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# PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayishlach ✍️ Rabbi Moshe M. Willner

## Who is in Control?

There is a story told about two noblemen who were traveling along a road. Each one was riding in his own beautiful coach led by a team of magnificent steeds. Things were going well until they came to a narrow bridge. The width of the bridge allowed entry for only one coach at a time. At this point, each nobleman came out of his coach. They both explained that they were in quite a big rush. Important meetings and business dealings were at stake, so time was of the essence. They now found themselves in a dilemma- who goes first? One felt that since he owned more land he deserved to go ahead. The other countered that he had more forests for lumber than the other. This squabbling continued on for some time as each one tried to prove how important he was. Meanwhile, a long line of traffic built up behind the two stopped coaches. Curious to find out the reason for the delay, a poor yid approached the two quarreling noblemen. Upon assessing the situation, he asked if he could propose a solution. They both ceased arguing and listened. The clever yid suggested that the one who is the wisest should pull over to the side of the road. Immediately, **both** noblemen pulled over to the side of the road. This allowed all the traffic, including the yid, to swiftly cross the bridge, leaving the two “wise” noblemen standing on the side. (Perhaps they are still waiting there.) The lesson is clear. A person’s desire for honor can lead him to do the opposite of what he originally planned to do.

A similar story plays itself out in this week’s parsha. Eisav mobilizes a great military force to wipe out Yaakov Avinu. Yaakov originally sent real malachim (angels) to inform Eisav of his arrival. This conveyed the message

that Yaakov had the ability to command powerful spiritual beings to do his will. Nevertheless, Eisav was not deterred from marching forward to attack. This being the case, what caused Eisav to have a change of heart? As we know, Eisav ended up embracing Yaakov and treating him like a beloved brother. Reb Leib Chasman Ztz”l explains that this was due to Eisav’s uncontrollable lust for honor. Being that Yaakov knew his brother’s weakness, he opted to give him honor as opposed to engaging in battle. Restraining his impulse to fight, he won the battle without brandishing a sword. He carried out this strategy through instructing his servants to refer to Eisav as “master”. He further told them to change his own title to “your servant”. Eisav became somewhat blinded by this honor he received. He slowly started to forget his hatred towards Yaakov, as reshaim are slaves to their desires. When Eisav finally met Yaakov, he still intended to attack. However, upon seeing his brother bow humbly before him seven times, he no longer could contain himself. He was intoxicated by the honorable reception, and forgetting about the great army he assembled, he ran to embrace his brother.

AS the possuk says in Mishlei, “The lips of the tzadik know how to appease...”, Yaakov knew how to change Eisav’s anger and hatred into love. Since he was in control of his own impulses, he was able to control his enemy. On the contrary, Eisav who was enslaved by his desires, ended up acting foolishly, doing the opposite of his original plan.

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# HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

## Aliyah LaTorah

*Rabbi Ephraim Friedman*

### Should the Sefer Torah be opened or closed during the brochos?

At the end of Mesheches Megillah (32a), there is a machlokes between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehuda concerning the proper procedure for one who is called to the Torah. Both agree that prior to reciting the opening brocha, the Sefer Torah must be opened before the oleh so that he may take note of where the laining will begin. Rabbi Meir is of the opinion, that after the oleh notes the place, the Sefer Torah should be rolled closed, and then the brocha should be recited. After the recital of the brocha, the Sefer Torah is once again opened, and the parsha is lained. The reason Rabbi Meir requires that the Sefer Torah be closed while the brocha is being recited, is so as not to give the impression that the brochos are written in the Sefer Torah itself and the oleh is reading them from within. Rabbi Yehuda, on the other hand, is not concerned that anyone would make such a mistake, and he therefore paskens that the Sefer Torah remain open while the brocha is being recited. After recording this machlokes, the gemarah states that the halacha is in accordance with the view of Rabbi Yehuda.

Even after the psak of the gemarah, however, the Poskim explain that Rabbi Meir's concern is not totally dismissed. This manifests itself in two ways. Firstly, although we pasken that the Sefer Torah remains open during the *opening* brocha, nevertheless, at the end of an aliyah, before the *concluding* brocha is recited, all agree that the Sefer Torah first be rolled closed. This is done because at the beginning of the aliyah, when the baal koreh is about to lain, to roll the Sefer Torah closed and then reopen it will cause a delay which is deemed *tircha d'tzibura*. The concern that someone might think the brocha is written in the Sefer Torah is not great enough to justify this type of *tircha*. At the end of the aliyah, when the Sefer Torah is about to be closed anyway (because that is the way it should be kept between aliyos), there is no *tircha d'tzibura* involved in shutting it before the brocha is recited. Consequently, this is the proper thing to do in order to avoid even a small possibility of confusion.

A second consideration of R' Meir's opinion is that the Rm" a (O.C. 139:4) writes that when reciting the brocha before laining the oleh should turn his face to the [left] side. This is done so that he should not appear to be reading the brochos from the Sefer Torah which is open before him. Once again, since no *tircha d'tzibura* is involved, a precaution is required to avoid giving the wrong impression. Nonetheless, some Achronim object to the idea of turning one's face away from the Sefer Torah while reciting the brocha, for that gives the appearance that the brocha is not being recited over the Torah at all. Instead, the Chayei Adam, quoted by the Mishna Brurah (ibid:19) suggests closing one's eyes during the brocha while facing the open Sefer Torah as a preferable method of accomplishing what the Rm" a wished to accomplish.

### An Alternative Approach

The discussion of this topic doesn't end here. Everything explained thus far is based on one interpretation of the gemarah in Megillah, that Rabbi Yehuda objects to Rabbi Meir's opinion that the Sefer Torah be closed before the brocha is recited. By paskening according to Rabbi Yehuda, the gemarah is requiring that the Sefer Torah remain open. Although this is the simpler and more standard interpretation, it is not the only one. Tosfos takes a different approach. According to Tosfos, Rabbi Yehuda actually agrees with Rabbi Meir that it is preferable to close the Sefer Torah and then recite the brocha, for the same reason that Rabbi Meir considers it a requirement. The dispute between them is only that Rabbi Yehuda doesn't require that this be done, for in his opinion, the concern that unlearned people will think the brochos are actually

written in the Sefer Torah is not a major one. He therefore finds it acceptable to leave the Sefer Torah open and recite the brocha if one wishes to for any reason. Rabbi Meir, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the Sefer Torah *must* be shut before the brocha is recited. It follows, that when the gemarah paskens like Rabbi Yehuda that the brocha is recited with the Sefer Torah open, it is only paskening that it is acceptable to do this but not that it is preferable, and certainly not that it is required. This interpretation of the gemarah is in contrast to the original interpretation cited, which understands Rabbi Yehuda as being opposed to closing the Sefer Torah before reciting the brocha because of the *tircha d'tzibura* involved.

### The Halacha

In the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 139:4), both the Mechaber and the Rm" a follow the original interpretation of the gemarah, and consequently they do not advise closing the Sefer Torah before reciting the brocha. The Chofetz Chaim, in his *Beur Halacha*, mentions that in some communities the minhag is to close the Sefer Torah based on Tosfos' pshat in the gemarah. He concludes by saying "nahara nahara upshatei", indicating that where this is the minhag it is acceptable to do so.

Interestingly, the Sha'arei Ephraim (4:3) which is one of the major authoritative sources of halacha in matters of Krias HaTorah, mentions the minhag of closing the Sefer Torah before the brocha as the *primary* minhag, although he does acknowledge that the other minhag has solid foundations as well. The Aruch Hashulchan (139:12), on the other hand, questions if it is even appropriate to follow Tosfos' view and close the Sefer Torah, since the majority of Poskim disagree.

The bottom line is that one who has no family (or other) minhag to the contrary, would be best advised to follow the Shulchan Aruch, leaving the Sefer Torah open during the opening brocha, and closing his eyes or looking to the side- perhaps into a printed text- when saying the brochos. Although the R"ma recommends tilting one's head to the *left* side in order to face Hashem's right, (just as we bow first to the left when stepping back at the completion of Shmone Esrei) others disagree. The Chavos Yair (in Mikor Chaim 139:4) writes that according to the currently established minhag that the ba'al koreh stands on the left of the oleh, it is more appropriate for the oleh to tilt his head to the right. (Sefer Halichos Shlomo- Tefillah 12, note 68 records that this was also the practice of HaGaon Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l when he was called up for an aliyah.) This is, of course, more practical as well, if one wishes to read the brochos from a siddur or a printed card which will generally be placed on the bimah to the right of the oleh.

As mentioned above, this entire discussion is with regard to the brocha recited at the beginning of an aliyah. At the end of an aliyah, all Poskim agree that the Sefer Torah should be rolled closed before the brocha is recited.

As a final point, the Kaf HaChaim (139:4) writes that according to kabbalistic sources, the Sefer Torah should actually be covered- not merely rolled closed- before the oleh recites the opening brocha. This is the practice in many Sefardic shuls.

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