrei Torah*. In addition, those present might be occupied in activities that should not be interrupted by standing up in the middle, such as certain parts of *davening* or Torah study. In fact, for some of these cases, it would be detrimental to stand unless there was a compelling reason. Accordingly, it is recommended that one should not add to the original custom to stand for the opening of the *aron hakodesh*. However, if one feels that remaining seated shows disrespect, he should stand as a personal activity. We find that there is a difference between *kavod*, respect and *mora*, awe. *Kavod* relates to the other, while *mora* relates to the person showing it, regardless of how the other receives it. In the case of a *Sefer Torah*, part of the *mitzvah* is to show awe, as with the *Bais Hamikdash*. This requires both following certain set standards and one's own feelings of awe. [See references to Section A. Sotah 39a, Poskim. Shibolei Haleket OC p.142. Tur BY Sh Ar OC 134:2 141:1 146:4 (Kaf Hachayim, Shhar Hatziyn 18) YD 142:Taz 13 Ar Hash 49, commentaries. Ketzai Hamateh (Mateh Efraim) 592:2. Panim Meiros I:74 (end). Chasam Sofer CM:73 (end). Igros Moshe OC:I:38 V:38:4.]

In conclusion, he may remain seated, unless he feels sitting shows disrespect. ***On the Parsha ...*** *In the face of an elder you shall rise, and you shall show honor for the face of a sage and show awe for your G-d, I am Hashem. [19:32]* This includes not sitting in his seat (even when he is not present). [*Rashi*] Perhaps we may add that if an activity would be considered respectful to onlookers, but the person feels disrespect inside, he should know that Hashem will see this. He should follow his feelings and show personal respect.

Sponsored By Frank Lieberman and Beverly Barkon, in memory of Beverly's mother, Caroline

Barkon, Chaya bas Avrohom Nochum a"h, whose *yahrzeit* was on the 30th of Nissan. 

© Rabbi Shimon Silver, May 2012.

Subscriptions and Sponsorships available. (412) 421-0508. halochoscope@hotmail.com