

Hagbah

and

Gelilah

a guide to

properly lift, separate and tie

Produced for the
Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs
by

Stan Greenspan

Megillah 32a

Rabbi Shefatya cited Rabbi Yochanan: If one rolls closed a sefer Torah, he should leave it on the seam, so that if it tears, it tears on the seam.

And Rabbi Shefatya cited Rabbi Yochanan: If one rolls {here, assuming to get to another place} a sefer Torah, he should roll the outer roll and should not roll the inner one, and when he tightens it, he should tighten the inner roller and not the outer roller.

And Rabbi Shefatya cited Rabbi Yochanan: If ten read {in a minyan}, the most prominent among them rolls {hagba or gelila} the sefer Torah.

For Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: If ten read from the Torah, the one who rolls {hagba/gelila} gets the merit of all of them.

The merit of all of them, do you think {such that they do not have any merit themselves}? Rather, Abaye said: He takes merit equal to the merit of all of them combined.

After the completion of the Torah reading, two people are chosen for the honors of hagbah (lifting up the Torah) and gelilah (rolling and dressing the Torah).

The Talmud (Megillah 32a) tells us that hagbah carries a reward equal to that of all the aliyot combined. (It says “the one who rolls the Torah,” but in the time of the Talmud, hagbah and gelilah were performed by the same person. The Mishna Brurah makes it clear that this refers to what we call hagbah.)

Hagbah

Properly raising the Torah

Traditionally, one of the most important yet overlooked of all Torah honors is Hagbah, the raising of the Torah after the last aliyah.

For Men's Club members, especially for those on the larger side of average, this honor is the one that they are often chosen to perform, often without any assistance or instruction.

Until now, there was no hebrew/english "crib card" like the one for aliyot, no instructions in the siddur, only the fear of dropping a Torah in public. While not the easiest of aliyot, Hagbah has its tricks and a few tips can make it an easy way to show your expertise in the rituals of the service.

A few points:

- Who: Hagbah can be done by any Jew - Cohen, Levy or Israel
- What: Lifting the Torah from the reader's table and carrying it vertically for a short distance, then sitting and holding the Torah while GELILAH - the dresser - tightens, binds and covers the scrolls with the peroket (cover)
- Where: At the Bimah
- When: Hagbah is done whenever the Torah is read, 4 times during a normal week - Torah service on Shabbat morning, Mincha Shabbat afternoon & Shacharit on Monday and Thursday, and twice during holiday morning services -except on rare "triple play" days, when Hanukah, Shabbat & Rosh Chodesh Tevet occur on the same day, Simchat Torah or Shabbat Hachodesh/Rosh Chodesh Adar. Hagbah is done after the last aliyah is read from that Torah.

- Why: We honor the Torah by ensuring that it is treated with respect during the process of re-dressing it, very much like a king is attended by his butlers
- The mishne on Hagbah and Gelila (Masechet Migilla) mentions that the mitzvah for Gelila is “equal to all the other aliyot combined” (Gelila AND Hagbah - there’s no difference in the text)

What’s the Procedure?

The person honored with Hagbah (Magbiah) or Gelilah should be ready near the Bimah when the last Aliyah (or Maftir) is finishing their blessings. The Gabbai will call the Magbiah and the person honored with Gelilah (the Golel) to come forward.

Before you reach the Bimah:

1. You want to ensure that the lift is done easily. Remove any rings on your fingers that can be caught on the handles. Many synagogues put small plaques on the wood discs on the bottom of the Torah, these can get caught on a ring.
2. If it’s a weekday service, remove your tefillin from your fingers and palm and wrap the strap around your wrist. Tightly wrapped tefillin will restrict your grip on the handles.

The Magbiah places his hands on the Torah’s handles (Eitz Chaim) and waits for the Ba’al Koreh (Torah Reader) to finish the blessings. The congregation will all rise and there will usually be a signal to begin from one of the Gabbaim, or you can wait for the dramatic silence to engulf the congregation as they await your performance!

At the Bimah:

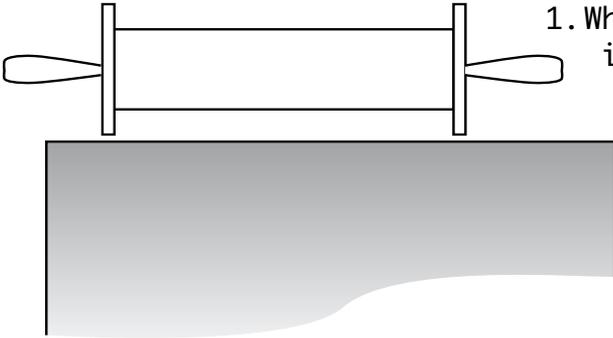


Figure A

1. While the Torah is still on the reader's Table:

Twist the handles to move one of the Torah's seams into

the middle of the space between the 2 scrolls. Your overriding

concern is to avoid damage

to the Torah at any point, and moving the seam into the middle will reduce the stress on the parchment. In fact, if the stress is too great and there is a tear, because the seam is weaker than the parchment, it will separate. Since the Torah is only a Torah when it is complete, by separating at the seams, the penalties for dropping the Torah are removed. What penalties? 40 days of fasting!

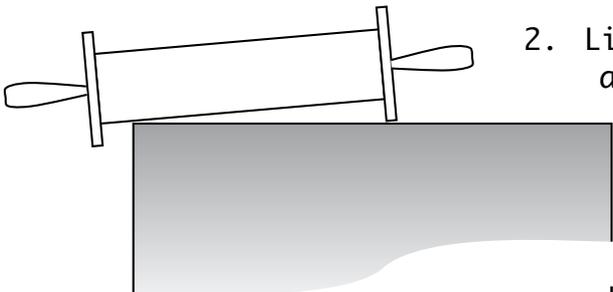
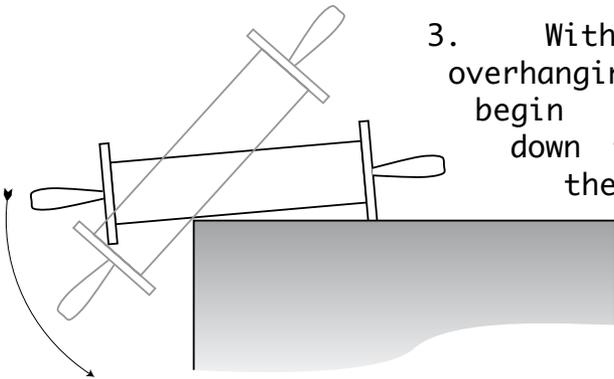


Figure B

2. Lift the handles about an inch or so off the table and drag the Torah towards you, so that about 3 to 5

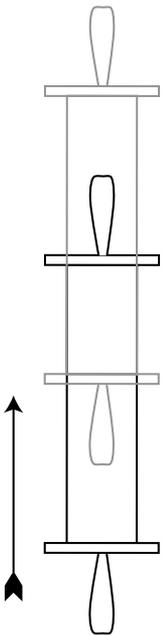
inches are leaning over the edge of the table. You want to

increase your leverage at this point; you're not lifting straight up.



3. With the Torah overhanging the edge, begin by pushing down first to lever the Torah into a vertical position for lifting.

Figure C



4. The Torah will “pop” up into the vertical position and your knees will probably be bent slightly at this point. As you straighten them, lift the Torah, while moving your hands apart, maintaining tension on the parchment.

Release one side’s grip SLIGHTLY to allow the scroll to open.



Figure D

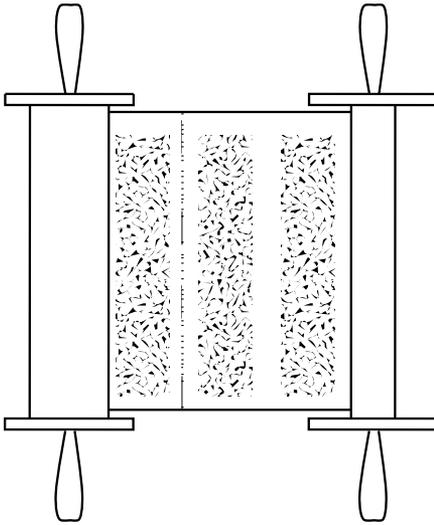


Figure E

- If you are a really big person and Golel is of slighter stature, it's poor form to make the distance between the scrolls wider than Golel can reach.

- The maximum number of columns of script that may be shown is 6 (six) NOTE THE SEAM!

- The proper number of columns of script that should be shown is 3 (three). Judaism

believes in modesty and you don't want to be a "show off"!

4. As you lift, the congregation begins its part in the process.

- They begin to sing (in Hebrew) "This is the Torah that Moshe set before the people Israel; from the mouth of G-d and the hand of Moshe"
- There is a relatively new custom to point at the Torah while singing "V'zot haTorah . . ." This tradition is has it's roots in the salute to Caesar but our tradition of modesty is that we do not point with our whole hand, rather, we use the smallest (aka "pinky").

HOWEVER, the salute to Caesar was also copied by the Nazis as "Seig Heil". In 2014, Neo Nazi sympathizers and other travellers of the same road began to use a modified arm motion known as the "Quenelle" which has

been banned in much of Europe. Strange that we, the descendents of those most persecuted have begun to use a symbol of those who sought our destruction.

The raising of our hands to the Torah is a recent tradition and knowing where and how the symbolism of the action has been perverted in the last century, it behooves us to cease using this in our service.

- It is a mitzvah to see the actual letters on the Torah, that's why the Hagbah will twist around. (#5)
- 5. Twist your body to the left and to the right to show the open scroll to as many members of the congregation as possible. Some men will do almost a complete rotation, but dancing is not advised (other than Simchat Torah).
- 6. Walk backwards towards the chair that you'll be sitting in while Golel does their magic. The Gabbai should be guiding you to the chair.
- 7. Have a seat.

Now introducing Gelilah

It is with great pleasure that we present the star of today's event, Gelilah. And we do mean the star. The entire process we refer to as Hagbah and Gelilah, is, if you can recall from page 1, all about the wrapping and not really about the lifting. Redressing the torah is the important part here and this is the main event. The person doing Gelilah is referred to as the Golel, and it's now time for this to become a duo.

1. Hagbah helps the Golel tighten up the scrolls to close them. The Mishnah on Hagbah and

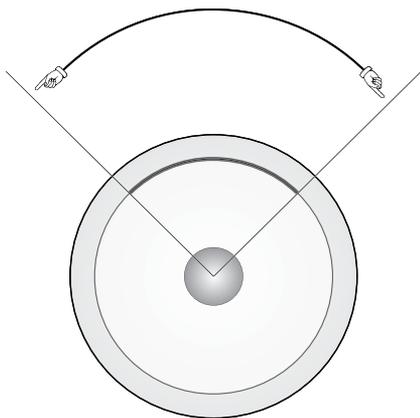


Figure F

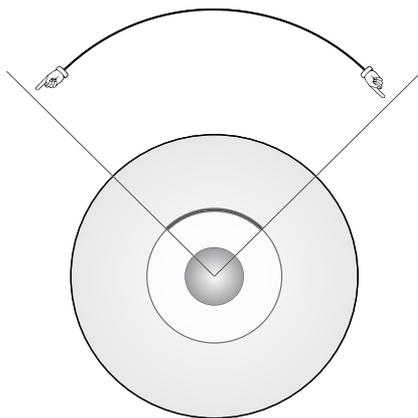


Figure G

Gelila (Masechet Migilla) talks entirely about the role of the Golel, and how you tighten the Torah before you cover it. It's a bit of a physics lesson, as you are only supposed to tighten the smaller side, never turning the larger side. [PHYSICS LESSON: it's all about the moment arm - the larger side will "amplify" the turning motion, and you don't want to tear anything, see Figures F & G on the next page]

2. The Mishnah also mentions that the mitzvah for Gelila is "equal to all the other aliyot combined" (and Hagbah - there's no difference in the text)
3. In a low voice, the Magbia (Hagbah) may offer pithy boy scout type comments while Golel ties the knot - right over left and under, etc. - and if the Torah has a Velcro strap, lament the "good old days" when you actually had to make a knot.
4. The Magbia should watch out for the Yad - pointer - as it's placed on the wrapped Torah. The Golel may not notice your eyes and there is a slight possibility of getting poked!

(Then it becomes a sport) Some fun loving Magbia like to include a well timed “ouch” at this point.

5. The last part of the Golel’s job is placing the “jewelry” on the Torah. The usual order is the breast-plate first, the parsha tag (if required), and the yad. All are placed on the torah’s front, which is, at this point, is still facing the Magbia, so the Golel is “working blind” here. The crowns (rinonim) are sometimes placed on the upper handles (eitz) at this point, but it can be done at any time before you replace the Torah in the ark.
6. Once completely dressed, turn the Torah around, placing the it on the Magbiah’s right shoulder with the back of the Torah towards the body.
7. Some synagogues will take the Torah and place it on a rack or stand at this time, other will ask a young person from the congregation to hold it while seated and still others will ask Hagbah to hold the Torah until ready to be placed back in the Aron (ark).
8. When the Torah leaves your possession, be sure to shake hands with everyone on the Bimah and proceed back to your seat. Shake hands with everyone in the congregation who offers, but “high fives” should not be given without a prior hechsher from the rabbi or balebatim.



fjmc