

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SERIES 2: 95 - UNUSUAL MINHAGIM OF HAGBAHA OU ISRAEL CENTER - SUMMER 2024

- One of the most visible customs in the synagogue is the lifting of the Sefer Torah - hagbaha¹. However, in most Ashkenazi shuls this minhag has taken on some unusual contours.
- It is done at the end of the reading, and not (as was the Talmudic custom) at the beginning.
- It is accompanied by the recital of a verse which is not actually a verse at all, but a combination of two verses - normally something that is halachically problematic.
- Many people have the custom to reach towards the Sefer Torah with their little finger, for reasons that most of them do not know.

A] THE ORIGINS OF HAGBAHA

1. (א) וַיִּאֲסְפוּ כָּל־הָעָם פְּאִישׁ אֶחָד אֶל־הַרְחֹב אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמַּיִם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְעֶזְרָא הַסֹּפֵר לְהֵבִיא אֶת־סֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה ה' אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ב) וַיָּבִיא עֶזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה לִפְנֵי הַקָּהָל מֵאִישׁ וְעַד־אִשָּׁה וְכָל מִבְּיֹן לִשְׁמֹעַ בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי: (ג) וַיִּקְרָא־בּוֹ לִפְנֵי הַרְחֹב אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמַּיִם מִן־הָאֹרֶז עַד־מַחְצִית הַיּוֹם נֶגְדַת הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׂאִים וְהַמְּבִינִים וְאֹזְנֵי כָּל־הָעָם אֶל־סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה: (ד) וַיַּעֲמֵד עֶזְרָא הַסֹּפֵר עַל־מַגְדֵּל־עֵץ (טזן עזרא - כדמות מגדל כאשר אנו עושים פה צנתי כנסיות) אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לְדַבֵּר וַיַּעֲמֵד אֶצְלוֹ מִתְּתִלָּה וְשָׁמַע וְעָנָה וְאוֹרְתָה וְחִלְקָתָה וּמַעֲשֶׂתָה עַל־יְמִינוֹ וּמִשְׁמָאלוֹ פָּדָתָה וּמִיִּשְׂמָאל וּמִלְּפָנֶיהָ וְחָשָׁם וְחִשְׁבָּדָתָה וְכָרְתָה מִשְׁלָם:

נחמיה ח-א-ד

Following the return to Eretz Yisrael after the Babylonian exile, Ezra and Nechemia gathered the people together on Rosh Hashana to hear the public reading of the Torah. Many aspects of that reading establish the minhagim of our contemporary Torah reading, including the reading being to the men and the women, the reader standing on a bima, and him reading the Torah with others standing to the left and right.

2. (ה) וַיִּפְתַּח עֶזְרָא הַסֹּפֵר לְעֵינֵי כָּל־הָעָם כִּי־יַעֲלֶה כָּל־הָעָם הָיָה וּכְפִתְחוּ עֵמָדוֹ כָּל־הָעָם: (ו) וַיִּבְרַךְ עֶזְרָא אֶת־ה' הָאֱלֹהִים הַגָּדוֹל וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן אָמֵן בְּמַעַל יְדֵיהֶם וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לַה' אֲפָיִם אֲרָצָה.

נחמיה ח-ו-ו

The narrative then records that Ezra opened the Torah before the eyes of the people and they stood up when he opened it. Most mefarshim² explain that the people stood³ in silence when they saw Ezra open the book about to read. However, it could be read as a model of hagbaha - Ezra lifted the Torah scroll to show the people and they stood up and bowed⁴.

3. מִיד גּוֹלַל סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה עַד שְׁלֹשָׁה דַּפִּין. וּמַגְבִּיחוֹ וּמֵרָאָה פְּנֵי כְּתִיבְתוֹ לְעַם הָעוֹמְדִים לִימִינוֹ וּלְשִׁמְאֵלוֹ, וּמַחֲזִירוֹ לִפְנֵי וּלְאַחֲרָיו, שִׁמְצוּהָ לְכָל אַנְשִׁים וְנָשִׁים לְרֹאוֹת הַכְּתוּב וּלְכַרְוֹעַ. וְלוֹמַר (דְּבָרִים ד-מ) וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (או) וְעוֹד (אוֹמַר) [תהלים יט-י-י] תּוֹרַת ה' תִּמְיִמָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ עֲדוּת ה' יִצְמָנָה מִחֲפִימַת פִּתִּי: [פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁמַחֲלֵב מִצְוַת ה' בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם. יְרָאת ה' טְהוֹרָה עוֹמְדַת לְעַד מִשְׁפָּטֵי־ה' אֲמַת צְדָקוֹ יַחֲדוּ: הַנְּחַמְדִּים מְזַהֵב וּמִפְּזֵי רַב וּמִתִּיקִים מְדַבֵּשׁ וְנִפְתַּת צוּפִים:]

מסכתות קטנות מסכת סופרים פרק יד הלכה ח

Mesechet Sofrim⁵ sets out the ceremony for the taking out of the Sefer Torah from the ark before the reading⁶. This includes lifting the Torah so that the men and women can see the writing and bow. The custom was to recite Devarim 4:44 and/or verses from Tehillim⁷.

1. For an excellent article on this topic see *Pointing to the Torah and other Hagbaha Customs* - R. Dr. Zvi Ron, Hakira 15 (2013) pp 289-303. Much of the information in this shiur was gleaned from R. Ron's article.
2. See Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Metzudat David and Malbim on 8:5.
3. Ibn Ezra quotes Chazal that from Moshe to the time of Rabban Gamliel people always stood to learn Torah.
4. See Da'at Mikra to Nechemia 8:5 fn 6a which brings such an explanation.
5. Mesechet Sofrim is one of the so called 'Minor Tractates' which, according to the the Rosh in Hilchot Sefer Torah, was redacted a little later than the main body of the Gemara. Most scholars set its date of redaction at around 750 CE.
6. It is clear from the context in Mesechet Sofrim that the Torah must be lifted *before* the reading takes place. See the preceding halachot which deal with the verses recited by the Chazan as he removes the sefer from ark. Many of these clearly fed into our customs today, although the version in Sofrim includes many more verses for the chazan and the congregation to recite. See https://www.sefaria.org.il/Tractate_Soferim.14.8?lang=en for a translation.
7. Some textual variants of Soferim include only Tehillim 19:8 and others add on verses 9 and 10. Also, some variants include the word "or" between the verses indicating that either

4. אָרוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקְיָם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם וְאָמַר כָּל־הַעַם אָמֵן: פ

דברים כז:כ

The Torah curses those who do not 'uphold' the Torah (and according to Chazal blesses those who do).

5. כתיב אָרוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקְיָם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת. וכי יש תורה נופלת? שמעון בן יקים אומר זה החזן שהוא עומד.

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת סוטה פרק ז הלכה ד

The Yerushalmi associates this verse with a chazan who 'stands' to prevent the Torah from falling.

6. ואמרו על דרך אגדה - זה החזן שאינו מקים ספרי התורה להעמידן כתקן שלא יפלו. ולי נראה - על החזן שאינו מקים ספר תורה על הצדור להראות פני כתיבתו לכל, כמו שמפורש במסכת סופרים (יד:יז) שמגזיבין אותו ומראה פני כתיבתו לעם העומדים לימינו ולשמאלו ומחזירו לפניו ולאחריו. שמאז לכל אנשים והנשים לראות הכתוב ולכרוע ולומר וזאת התורה אשר שם משה וגו'. וכן נוהגין.

רמב"ן דברים פרק כז פסוק כו (פרשת כי תבוא)

The Ramban quotes the Yerushalmi and suggests homiletically that this verse alludes to the raising of the Torah before the men and women in synagogue⁸. He explains the reference to someone who 'does not uphold' the Torah as being to someone who does not show the Torah to the whole congregation at hagbaha. He also records the custom as given in Mesechet Soferim, including the people bowing when they see the writing.

- Note that there is no reference in these sources to pointing to the Sefer Torah during Hagbaha.

B] HAGBAHA - BEFORE OR AFTER THE TORAH READING?

7. מראה פני כתיבת ס"ת לעם העומדים לימינו ולשמאלו ומחזירו לפניו ולאחריו, שמצוה על כל אנשים ונשים לראות הכתב ולכרוע. ולומר: וזאת התורה וכו' תורת ה' תמימה וכו'. הגב: ונהגו לעשות כן אחר שקראו בתורה. אבל כשמוליאין אותו אומר הש"ס גדלו והקבל אומרים דוממו כו' אצ הרחמים הוא ירחם עם עמוסים וכו'. וי"א לומר על הכל יתגדל (מ"ס פי"ג וטור ומכרי"ט) וכן נוהגים זיום טוב וזשבת. ...

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות נשיאת כפים ונפילת אפים סימן קלד סעיף ב

The Shulchan Aruch rules that hagbaha must be done prior to the Torah reading, and that the men and women bow. The Rema adds some of the other recitations mentioned in Mesechet Soferim and, notably, rules that the Ashkenazi custom is to perform hagbaha AFTER the Torah reading.

8. כתוב במסכת סופרים כשיהיה החזן על המגדל פותח הספר ומראה הכתב לאנשים ולנשים, ואז היו כלם אומרים וזאת התורה אשר שם וכו'. מכאן מנהג הנשים שדוחקות עצמן לראות ספר ואינן יודעות על מה. ואם יש שם כהן קורא ראשון ואומר החזן כהן קורא יעמוד רבי פלוני הכהן

ספר כלבו סימן כ

The Kol Bo - an Ashkenazi halachic collection⁹ from the late 13th/early 14th century - records that the Ashkenazi custom was to do Hagbaha BEFORE the reading.

9. אבל בזמן הש"ס לא היה הגבהה אחר הקריאה אלא קודם הקריאה. וכן מנהג ספרד גם היום

ערוך השולחן אורח חיים סימן קמו סעיף ט

The Aruch Hashulchan notes that the universal custom at the time of the Talmud was to do Hagbaha AFTER the reading.

- A subtle shift of order can also be seen between the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch. Normally R. Yosef Karo follows the exact order of the Tur when writing the Shulchan Aruch¹⁰. However, the Tur¹¹ includes the laws of hagbaha in OC 147 - after the laws of the Torah reading, but the Shulchan Aruch includes hagbaha in OC 134 before the Torah reading!

the verse in Devarim or that/those in Tehillim were recited.

8. See Minhagei Yisrael, R. Daniel Sperber Vol 1, pp. 79-81. R. Sperber gives a different explanation to the Yerushalmi and asserts that it is not connected with hagbaha.

9. R. Aharon b. R. Ya'akov ha-Cohen of Narbonne. In 1306 he was expelled from France together with all the Jews there, and he settled on the island of Majorca near Spain. Nevertheless, the Maharik (Shoresh 54:1), who was also Ashkenazi - from Italy and of French origin, records the custom to perform hagbaha after the reading.

10. The Shulchan Aruch is a summary of R. Karo's commentary on the Tur - the Beit Yosef.

11. The Tur (1269-1343) was ethnically Ashkenazi, growing up in Germany with his father, the Rosh. However, the Tur spend most of his adult life in Toledo in Sefardic Spain following his escape from Germany after the Rindfleisch massacres of 1298. See <https://www.torahmusings.com/2020/10/the-last-rishonim-of-ashkenaz/>

10. (ח) מראה וכו' - המחזר כתב דין זה קודם הלכות קה"ת שכן מנהג הספרדים להגזיב קודם הקריאה. ועיין לקמיה זכג"ה שמנהגנו לעשות ההגזב אחר הקריאה. המגזיב הס"ת מעל התיבה להראות לעם גוללה עד ג' דפין ומגזיב. ואפשר דדוקא נקט ג' ונ"ל דתלוי לפי כח המגזיב שיהיה זיכלתו להגזיב כשהיא נגללת הרבה.

משנה ברורה סימן קלד ס"ק ח

The Mishna Berura notes this and explains it as a difference between the Sefardim and the Ashkenazim. R. Yosef Karo reflects the Sefardic custom and rules that hagbaha is before the reading. The Mishna Berura also discusses how wide the Sefer Torah should be opened during Hagbaha and concludes that this depends on the strength of the magbia¹²!

• So how could the Ashkenazi custom have changed so significantly? Two reasons are suggested:

- (i) The Bach¹³ seems to suggest that Mesechet Soferim itself requires hagbaha after the reading¹⁴.
 (ii) R. Chaim Benvenisti¹⁵ suggests¹⁶ that the Ashkenazim changed the custom since uneducated congregants thought that seeing the Torah for hagbaha was more important than hearing the Torah reading and would therefore walk out of shul immediately after hagbaha! On that basis, they postponed hagbaha to the end of the reading so that people would stay.

• In practice, most Ashkenazi communities perform hagbaha after the reading and all Sefardic communities do it before. Some Ashkenazi communities in Eretz Yisrael follow the Sefardic custom and do hagbaha before.¹⁷ This follows the practice of the Ari who insisted that hagbaha must be done before the reading¹⁸ in order for the spiritual light of the Torah to reach the community immediately.

C] HAGBAHA - THE VERSES

C1] WHICH VERSES TO SAY

11. וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם מִשָּׁה לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

דברים ד:מד

We saw in Mesechet Sofrim that the main verse to be recited during hagbaha is 'Vezot hatorah'.

- In addition, Mesechet Soferim cited Tehillim 19:8 - Torat Hashem Temima¹⁹ and, in some girsaoth, also Tehillim 19:9-10.
- Some girsaoth of Mesechet Soferim present the verses as alternatives - Devarim OR Tehillim²⁰. This may be the reason that the pesukim in Tehillim are not said by most communities today.
- The Ashkenazi custom is to add at the end of Vezot HaTorah - וְעַל-פִּי ה' בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה. This is a phrase that is found particularly in Sefer Bamidbar, but which verse is it taken from? There are a number of possibilities.

12. (לז) אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי מִשְׁפַּחַת הַקְּהֹלֵי כָל-הָעוֹבְדִים בְּאֶחָל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר פָּקַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן עַל-פִּי ה' בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה:

במדבר ד:לו

13. אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי מִשְׁפַּחַת בְּנֵי מִרְיָי אֲשֶׁר פָּקַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן עַל-פִּי ה' בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה:

במדבר ד:מה

The phrase is found in connection with the counting of the Levi'im

12. See *What's the Truth about . . . How Much to Open the Torah for Hagbah?*, R. Ari Zivofsky concerning how much the Torah should be opened during hagbaha. <https://jewishaction.com/religion/jewish-law/whats-truth-much-open-torah-hagbah/>. R. Zivofsky brings a number of sources to show that 3 columns is the maximum that should be shown, although this is not the implication of the Mishna Berura. He also suggests that where the magbia rolls out more than 3 columns, the focus of the congregation shifts from the Torah to the prowess of the person lifting it! Some communities insist that hagbaha can only be performed by individuals who have been properly trained. In Golders Green Beth HaMidrash in London anyone to be given hagbaha first had to do a 'trial run' in front of the gabbaim! The Chida writes that some communities abolished hagbaha entirely for fear that the Torah may be dropped or touched with bare hands.
13. Commentary on the Tur 147:3. He suggests that this is also the view of the Rosh, Rabbeinu Yerucham and the Tur.
14. See Encyclopedia Talmudit Vol 8 Column 167 fn 12. They tentatively suggest that perhaps there was an alternative textual variant in Mesechet Soferim. See also Piskei Teshuvot 134 fn 43 who quotes other reasons for the Ashkenazi shift.
15. 17th century Turkey. However other Sefardic sources praise the Ashkenazi custom - see Chida, le-David Emet 4:2.
16. Shayarei Keneset HaGedola. The source quoted is Haga'ot Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 134:2 but I was unable to find it there. See Encyclopedia ob cit fn 13 and also Kaf HaChaim OC 134:17 who quotes this reason.
17. See Kaf Hachaim ibid. who brings this minhag. Some Chassidic shuls do this - it is the custom of the Boston shul in Har Nof. Apparently, some communities do hagbaha both before and after the reading - see Piskei Teshuvot 134 fn 43.
18. This is based on the Zohar Vayakhel 206a.
19. Other minhagim recite this verse at the end of the formula for calling up the first aliya - *vetigale*. This is found in Rishonim such as Sefer Abudarham (p. 142).
20. The version of Mesechet Soferim in the Vilna Shas includes the word "or", but the Vilna Gaon deletes this. The version of Mesechet Sofrim found in Machzor Vitry (p. 707) indicates that both verses should be said
21. This is first seen in the Siddur of the Shelah HaKadosh (1565-1630) but he does not comment on its inclusion. R. Ron notes that it seems not to be a specifically kabbalistic addition since it does not appear in other kabbalistic siddurim.

14. על־פי ה' יחננו ועל־פי ה' יסעו את־משמרת ה' שָׁמְרוּ עַל־פִּי ה' בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה: פ

במדבר ט:כג

... the encampments of the Bnei Yisrael in the desert

15. ויסעו בראשנה על־פי ה' ביד־מֹשֶׁה:

במדבר י"ג

... the original journey of the Bnei Yisrael from Sinai

16. (ט) וישבו וילכו בני־ראובן ובני־גַד ויחזי שבט המנשה מאת בני ישראל משלה אשר בארץ־כנען ללכת אל־ארץ הגלעד אל־ארץ אחזתם אשר נאחזו־בה על־פי ה' ביד־מֹשֶׁה:

יהושע כב:ט

.... and the return of the Bnei Reuven, Gad and Menashe to Gilad after the conquest of Eretz Yisrael.

17. וימצאו כתוב בתורה אשר צוה ה' ביד־מֹשֶׁה אשר ישבו בני־ישראל בספרות בחג בחדש השביעי.

נחמיה ח:יג

Note that in the continuation of the narrative in Nechemia which constitutes the original source for Hagbaha there is a mention of the Torah being commanded by God 'beyad Moshe'.

18. ופלא שאנו אומרים 'וזאת התורה' וגו' 'על פי ה' ביד משה', וכן נדפס בסידורים. וקשה טובא! חדא דאין זה פסוק בשום מקום מזאת התורה הוא בואתחנן (דברים ד:מד) וע"פ ה' ביד משה הוא סוף פסוק בבהעלתך (במדבר י"ג) במסעות, ועוד דבמסכת סופרים אינו כן וכמ"ש ...

ערוך השולחן אורח חיים סימן קלד סעיף ג

The Aruch Hashulchan is very puzzled by the custom to add on 'al pi Hashem'.

19.

כשמנביהין הספר תורה הומרים זה:
 וזאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל על פי יי ביד משה: הורה צוה
 לנו משה, מורשה קהלת יעקב: עין חיים היא לפחזיקים בה, ותרומכיה
 מאשר: דרכיה ברכי נעם, וכל גתיבותיה שלום: ארך ימים בימינה,
 בשמאלה עשר וכבוד: יי תפן למען צדקו, יגדיל תורה נאדיר:

סידור תפילת כל פה עמ' 85

In fact, some siddurim set out the two verses together as if they were one verse in the Torah!

• The most likely candidate for 'al pi Hashem' is Bamidbar 9:23²³ since this fits with the theme of the Sefer Torah moving like the Aron Kodesh through the desert. When we take out the Torah we recite and ויהי בנסע הארון and when we replace it we recite יאמר. So as the Torah travels we recite the verses about the encampments 'al pi Hashem'.²⁴

20.

כשמנביהין הסת מביט נגד הכתב של הספר תורה וברע נגדה, ומראה באצבע ואומר:
 וזאת התורה, אשר־שם משה לפני בני ישראל: על־פי יהוה
 יחננו, ועל־פי יהוה יסעו, את־משמרת יהוה שָׁמְרוּ, על־פי
 יהוה [ביד־משה: [תורת יהוה, תמימה משיבת נפש. עדות
 יהוה, נאמנה. מחכימת פתי]:

סידור ווילנא עמ' 130

In the siddur printed according the custom of the Vilna Gaon, the whole verse of Bamidbar 9:3 is included²⁵. According to some commentators, this was the proper custom and a printing error caused the rest of the verse to be omitted.²⁶

22. The addition of this reference is interesting. Both Bamidbar 9:23 and 10:13 are in Beha'alotcha but the editor chose to cite 10:13. In the standard old print of the Aruch HaShulchan there is no verse citation - just a mention of it being in Beha'alotcha, so it could have been 9:23.
 23. This reference is given in many siddurim, such as the Artscroll and the Koren. The Rinat Yisrael siddur, which usually cites verse references, leaves this one out entirely.
 24. This explanation is given in the Dover Shalom commentary to the Siddur Otzar Tefilla (Vol 1 p. 422).
 25. This is widely reported as having been the custom of R. Chaim of Volozhin, the student of the Gra - see Dover Shalom ibid., written by R. Yltzhak Landa of Vilna (d. 1876) who reports hearing this directly from R. Chaim of Volozhin (d. 1821). However, it does not appear in any original siddurim and was likely added to the Siddur Vilna to reflect the custom of R. Chaim.
 26. This is explanation of R. Elyahu Munk in his World of Prayer (p.176), who writes: "In the edition of the Siddur which was published in Jerusalem with the commentary of the Vilna To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbiManning.com

ואפילו עמד קודם שמונה עשרה יפסיק. ובקרא בספר תורה פסולה לא יאמרו זה:
 זאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל: (על פי יהוה ביד משה):
 עץ חיים היא למחויקים בה, ותומכיה מאשר: דרכיה דרכי נעים, וכל נתיבותיה
 שלום: ארך ימים בימינה, בשמאלה עשר וכבוד. יהוה חפץ למען צדקו, יגדיל
 תורה ויאדיר:

סידור רב יעקב עמדן עמ' 320

*In the siddur of R. Ya'akov Emden, the addition of 'Al pi Hashem' is left in brackets and could be omitted entirely.*²⁷

- But why would the Ashkenazim add this extra phrase, which seems repetitive? Some commentators suggest that it was added by the Ashkenazim living in Christian lands as a polemical statement those who cast doubts on the divine origins of the Torah, claiming that the Torah we received was from Moshe, but he did not receive all of it from God. On that basis we add 'al pi Hashem'.²⁸
- Interestingly, in the Schonfeld Siddur, which gives exhaustive source references for all prayers, Rabbi Schonfeld notes that the source of 'al pi Hashem' is the Sefer Haikarim, suggesting a similar approach.

22.

°Yea, this is the Torah which Moses set before the Children of Dt. 4,⁴⁴
 Israel, according to the command of God, by the hand of Moses. Ikk. 3,¹¹
 °She is a tree of life unto them that hold on to her, yea, they that sup- Prv. 3,¹⁸
 port her are prospered. °Her ways are ways of harmony, yea, all her Prv. 3,¹⁷
 pathways are peace. °Length of days is at her right, at her left is Prv. 3,¹⁸
 wealth and honour. °God desired it—for the purpose of his rightness, Is. 42,²¹
 he aggrandizes and magnifies Torah. ° Mai. ST. 10,²¹

Siddur with translation and references by Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld p. 57

C2] QUOTING HALF A VERSE - MINHAG vs HALACHA

23. כל פסוקא דלא פסקיה משה אנן לא פסקינן ליה.

מגילה כב.

The Gemara states that we must not divide up Torah verses differently to Moshe - ie we may not quote half a verse.

- Although this principle is not ruled in the Rambam²⁹ or Shulchan Aruch, many Rishonim³⁰ and Acharonim regard it as normative.

24. נראה לי דמותר לומר חצי פסוק אף על פי שמזכיר את השם. ולכן אם קרא וטעה בנגינה וטעמים, מותר לקרותו עוד הפעם אף על פי שאינו חוזר כל הפסוק, כיון שהוא להשלים הפסוק. אבל לומר חצי פסוק בדרך קריאת פסוק, אפילו בלא הזכרת השם אסור. דכל פסוקא דלא פסקיה משה בתורה אנן לא פסקינן. והוא הדין בנביאים וכתובים (סי' תכ"ב):

חיי אדם חלק א כלל ה סעיף ב

*The Chayei Adam rules this in halacha - we may not formally recite half a verse from Tanach.*³¹

- In fact, this question is raised concerning other minhagim, more than in connection with saying 'al pi Hashem'³²

Gaon the entire verse is quoted In our editions, by some error, only the end of the verse was retained."

27. This siddur also records the halacha that the entire statement - 'Vezot Hatorah' - should not be said if the Sefer Torah had been found to be invalid. This could happen if an invalid letter was found during the last aliya and the mistake was not one which necessitated taking out a different sefer.
28. This explanation is given by Rabbi Munk (op. cit.) and is also suggested by R. Daniel Sperber in Minhagei Yisrael Vol 3 pp. 96-100. If this is accurate, research is needed as to what prompted this addition in the early modern period. Christian and Islamic negativity to the authority of the Torah was not new at that time and it seems a little early for the pre-enlightenment objections of Spinoza. See also Me'am Loez Devarim 27:26 who suggests that the two parts of the statement reflect our commitment to both the Written Torah (*vezot hatorah*) and Oral Torah (*al pi Hashem*). See below as to who wrote this section of the Me'am Loez.
29. Although see Tzitz Eliezer 18:30 in which Rav Eliezer Waldenberg responds to Rav Yosef Kapach's question as to why the Rambam writes (Issurei Biah 12:13) the prohibition of sexual relations with a kadesh/a as when the verse (Devarim 23:18) lists them the other way around when the verse (Devarim 23:18) lists them the other way around. Rav Waldenberg answers that the Rambam wished to abbreviate as much as possible but would not write the passuk in part due to the halacha of *kol pesuka*. As such, he changed the order so that it would not be the start of a passuk.
30. See for instance Rashba Berachot 14b who raises this on the Gemara's statement there that in Eretz Yisrael there was a custom to say an abridged version of the last paragraph of the Shema at night time, reciting the beginning and end of the paragraph and omitting the section on tzitzit (since the mitzva of tzitzit does not apply at night).
31. I heard from R. Shalom Rosner that, for this reason, where part pesukim are quoted in the Talmud the quotation ends with "etc" since the entire verse must be quoted. But when it abbreviates a phrase which is not a passuk from Tanach it states "וכו' - וכולי - וכו'" since there is no need to complete the phrase.
32. Although the Torah Temima does raise it on the issues of 'al pi Hashem'.

25. (יג) יְהַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם ה' כִּי־נִשְׁגַּב שְׁמוֹ לְבָדוֹ הַדָּוָה עַל־אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם: (יד) וַיִּרְם קָרוֹן לְעֲמוֹ תְהַלֶּה לְכָל־חֲסִידָיו לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עִם־קִרְבּוֹ הַלְלוּ־יָהּ:

תהלים קמח:ג-יד

The custom when returning the Sefer Torah to the Aron is for the chazan to sing 'Yehalelu ... levado' and for the congregation to pick up from there.

26. (לא) וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי: פ

בראשית א:לא

The custom on Friday night kiddush is to start in the middle of the verse - 'veyhi erev' or 'yom hashishi'.³³

27. (יא) כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיִּנַּח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בִּרְדָה ה' אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשָׁהּ: ט

שמות כ:יא

Similarly, some people start Shabbat morning kiddush with 'al ken', in the middle of this verse.

• A number of answers are suggested, some of which fit some of the problem cases but not others. The Rokeach³⁴ understands that the prohibition does not apply when reciting verses in prayer³⁵.

D] TO BOW OR NOT TO BOW

• The original sources for hagbaha - the Tanach, Talmud and Shulchan Aruch - all specify that the kehilla must bow when they see the Torah raised. So why do so few people actually bow today?

28. צמחרי"ל (ה'ל' תפלה ס"ג ג) שְׁהוּא הֵיך נוֹהֵג בְּשַׁעַת הַגְּזֵזַת הַתּוֹרָה לְהִשְׁתַּחוּת נֶגַד הַכֹּתֵב וְלוֹמַר וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה וְכוּ'.

דרכי משה הקצר אורח חיים סימן קמז

The Rema also records this as the Ashkenazi minhag and notes that the Maharil bowed during hagbaha.

D1] CONCERNS AT BOWING TO A SEFER TORAH

29. א לשון ריא"ז - וחייבים לעמוד מפני סה"ת אם מפני לומדיה עומדין מפניה לא כל שכן. ונראה בעיני שלא אמרו אלא לעמוד מפני התורה ולא להשתחוות לה. ולא נמצא בכל התורה שמשתחוין אפילו לארון הקדש כמב"ה.

שלטי הגבורים קידושין יד:

The Shiltei Giborim quotes the Ria'z - R. Isaiah di Trani (13th century Italy) that, although one should stand for the Sefer Torah, one should never bow to one, or to the Aron Kodesh.

30. והנראה פשוט בזה דגם ריא"ז והכנה"ג מודו שמצוה לכרוע נגד הכתב. והכי דייק לשון מסכת סופרים לראות הכתב ולכרוע. אמנם ריא"ז קאי על הרואה ספר תורה כשהוא סגור, ובסתום חכמה חייב לעמוד אהא כתב שלא מצינו שמשתחוין לספר תורה סגור כדרך שחייבין לעמוד, ולא דוקא השתחוואה אלא אפ"ל כריעה.

ברכי יוסף אורח חיים סימן קלד ס"ק ג

The Chida has a long commentary on this issue and flags that the concern is that we should only bow to God. Therefore, he understands that it is prohibited to bow to a closed Torah or to the Aron Kodesh³⁶, but permitted (as set out in the sources on hagbaha) to bow to an open Sefer when one can see the writing.

33. Some people say the whole verse, although quietly since Chazal (Bereshit Rabba 9:5) associate the phrase 'tov meod' with the creation of death in the world.

34. Introduction to Hilchot Berachot.

35. For more on this see *Half Pasuk*, R. Daniel Roselaar at <https://www.torahmusings.com/2012/08/half-pasuk/>.

36. He clarifies that this is also permitted if the context clearly demonstrates that one is actually bowing to God. The Chida also discusses whether the source in Mesechet Soferim requires bowing during hagbaha or only permits it.

D2] CONCERNS AT BOWING TO THE MAGBIA

- Another concern raised by the commentators is that the person lifting the Torah is standing between the congregation and the Torah text, so it could appear that people are actually bowing to the *magbia*.
- This problem arises during a 'normal' Ashkenazi hagbaha today. However, some poskim³⁷ understand that the original hagbaha (as mentioned in Mesechet Soferim) was the special method (now seen only on Simchat Torah³⁸) whereby the *magbia* flips the Torah and lifts it with the text outwards towards the people!
- This may be less of an issue for the Sefardic practice where the Torah scroll is held in front of the magbia.

E] POINTING AT THE SEFER TORAH

- There is no early source for the custom to point at the Sefer Torah during hagbaha and many senior poskim (such as Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv) did not point during hagbaha.
- The earliest sources for pointing are in 18th and 19th century Sefardic poskim - R. Mordechai Krispin³⁹ and R. Chaim Pelaggi⁴⁰

E1] POINTING AT THE WORD 'ZOT'

31. א"ר חנינא בראשונה כל מי שהיה מראה איקונין של מלך באצבע היה נהרג. והתינוקות הולכים לבית המדרש ומראים את האזכרות באצבע. אמר האלהים (שיר השירים ב:ד) וְדַגְלֵי עַלְי אֶהְבֶּה - 'וגודלו' עלי אהבה.

במדבר רבה (וילנא) פרשה ב סימן ג (פרשת במדבר)

The Midrash references a custom for the children in the study house to point at the names of God in the Torah as an expression of love.

- A number of sources in Chazal associate the word 'zeh' with physical pointing and Rav Pelaggi connects them with the custom of pointing at the Torah during hagbaha.

32. תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל: שלשה דברים היו קשין לו למשה עד שהראה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא באצבע ואלו הן: מנורה, וראש חדש, ושרצים. מנורה, דכתיב: (במדבר ח: ד) וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמִּנְרָה. ראש חודש, דכתיב: (שמות יב: ב) הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים. שרצים, דכתיב: (ויקרא יא: כט) וְזֶה לָכֶם הַטֹּמֵא. ויש אומרים: אף הלכות שחיטה, שנאמר: (שמות כט: לח) וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ

מנחות כט.

Chazal identify a number of examples⁴¹ where Moshe had difficulty understanding mitzvot and God had to 'point' to show him the item in question. Each uses the word 'zeh'.

33. אמר עולא ביראה אמר רבי אלעזר: עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא לעשות מחול לצדיקים והוא יושב ביניהם בגן עדן. וכל אחד ואחד מראה באצבעו שנאמר (ישעיהו כה: ט) וְאָמַר בְּיָמָם הַהֵוא הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ זֶה קֹנֵינוּ לוֹ וְיִוָּשִׁיעֵנוּ זֶה ה' קֹנֵינוּ לוֹ נִגְלֶה וְנִשְׂמָחָה בִּישׁוּעָתוֹ.

תענית לא.

The ending of Mesechet Taanit brings the famous Midrash that, in the World to Come, the tzadikim will dance around God and point to Him, invoking the verse - this - zeh - is our God.

34. רבי ברכיה רבי חלבו עולא ביריא ר' לעזר בשם ר' חנינא - עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא ליעשות ראש חולה לצדיקים והצדיקים מראין אותו באצבע ואומר (תהלים מח: טו) כִּי זֶה אֱלֹהֵים אֱלֹהֵינוּ עֹלָם וְעַד הוּא יִנְהַגֵנוּ עַל-מֹות.

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת מועד קטן פרק ג הלכה ז

A similar drasha is brought in the Yerushalmi, quoting a different verse which also uses the word 'zeh'.

37. See Shu't Divrei Yatziv 1:76 by the Klausenberger Rebbe and also Piskei Teshuvot 134:7 p.106 fn 29. R. Halberstam also suggests that the reason we do not bow today is because all Sifrei Torah have a doubtful status since Chazal declared that we cannot be sure of *chaser* and *malei* spellings. Nevertheless, it is unclear why this was not also the case for Mesechet Soferim which was after this statement of Chazal and yet requires bowing.

38. See Piskei Teshuvot 669:3 for why this custom has been preserved specifically for Simchat Torah.

39. Born 1730 and Rav of Rhodes, shu't Divrei Mordechai 9.

40. Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire (1788-1869), Sefer Chaim 3:6.

41. See also Shemot Rabba 15:28 for another example (the anointing oil) based on Shemot 30:31.

- Consider also the following:

35. (ח) וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

שמות יג:ח

The requirement to point to Pesach, Matza and Marror at the seder.

36. (ב) עָזַי וְזַמְרַת לִי-הָ וְהִי-לִי לִישׁוּעָה זֶה א-לֵי וְאֵנֹוֹהוּ אֱלֹהֵי-אָבִי וְאַרְמְמִנְהוּ:

שמות טו:ב

..... and the ability of the lowliest in Bnei Yisrael to identify their vision of God at the crossing of the Red Sea.⁴²

- These examples ALL use the word 'zeh'. Could we say the same about the word 'zot'? In fact, Chazal never make such a derasha!

37. דַּבְּרוּ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֹאת הַחֲזִיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

ויקרא יא:ב

38. זאת החיה - מלמד שכיב משב אוחז בחיבנ ומראה אותה לישראל - זאת תאכלו וזאת לא תאכלו.

רש"י ויקרא יא:ב

However, Rashi applies the midrashic principle seen above to the word 'zot'⁴³ and learns that Moshe pointed to each animal to teach the Bnei Yisrael which were kosher.

E2] POINTING AS 'EXTENDED KISSING'

- There is a widespread custom to kiss the Sefer Torah as it is being brought around the shul. In many Sefardic communities, those who are standing too far away to actually kiss the Torah, especially women in the Ezrat Nashim, reach out their hands as if to kiss the Torah from afar. Sometimes men hold out their tzitzit in their hand and then kiss them.
 - Some suggest⁴⁴ that pointing during hagbaha is an outgrowth of this, especially in Sefardic synagogues where hagbaha is done before the reading and some people may still have their arms out to kiss the Torah from afar.

E3] POINTING TO IDENTIFY THE TEXT

- We mentioned above the comments of the Ariz'l that one should be careful to look at the Torah text during hagbaha. The wording of Shulchan Aruch also stresses looking at the writing.

39. לראות הכתב - כשרואה האותיות עד שיוכל לקרותם מגיע אליו אור גדול (הכוונות).

מגן אברהם סימן קלד ס"ק ג

Magen Avraham rules this kabbalistic custom as the halacha and writes that one should try to actually read the text.⁴⁵

40. ראיתי בספר אחד שכתוב שם, טוב שיסתכל האדם בתיבה שיהא אות ראשון שלה כמו אות ראשון שבשמו.

בן איש חי שנה שניה פרשת תולדות סעיף טז

The Ben Ish Chai cites a custom to try and read a word in the text that begins with the same letter as one's name.

- As such, pointing at the text could help one make out the letters properly. There is a similar widespread Sefardic practice for someone to point to the text of the Torah with a silver yad to show the community where the reading is from.

42. See also Torah Temima Bereishit 25 n. 30 and Shemot 13 n.29, Tiferet Yisrael on Mishna Sanhedrin 8:4 on the parents pointing to the *ben sorer umore*.

43. See Mizrahi and Sifte Chachamim ibid.

44. See R. Ron's article p.297 for more sources on this. He also points out that the early mentions of the custom to point during hagbaha are all from Sefardic sources.

45. The Mishna Berura (134:11) and Aruch HaShulchan also rule this halacha. See also the Ben Ish Chai (in the section quoted below) as to the kabbalistic impact of the spiritual light of the Torah emanating from the scroll and entering the individuals who look at the text. It is very clear from such sources that it is essential that hagbaha takes place BEFORE the reading in order to inspire the listeners. After the reading, the light of the Torah is once again hidden.

F] POINTING WITH THE LITTLE FINGER

- R. Chaim Pelaggi⁴⁶ writes that one should point at the Torah with the index finger since this is the second finger counting from the thumb. This connects with the verses that Mesechet Soferim mentions from Tehillim 19:8-10 which contain 6 statements about the Torah - '*Torat Hashem temima meshivat nafesh*' etc., each of which has 5 words and the second word is Shem Hashem. The second finger therefore alludes to the connection to God.
- However, many people point with their little finger⁴⁷, although most have no idea why!

41. ונהגן להצביע באצבע הזרת לעבר הכתב ולנשקה.

ספר מעם לועז כי תבא עמ' תתל"ז

The first reference to the minhag to point with the little finger is in the Me'am Loez.

- The Me'am Loez was begun by R. Ya'akov Culi, who died in 1732. However, R. Culi wrote only the commentary on Bereshit and most of Shemot and the rest was written by others after his death. The commentary on Devarim was completed in 1772 by R. Yitzchak Arguti of Constantinople, but only a few pages of his work were preserved. As such, the rest of the Me'am Loez commentary on Devarim was completed by R. Shmuel Kroizer (1921-1997)⁴⁸, an Ashkenazi Rav who translated much of the sefer. This section was written in 1969⁴⁹. As such the reference in the Me'am Loez to pointing with the little finger is very recent, and Ashkenazi!
- No clear reason is known for pointing with the little finger. Some are suggested but none have solid sources:
 - (i) The little finger represents our sense of humility in learning Torah⁵⁰.
 - (ii) The little finger is the first of 10 (assuming one starts from that finger!) representing the first of the 10 commandments.
 - (iii) The pointers actually made the *kemitza* shape with their hands, like the Cohen taking from the korban mincha - as it to



take a portion from the reading - which left the little finger pointing.

(iv) There is no mitzva done with the little finger, so it was assigned to hagbaha.

(v) Pointing with the index finger was consider very rude in many cultures⁵¹ so the little finger was used instead.



(vi) Each finger is associated with one of the 5 senses.

42. וחכמי הטבע כתבו בספריהם כי כשם שכל אבר ואבר מאברי הגוף נברא לתועלת מיוחד בגוף, ויש ברובן שבכל אחד ואחד כלול שתיים שלש תועלויות ואין בו דבר לבטלה, כך חמש אצבעות שביד כל אחד ואחד מהם נברא לתועלת מיוחד. והוא כי כל אחד מהאצבעות הוא משרת לחוש אחד מחמשה חושים שבאדם שהם עיקר האדם, ובהם מתגלים כחות הנפש. הראשון משרת לקנח הפה והוא שבו חוש הטעם. והשני תוך הנחירים שבו חוש הרית. והשלישי לחוש המשוש למשש בכל חלקי הגוף ולפיקך הוא ארוך מכולן. והרביעי לקנח העין. והחמישי לקנח האזן. והקב"ה ברא בגוף האדם חמשה חושים ומסר להם חמשה משרתים שהן האצבעות, וזהו שלמות הטבע. כי אין הטבע עושה דבר לבטלה ואנו רואין כי כל אחד ואחד מהאצבעות הולך לחוש שלו תמיד שלא בכונה, יתברך ויתעלה היוצר, יוצר בראשית, אשר יצר את האדם בחכמה.

רבינו בחיי ויקרא פרק ח פסוק כג (פרשת צו)

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that each of the fingers assists in the cleaning of a part of the body - the thumb cleans the mouth (taste), the index finger cleans the nose (smell), the middle (longest) finger is used to check all the body (touch), the ring finger cleans the eyes (sight), and the little finger cleans the ears (hearing).

- As such, the little finger is associated with hearing⁵² and is a hint to '*na'ase venishma*'⁵³ and perhaps also to our eagerness to listen to the Torah reading.

46. Lev Chaim Vol. 2 167:6. See also above.

47. Americans call this the 'pinkie' from an old Scottish word 'pink' for tiny. This is also the origin of the American term 'pink eye', which has nothing to do with color, but is a reference to the squinting of the eye - see <http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-pin1.htm>.

48. See Me'am Loez introduction to Voi 1, pp. 5-6.

49. See R. Ron's article for more details. He undertook extensive investigations on this point, as with every aspect of his comprehensive article, including correspondence with the Kroizer family and friends to see if they knew of a reason for the custom.

50. This explanation is quoted in the name of Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg who references Rashi on Bereishit 10:25. In this verse the Yoktan's 13 children are listed and Rashi points out that his large family was in the merit of his humility ('katan').

51. See R. Ron fn 63-72 for cultural sources. See also Yishayahu 58:9 and Mishlei 6:13 which single out finger-pointing as a negative action.

52. In fact, the little finger has long been called the "auricular finger," from the Latin phrase *digitus auricularis*, which literally means "ear finger." It was widely accepted that the little finger was suited for its ability to enter the aural cavity. In Anglo-Saxon the little finger was called the *earcloensend* - 'ear-cleaner', *earfinger* - 'ear-finger' and *earscripel* - 'ear-scraper'. R. Ron points out that in medieval theatre a raised little finger indicated that an actor in a play was eavesdropping on another character.

53. Sefer Kara Ravaz p. 275.