

An Open and Shut Case?
Opening and Closing the ספר תורה during the Blessings for an Aliyah
By: Rabbi Noah Gradofsky

Notes:

- Please see <http://utj.org/viewpoints/videos/an-open-and-shut-case/> for video of a shiur (class) on this subject.
- Unless otherwise noted, electronic texts are from Bar Ilan CD version 14 (קרבן העדה, רבינו רבינו, חננאלת ר"ן, and ב"ה) are from version 24 ... I upgraded after the original version of this text and these texts were added to the CD).
- Sources of scanned texts are from a standard printing of each text unless otherwise indicated.
- All translations are my own.
- Generally, **translations that represent the literal translation of Hebrew words are in bold**, while additional wording required to make better English sense is in regular type.
- If you wish to browse some key texts, I have marked what I believe are the most important texts below with →arrows indicating where to begin and end reading←

ABSTRACT: Below is a compendium of sources addressing some points of conduct during the blessings before and after an *aliyah*. I present the following primary conclusions: (a) one should hold the Torah scroll open while reciting the blessing before the Torah is read and close the Torah scroll prior to reciting the blessing after the Torah is read; (b) while reciting the blessing prior to the reading of the Torah, one should look at the place in the Torah where the reading will begin or, if one does not know the blessing by heart, look at the text of the blessing; (c) after the *aliyah*, anything that is customarily done out of respect for the Torah during the interim between *aliyot*, for example, covering the Torah scroll, should be done immediately after the reader has concluded reading from the Torah, rather than waiting until after the closing blessing has been recited. In addition to these halakhic conclusions, I argue that: (a) where Tosafot rule that it is preferable for one to hold the Torah scroll closed during the blessing prior to the reading from the Torah, they are ruling in accordance with Rabbi Meir, rather than saying that Rabbi Yehudah agrees with Rabbi Meir on this point; and (b) Rashba and Mordechai's argument that the Torah should be closed between *aliyot* is convincing, but the argument that the Talmud implies this is anachronistic. In concluding this study, I note that the rules discussed revolve around according proper honor to the Torah, and I pray that study of these sources and proper practice during an *aliyah* sensitizes us to the many opportunities for bringing honor to the Torah in every aspect of our lives.

Babylonian Talmud Megillah 32a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א

→ **The Rabbis taught:** “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, rolls the scroll to close it and blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and again opens and reads,” these are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says, “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and reads.”¹ What is Rabbi Meir’s reasoning? His reasoning is in accordance with the statement of Ula, for Ula said, “Why did they, i.e. prior rabbis, say ‘one who reads the Torah should not aid the translator?’² - So that people should not say that the translation is written in the Torah.” So, too, here Rabbi Meir rules that the Torah should be closed during the blessing, so that people should not say that the blessings are written in the Torah. And Rabbi Yehudah, what is his reasoning for not saying to close the Torah during the blessing? He believes that with regard to the translation, it is possible to err, while with regard to blessings, it is not possible to err. Rabbi Zera said in the name of Rav Matnah: “The halakha is, one who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and reads.” Let him say “the halakha is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah” rather than repeating the entire statement of Rabbi Yehudah!? He recites the entire statement because there are those who reverse them, i.e. some confuse which statement was made by Rabbi Yehudah and which statement by Rabbi Meir. ←

← תנו רבנן: פותח ורואה, גולל ומברך, וחוזר ופותח וקורא, דברי רבי מאיר. רבי יהודה אומר: פותח ורואה ומברך וקורא.¹ מאי טעמא דרבי מאיר - כדעולא, דאמר עולא: מפני מה אמרו הקורא בתורה לא יסייע למתורגמן?² - כדי שלא יאמרו תרגום כתוב בתורה, הכא נמי - כדי שלא יאמרו ברכות כתובין בתורה. ורבי יהודה: תרגום איכא למיטעי, ברכות - ליכא למיטעי. אמר רבי זירא אמר רב מתנה: הלכה, פותח ורואה ומברך וקורא. - ולימא הלכה כרבי יהודה! - משום דאפכי להו. →

Rashi on Babylonian Talmud Megillah 32a

רש"י מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א

BECAUSE THERE ARE THOSE WHO REVERSE THEM³ - They associate the words of Rabbi Meir with the words of Rabbi Yehudah, and the words of Rabbi Yehudah with words of Rabbi Meir.
IT IS POSSIBLE TO ERR – And one might say the translation is written in the Torah, and come to write the translation in the Torah, but
BLESSINGS – Everyone knows that the blessings are not written in the Torah.

משום דאפכי להו³ - דרבי מאיר לדברי יהודה, ודרבי יהודה לדברי מאיר.
איכא למיטעי - ואומר תרגום כתוב בתורה, ואתו למיכתב תרגום בתורה.
אבל ברכות - הכל יודעין שאין ברכות כתובין בתורה.

Discussion

- Rabbi Meir holds that after opening and looking into the Torah scroll, the person having an *aliyah* should close the scroll prior to saying the opening blessing. Rabbi Yehudah does not mention closing the scroll. As we shall see, the majority of opinions understand Rabbi

¹ The meaning of this statement is discussed further in the discussion section below

² Commonly, the Torah was read in Hebrew and a translator would recite an Aramaic translation.

³ Note that this comment of Rashi actually appears in the preceding discussion in the Talmud, which also concludes with the statement that Rabbi Zera in the name of Rav Matnah quoted an entire ruling rather than saying that the Halacha follows Rabbi Yehudah because some might reverse the opinions.

Yehudah to be ruling that the scroll *should* be kept open during the blessing. Some authorities understand Tosafot⁴ to imply that while Rabbi Yehudah holds that the scroll *may* remain open, Rabbi Yehudah would agree that it is *best* to close the scroll. As argued below,⁵ I believe there is a better read of Tosafot where they would not be suggesting any such preference on the part of Rabbi Yehudah.

- According to the Talmud, Rabbi Meir holds that the scroll should be held closed is so that people would not mistakenly believe that the blessings are written in the Torah, while Rabbi Yehudah is not concerned about this possible error. The Talmud reaches this understanding of Rabb Meir by extrapolating from Ula's explanation of why the person reading the Torah may not aid the translator, which Ula explains is based on a concern that people might think the translation is written in the Torah. Rashi explains that Rabbi Yehudah is not concerned because fewer people would be under this misconception, and generally commentators figure this is because the belief that the blessings are written in the scroll is a higher level of ignorance. I would suggest that perhaps as a practical matter one misconception is more likely than the other. To my mind, it is more believable that a translation would be written immediately above/below the text than for the blessings to be written out as the same blessings would have to be written out repeatedly, throughout a large scroll, which among other things would have been considered a significant waste of ink in ancient times.
- The Talmud suggests that there was some confusion as to which opinion was the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah and which was the opinion of Rabbi Meir. Interestingly, as we see below, the Jerusalem Talmud and Tractate Soferim cite the two opinions without identifying the individuals holding each opinion, confirming the possibility of confusion or lack of knowledge as to who held which opinion.

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת מגילה פרק ג דף עד טור ג ה"ז **Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 3:7 (p. 74c)**

→ **There is a teaching that teaches** “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, rolls the scroll to close it and blesses i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*” and **there is one teaching that teaches** “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, and blesses i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*,” **Rabbi Zeura Aba bar Yirmiah** said in the name of **Rav Matna** who said in the name of **Shemuel**: “**The halakha is in accordance with the one who says ‘opens, sees, and blesses.’**” **And what is the reason?** The verse (Nehemiah 8:5) says, “**and when he opened it, i.e. the Torah scroll, the entire nation stood.**” **And what does it say afterwards?** “**And Ezra blessed the Great LORD God.**” (Nehemiah 8:6)⁶ ... ←

← אית תניי תני פותח ורואה גולל ומברך אית תניי תני פותח ורואה ומברך רבי זעורא אבא בר ירמיה רב מתנה בשם שמואל הלכה כמי שהו' אומר פותח ורואה ומברך ומה טעמא וכפתחו עמדו כל העם ומה כתיב בתריה ויברך עזרא את יי האלהים הגדול⁶ . . . →

⁴ Text and discussion of Tosafot is below p. 5.

⁵ Bullet points accompanying footnotes 8-13 in the discussion of Tosafot.

Nehemiah Chapter 8

6 בתמיה פרק ח

(8) **And Ezra opened the scroll before the eyes of the entire nation, for he was above them, and when he opened it the whole nation stood up.**
(9) **And Ezra blessed the Great LORD God, and the entire nation answered “Amen, Amen.” raising their hands and they bowed and prostrated their heads to the earth before the LORD.**

(ה) וניפתח עזרא הספר לעיני כל העם פי מעל כל העם היה וכפתחו עמדו כל העם:
(ו) וניברך עזרא את יקנו האלהים הגדול וניענו כל העם אמן אמן במעל ידיהם וניקדו וישתחו ליקנו אפים ארצה

Korban Ha'edah Talmud Yerushalmi

קרבת העדה על תלמוד ירושלמי

OPENS – The Torah scroll AND SEES the writing, ROLLS the Torah scroll and afterwards BLESSES, so that people should not say the blessings are written in the Torah.

פותח. ס"ת ורואה הכתב וגולל הספר תורה ואחר כך מברך שלא יאמרו ברכות כתובות בתורה:

AND WHEN HE OPENED IT, ETC. Regarding Ezra it is written that when he opened the Torah scroll the whole nation bowed and afterwards it is written "AND Ezra BLESSED," ETC., and the scripture did not write that Ezra rolled the Torah scroll closed and afterwards blessed; rather, he blessed immediately while it, i.e. the Torah scroll, was still opened.

ובפתחו וכו'. בעזרא כתיב ובפתחו את ספר התורה שתקו כל העם ואח"כ כתיב ויברך וגו' ולא כתב שגלל ס"ת אח"כ אלא בירך מיד בעודו פתוח:

Minor Tractate Soferim 13:5-6

מסכתות קטנות מסכת סופרים פרק יג הלכה ה-ו

One who is holding the Torah scroll, two sages of the Tanaitic period disagreed on the matter. One said that the person "opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, rolls the scroll to close it and blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*," and one said that the person "opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, and blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*," Rabbi Zeura Aba bar Yirmiah said in the name of Rav Matna, who said in the name of Shemuel: "The halakha is in accordance with the one who says 'opens, sees, and blesses.'" And what is the reason? The verse (Nehemiah 8:5) says "and when he opened it, i.e. the Torah scroll, the entire nation stood." And what does it say afterwards? "And Ezra blessed the Great LORD God." (Nehemiah 8:6) ...

מי שהוא אוהז ספר תורה, נחלקו שני תנאים בדבר, חד אמר פותח ורואה וגולל ומברך, וחד אמר פותח ורואה ומברך, רבי זעורה אבא בר ירמיה רב מתנה בשם שמואל הלכה כמי שהוא אומר פותח ורואה ומברך, ומה טעם, וכפתחו עמדו כל העם, ומה כתיב בתריה, ויברך עזרא את י"י האלהים הגדול. . .

→ Law 6 . . . And after reading from the Torah one rolls it closed and says, "Blessed" ← ...

← הלכה ו . . . וגולל ואומר, ברוך → ...

Discussion

- The Jerusalem Talmud and Tractate Soferim largely present the same dispute as in the Babylonian Talmud. The reason for the different positions that were presented in the Babylonian Talmud is not presented. Instead, we are given the halakhic conclusion (the same one presented in the Babylonian Talmud) which is supported by reference to the conduct of Ezra.
- We noted in the discussion of the Babylonian Talmud that some (most?) opinions understand Rabbi Yehudah to be ruling that the scroll *should* be kept open during the blessing, while others hold that Rabbi Yehudah means to say that the scroll *may* remain open, though Rabbi Yehudah would agree that it is best to close the scroll. It seems to me that the reference to Ezra's behavior suggest that the Jerusalem Talmud/Tractate Soferim see leaving the Torah scroll open as an optimal behavior.
- Tractate Soferim says to close the Torah scroll before reciting the blessing after the Torah is read.

סידור רב סעדיא גאון סדר קריאת התורה בצבור עמ' שנט-שמ' p. 349-350 Prayer Book of Saadya Gaon

Text from <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/20685>

→ And one should not begin *Barechu*, i.e. the beginning of the blessings for the *aliyah*, until one sees the verse from which one will begin reading, and should only bless the first blessing with the open scroll in his hands. And one should not bless the final blessing, i.e. the blessing after the *aliyah*, until one covers the Torah scroll. ←

ולא יפתח בברכו עד שיראה
את הפסוק שממנו יתחיל, ולא יברך את
הברכה הראשונה אלא כשהספר פתוח בידו.
ולא יברך את הברכה האחרונה עד שיכסה
את הספר.

Tosafot Megillah 32a s.v. “Gollelo”

תוספות מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א ד"ה גוללו מבחוי

→ At the beginning of an *aliyah* one opens it, i.e. the Torah scroll, to the place from where one wants to read and calls a Kohen. And optimally he, i.e. the Kohen, rolls and closes it before one blesses so that masses won't say that the blessings are written in it, but *ex post facto*, i.e. if the person does not close the scroll,⁷ we need not worry about this because ignoramuses are not so common today. But after one reads, certainly one needs to roll it closed before one blesses, as per Rabbi Yehudah. ←

← פותחו למקום שירצה לקרות
בו וקורא כהן ולכתחילה הוא
גוללו וסותמו קודם שיברך כדי
שלא יאמרו ההמון שהברכות
כתובות בו אבל בדיעבד אין לחוש
שהרי לא שכחו עמי הארץ כל כך
עתה אבל לאחר שקרא בו ודאי
צריך לגוללו קודם שיברך כר'
יהודה. →

Discussion

- Rabbi Saadya Gaon explicitly states that the Torah scroll should be kept open during the blessing at the beginning of an *aliyah* and also notes that the Torah scroll should be covered before the blessing at the end of an *aliyah*.
- Tosafot says that it is *best* to keep the scroll closed during the blessing at the beginning of an *aliyah* to avoid the potential misconception that the blessings are written in the Torah, although they indicate that it is *acceptable* if the person holds the Torah scroll open during the blessing at the beginning of an *aliyah*, since the risk of people believing that the blessings are written in the Torah is minimal. It is not clear whether Tosafot is stating that it is preferable, if possible, to follow Rabbi Meir's opinion⁸ (which would be somewhat difficult to explain considering his opinion is rejected in the Talmud) or if Tosafot is reading Rabbi Yehudah's opinion to mean only that it is acceptable to leave the Torah open, but that closing the Torah is preferable.⁹
 - I believe Tosafot is best understood as ruling that in their days, as opposed to the Tamudic period, it is preferable to follow Rabbi Meir's opinion. This would mean that Tosafot understood Rabbi Yehudah's statement in the same way as apparently everyone else, which is per the plain meaning of the text.¹⁰ Additionally, this

⁷ Tosafot use the term לכתחילה, commonly translated as “*ab initio*,” to describe closing the scroll before the blessing before reading the Torah but saying it is OK to leave the Torah scroll open בדיעבד, commonly translated as “*ex post facto*.” The terms don't easily take on their common meaning in this context, and we will see some suggestions (e.g. Taz Orach Chayim 139:4, below p. 18) as to exactly what בדיעבד mean.

⁸ Taz on Orach Chayim 139:4, below p. 18 understands Tosafot this way.

⁹ Bach, below p. 17, Magen Avraham, below p.20, and Arukh HaShulchan Orach Chayim 139:12, below p. 22, understand Tosafot this way.

¹⁰ Bach, below p. 17, who understands Tosafot to be saying that Rabbi Yehudah prefers to have the Torah scroll closed for the blessing prior to the reading of the Torah, is particularly clear that such an understanding is contrary to the plain meaning of Rabbi Yehudah's statement.

- understanding likely resolves the difficulty in Tosafot's text that is addressed in the next bullet point.
- Tosafot's comment that *ex post facto* it is OK for the person to keep the Torah open during the opening blessing "because ignoramus are not so common today" seems to imply that during the time of the Talmud ignoramus were more common and at that time the Torah scroll would have to be kept closed, contrary to the ruling in the Talmud. Maharsha notes this difficulty.¹¹ A potential alternative read of Tosafot is suggested by Taz Orach Chayim 139:4,¹² to wit, that Tosafot felt that their generation was more ignorant than the time of the Talmud¹³ and that that the people were sufficiently ignorant to warrant following Rabbi Meir's opinion *ab initio*, but not sufficiently ignorant so as to reject Rabbi Yehudah's opinion *ex post facto*.
 - The final comment of Tosafot that closing the Torah during the blessing after the Torah is read is "per Rabi Yehudah" is difficult. Maharsha notes this and some other difficulties in Tosafot but comes to no great conclusion.¹⁴ Perhaps there is a textual error here and the last words of Tosafot should be "Rabbi Meir" rather than "Rabbi Yehudah." If the mention of Rabbi Yehudah is correct, Tosafot may be indicating that Rabbi Yehudah would also hold that the Torah should be held closed¹⁵ after the reading as per the next bullet point.
 - As we will see, there is general consensus that the Torah should be closed/covered (we won't delve too far into whether there is any distinction between these two things, which may also depend on whether the Torah is Ashkenazi or Sefardi style) prior to the blessing after the *aliyah* and that Rabbi Yehudah would likely agree with this point. There is, however, some disagreement among the commentators as to the reason why it is appropriate to close the Torah scroll prior to the closing blessing.

Rabbenu Channanel on Babylonian Talmud Megillah 32a **ר"ח מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א**
The rabbis taught: "One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and reads." These are the words of Rabbi Yehudah. And the halakha is in accordance with him.

ת"ר פותח ורואה
מברך וקורא דברי
ר' יהודה והלכה
כמותו.

¹¹ Below p. 16

¹² Below p. 18

¹³ It is also more plausible to believe that Tosafot would see their generation as more ignorant rather than less ignorant than the people of Talmudic times.

¹⁴

מהרש"א חידושי הלכות מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א

. . . גם מ"ש עוד אבל אחר שקרא ודאי דצריך לגוללו קודם שיברך כרבי יהודה עכ"ל לא ידענא היכא יצא להם דר' יהודה אית ליה לפלוגי בין קודם שקרא לאחר שקרא ועוד דהא בקודם נמי כתבו דלכתחלה גולל קודם שיברך ומה חילוק איכא בין קודם שקרא לאחר שקרא כדמשמע מדבריהם ושוב ראיתי שגם הרמב"ם פי"ב מהלכות תפלה פסק בלאחר שקרא דגוללו קודם שיברך וכתב הכ"מ שם דאיתא הכי במ"ס ואולי מ"ש התוס' כר' יהודה דמשמע דלא כר"מ היינו למאי דאפכי ליה ור"י אית ליה דגולל קודם שקרא ולאחר שקרא והלכה כרבי יהודה לגבי ר"מ אלא דהשתא אין לחוש בדיעבד דלא שכיחי ע"ה וזוהי יתיישבו קצת מהקושיות וצ"ע:

¹⁵ Taz Orach Chayim 139:5 understands Tosafot this way, see below p. 19.

ר"ף מסכת מגילה דף יא עמוד ב בדפי הרי"ף (RI"ף pagination) Rabbi Isaac Alfasi Megillah 11b

The Rabbis taught: “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, rolls the scroll to close it and blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and again opens and reads.” These are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says, “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read and blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and reads,” and thus is the halakha, i.e. the law follows Rabbi Yehudah’s ruling.

ראבי"ה ח"ב - מסכת מגילה סימן תקצה ד"ה בתענית, ברכות Rabbi Eliezer b. Yoel HaLevi (Raaviah)

The halakha is that one who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and reads.” And the Jerusalem Talmud explains what the reason is: It is written (Nehemiah 8:5) “and when he opened it, i.e. the Torah scroll, the entire nation stood,” and after that, “And Ezra blessed the LORD,” etc. (Nehemiah 8:6)

רא"ש מסכת מגילה פרק ד סימן יא Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (RO"Sh) Megillah 4:11

The Rabbis taught: “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read, rolls the scroll to close it and blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and again opens and reads.” These are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says, “One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* opens the Torah scroll and sees the place where one will begin to read and blesses, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, and reads,” and thus is the halakha, i.e. the law follows Rabbi Yehudah’s ruling.

Discussion

- The preceding sources all agree that the law follows Rabbi Yehudah. There is no indication of any deference to Rabbi Meir’s opinion as per our probable read of Tosafot adopted above.¹⁶ The statements are brief enough that it is not 100% clear that they intend that keeping the Torah scroll open during the blessing at the beginning of the *aliyah* is optimal, as opposed to permissible, as some argued Tosafot understood Rabbi Yehudah, although the writers appear to see keeping the Torah scroll open as optimal insofar as otherwise one would expect either some reference to Rabbi Meir’s position (which is present in Rif and Raaviah, but not in Rosh or Rabbenu Channanel) or some statement to the effect that the ruling according to Rabbi Yehudah was only for *ex post facto* purposes. Additionally, it seems to me that Raaviah’s reference to the rationale of the Jerusalem Talmud indicates that he sees keeping the Torah scroll open as being optimal.
- Other medieval sources mentioning that the halakha follows Rabbi Yehudah include מחזור ספר האשכול (אלבק) הלכות שני וחמישי¹⁷ (mentioning both Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah’s opinion and quoting the biblical proof raised in Talmud Yerushalmi),

¹⁶ See Tosafot text p. 5 and bullet points accompanying footnotes 8-13 in the discussion of Tosafot.

¹⁷ ה"ל ח': ומי שאוחז ספר תורה נחלקו עליו שני תנאים. חד אמר פותח ורואה גולל ומברך. וחד אמר פותח. ומה טעם. וכפתחו עמדו כל העם. “ [מה כת' ויברך עזרא את י"י האלהים] הגדול”

(brief mention without reference to Rabbi Meir's opinion or any reasoning), (without mention of Rabbi Meir's opinion only in סימן שצז and without any reasoning),¹⁸ and מנורת המאור (with mention of Rabbi Meir's opinion and without any reasoning).¹⁹

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק יב הלכה ה **Rambam Misheh Torah Laws of Prayer 12:5**

→ Each and every one of the readers, i.e. those who come up for an *aliyah*,²⁰ opens the Torah scroll and looks at the place from which the person will read and afterwards says *Barechu*, i.e. begins the blessing at the beginning of an *aliyah*, . . . and afterwards, i.e. after reciting the blessing, reads from the Torah until the person finishes reading and rolls the Torah scroll to close it and blesses the blessing after the reading. ←

← כל אחד ואחד מן הקורין²⁰ פותח ספר תורה ומביט למקום שהוא קורא בו, ואח"כ אומר ברכו . . . ואחר כך קורא עד שישלים לקרות וגולל הספר ומברך. →

Discussion

- Rambam's explicit reference to closing the Torah scroll before the blessing after reading from the Torah indicates that he has the Torah scroll open during the blessing before the reading. Note that Kol Bo²¹ clearly reads Rambam as saying that the Torah scroll should be kept open during the opening blessing. Rambam's basis and rationale for closing the scroll before the final blessing is unstated and a subject of some of the discussion we will see below.

חידושי הריטב"א מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א **R. Yom Tov b. Avraham (Ritba) Meg. 32a (selection)**

RABBI YEHUDAH SAYS, "One who comes to the Torah for an *aliyah* OPENS the Torah scroll AND SEES the place where one will begin to read, AND BLESSES, i.e. recites the blessing for the *aliyah*, AND READS," i.e. one does not roll the scroll to close it in the meanwhile and we do not worry that people will say that the blessings are written in the Torah, since it is a distant, i.e. minimal, concern, and it is regarding the translation that there is a concern according to Ulah that people will think the translation is written in the scroll if the reader assists the translator, and the halakha is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah (when one blesses). → And some say that it is specifically regarding the first blessing, i.e. the blessing before the Torah is read, where one does not have to open, see, roll closed and open again after making the blessing, but regarding the last blessing, i.e. the blessing after the Torah is read, since it is destined to

ר' יהודה אומר פותח ורואה ומברך וקורא. כלומר ואינו גולל בינתיים ולא חיישינן שיאמרו שהברכות כתובות בתורה שחששא רחוקה היא, ולתרגום הוא דאיכא למיחש כדעולא, והלכתא כר' יהודה (כשמברך), ← ויש אומרים דברכה ראשונה הוא דלא מיחייב לפתוח לראות ולגלול ולפתוח אבל ברכה אחרונה כיון שסופו לגלול מוטב

18

ספר אור זרוע ח"ב - הלכות שבת סימן מב סעיף טז

[טז] וכשהוא קורא תחילה פותח ספר תורה ורואה הכתב במקום שיש לו לקרות ומברך וקורא כהיה דשלהי מסכת מגילה דת"ר פותח ורואה מברך וקורא וא"ר מתנה אמר שמואל הלכה פותח ורואה מברך וקורא.

ספר אור זרוע ח"ב - הלכות קריאת ארבע פרשיות ומועדים סימן שצז

ת"ר הקורא בתורה פותח ורואה גולל ומברך וחוזר ופותח וקורא דברי ר"מ ר"י אומר פותח ורואה ומברך וקורא וכן הלכה.

ופותח הספר קודם שיברך ואחר כך מברך. פותח ורואה וגולל ומברך. פ"ל לאחר שפתח חוזר וגולל ואז מברך וחוזר ופותח וקורא. דברי ר"י "19

"מאיר. ר' יהודה אומר פותח ורואה ומברך. והלכה כר' יהודה. ולאחר שקורא גולל ומברך

²⁰ Rambam adhered strictly to the rule that each person who has an *aliyah* must read from the Torah as opposed to having a designated reader. See R. Yoseph Kapach's comment 8 on this *halakha*.

²¹ Text below page 13.

be rolled closed prior to the next *aliyah*, it is better to roll the scroll closed before the blessing and to be concerned per Rabbi Meir, and their opinion is reasonable. ← שיגלול קודם ברכה ולחוש כר"מ, ונראין דבריהם. →

Discussion

- Ritba distinguishes between the blessing prior to reading from the Torah, where we do not require the additional delay/trouble of closing the Torah scroll to say the blessing and then re-opening the scroll, and the blessing after the reading from the Torah, where one might as well follow Rabbi Meir's practice (though in truth Rabbi Yehudah never makes any particular statement to the contrary) and close the Torah scroll prior to making the blessing. Significantly, this also gives an indication that there is a practical reason to leave the Torah scroll open during the blessing prior to the reading of the Torah. On the other hand, Ritba's language of "דלא מיהייב" *where one does not have to* (close the Torah scroll prior to the opening blessing) *may* suggest that Ritba believes it is preferable for one to do so.

Responsa of Rabbi Shlomo ben Adret 8:10

שו"ת הרשב"א חלק ה סימן י

Note: The comments of the glossator included in the Responsa CD have been removed.

→ You have expressed surprise regarding the Rambam, who wrote in Chapter 12 of the Laws of Prayer (law 5), "Each and every one of the readers opens the Torah scroll and looks at the place from which the person reads, and afterwards blesses, and reads until one finishes reading and rolls the Torah scroll to close it and blesses." For you have stated that it appears that Rambam ruled according to Rabbi Yehudah, who said one who has an *aliyah* opens, sees, and blesses," and if so, at the end, why does one roll the Torah to close it and bless, which apparently implies that he, i.e. Rambam, believes according to Rabbi Akiva²² in this regard? It turns out²³ that his, i.e. Rambam's, words contradict each other.

← תמהת על הרמב"ם ז"ל, שכתב בפרק י"ב מהלכות תפלה (ה"ה). כל אחד ואחד מן הקורין, פותח ס"ת, ומביט במקום שקורא בו, ואח"כ מברך, וקורא עד שישלים לקרות, וגולל הס"ת ומברך. ואמרת: דנראה דפסק כר' יהודה, דאמר: דפותח ורואה ומברך. ואם כן, לבסוף אמאי גולל ומברך. דלכאורה משמע, דס"ל כר"ע בהא,²² ונמצאו דבריו סותרים זה לזה?

Response: In truth, the halakha is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah, and the halakha is explicitly decided in accordance with him in the Gemara,²⁴ and also in the Jerusalem Talmud, for we read there . . .²⁵ But what Rambam wrote regarding when one finishes the *aliyah*, that when one finishes reading from the Torah one "rolls the Torah scroll to close it and blesses," Rambam intended well, i.e. his ruling is appropriate, because Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Akiva only disagreed regarding one who came to read, i.e. one saying the opening blessing on an *aliyah*, for one needs to open and see where one begins, and after the Torah

תשובה: באמת הלכה כר' יהודה, ובהדיא איפסקא בגמרא הלכתא כוותיה (בפרק בני העיר, דף לב). וכן אמרו בירושלמי דגרסינן התם: . . . אבל מה שכתב: כשישלים, גולל הס"ת ומברך; יפה כוון. לפי שלא נחלקו ר"י ור"ע, אלא בבא לקרות. דר"י סבר דכוון דהוא עומד לקרות,

²² The text of Rashba refers to the opinion of Rabbi Meir as the opinion of Rabbi Akiva. It is possible this is a typographical error in Rashba. Note that the printing of Rashba found at <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=1379&st=&pgnum=118&hilite=> also has Rabbi Akiva instead of Rabbi Meir, so that this is likely not a problem with the text on the Responsa CD. Note also *Dikdukei Soferim* on the Talmud does not note a variant text ascribing Rabbi Meir's opinion to Rabbi Akiva.

²³ Literally "it is found"

²⁴ Text above p. 1.

²⁵ Text above p. 3.

scroll is opened, why would one go back and roll the Torah scroll closed? **And if** one might suggest closing the Torah scroll so that people will not say that the blessings are written in the Torah, regarding the blessing there is not a reasonable likelihood to err, i.e. for people to come to that misunderstanding, **for all know that we do not write a blessing in the middle of the Torah. Therefore, one does not need to re-open the Torah between the blessing and the reading**, i.e. one does not need to close the Torah scroll before reciting the blessing and thus have to re-open the Torah scroll to begin reading. **However, after one reads from the Torah why leave the Torah scroll open? Behold the Torah scroll is open without being read! This is not respectful to the Torah scroll that its writing should be exposed without being read, as they (the Sages) said (BT Eruvin 98) regarding those who write scrolls that the scribe should not turn the sheet on its face, but rather one spreads a cloth upon it.²⁶ And similarly they also said regarding the Sabbath²⁷, regarding one who stands on a roof with a Torah scroll in one's hand, and the Torah scroll rolled out of his hands.²⁸ And even the language of the Baraita apparently demonstrates thusly, i.e. indicates that the Torah scroll should be closed while the person recites the blessing after the Torah is read, since it teaches: "Rabbi Yehudah says, "Opens and sees and blesses," for what is the meaning of the word "opens" that it says, doesn't it remain**

וצריך הוא לפתוח לראות היכן מתחיל, אחר שנפתח, למה חוזר וגולל. ואי משום שלא יאמרו: דברכה כתובה בתורה; בברכה ליכא למיטעי, דהכל יודעים דאין כותבין ברכה באמצע של תורה. הלכך, אינו צריך לחזור ולגלול בין ברכה לקריאה. אבל לאחר שקרא, למה? הא הס"ת פתוח בלא קריאה! אינו כבודו של ס"ת שיהא כתבו מגולה, בלי קריאה. וכענין שאמרו (במס' עירובין דף צח) בכותבי ספרים: לא יהפוך היריעה על פניה, אבל פורס עליה מפה.²⁶ וכענין שאמרו גם כן, בשבת²⁷ (בפ"ק דף ה) בעומד בראש הגג, וס"ת בידו, ונתגלגל הספר.²⁸ ואף לשון הברייתא מוכיח כן לכאורה, דקתני: ר"י אומר: פותח ורואה ומברך. דמאי: פותח; דקאמר, והלא

²⁶ **Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 98a**

But it has been taught: Those who write scrolls of Torah, tefillin, and mezuzot, the Rabbis did not permitted them to turn the sheet on its face, rather the scribe spreads a cloth on it.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת עירובין דף צח עמוד א

והתניא: כותבי ספרים תפילין ומזוזות לא התירו להן להפך יריעה על פניה, אלא פורס עליה את הבגד!

²⁷ The glossator of Rashba cites this teaching to BT Shabbat 5b. In fact, the Mishnah to which Rashba refers appears at Eruvin 97b (and is the Mishnah upon which the text appearing at footnote 26 comments), though it is in fact quoted in the Talmud at Shabbat 5b. I imagine that the glossator understood Rashba's words "וכענין שאמרו גם כן" to mean, "And similarly they also said in Tractate Shabbat." However, I think Rashba merely meant "And similarly they also said regarding Shabbat."

Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 97b

If one were reading on a rooftop on the Sabbath and the scroll rolled out of his hand, as long as the part of the scroll stretching off the roof did not reach 10 handbreadths from the ground, so that no part of the scroll had entered a public domain, one rolls it toward oneself. Once the part of the scroll stretching off the roof reached 10 handbreadths from the ground, so that retrieving the scroll would involve retrieving an item from a public domain on the Sabbath, one turns the scroll on its writing, i.e. to have its writing face downward.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת עירובין דף צז עמוד ב

משנה. . . היה קורא בראש הגג ונתגלגל הספר מידו, עד שלא הגיע לעשרה טפחים - גוללו אצלו, משהגיע לעשרה טפחים - הופכו על הכתב.

Rashi explains:

Rashi on Eruvin 97b

HE TURNS the scroll **ON ITS WRITING**: He turns the lettering toward the wall, so that the scroll should not be lying so disrespectfully, and one leaves it until it gets dark, i.e. until the Sabbath ends and the scroll can be retrieved.

רש"י מסכת עירובין דף צז עמוד ב

הופכו על הכתב - האותיות כלפי הכותל, שלא יהא מוטל כל כך בבזיון, ומניחו עד שתחשך.

open from the original point? But rather it indicates that between each person the earlier person having an *aliyah* rolls the scroll closed and this is its, i.e. the Torah's, respectful treatment, and since one needs to roll it, why should it be open until one blesses? Is it not enough that they said that one does not need to roll it, and that they were not concerned lest people say the blessings are written in the Torah, thus indicating a general preference for the Torah to be closed when not being read, rather you come to require that the Torah remain open until you finish the blessing? And this ruling that the Torah should be closed when the blessing is recited after the Torah is read appears correct to me. ←

פתוח ועומד משעה ראשונה?
אלא דבין גברא לגברא, גוללו,
וזהו כבודו וכיון דהוא צריך
לגוללו, למה יהא פתוח עד
שיברך? לא דיים דאמרו:
שאינו צריך לגוללו, ולא
חששו שמא יאמרו ברכה כתוב
בתורה. אלא דאתה בא לחייב
שיהא פתוח ועומד, עד שיסיים
הברכה. וזה נראה לי עיקר. →

Discussion

- Rashba probably believes that it is preferable to keep the Torah scroll open when saying the blessing prior to reading the Torah, though it is not 100% clear. He says “אחר שנפתח, למה חוזר” *after the Torah scroll is opened, why would one go back and roll the Torah scroll closed?* On the other hand, he writes “אינו צריך לחזור ולגולל בין ברכה לקריאה” *Therefore, he does not need to re-open the Torah open between the between the blessing and the reading,* which might indicate that it is acceptable and/or preferable to close the Torah scroll during the opening blessing.
- Rashba explains Rambam’s ruling that the Torah scroll should be closed after it is read and before the closing blessing by arguing that this is a matter of respect for the Torah scroll (not allowing it to remain open while it is not being read), rather than/in addition to a concern that people might think that the blessings are written in the Torah scroll.
 - Note that Rashba’s rationale for closing the Torah scroll after the Torah is read could easily be part of Rabbi Meir’s reason for ruling that the Torah should be closed while the opening blessing is recited, i.e. that even when saying the blessing for reading from the Torah, perhaps Rabbi Meir still felt it was disrespectful to hold the Torah open when not reading from it. Perhaps Rabbi Yehudah felt that in the context of the blessing for reading from the Torah, there was sufficient reason to leave the scroll open (e.g. being prepared to read immediately after the blessing).
 - Note that the Lechem Yehudah²⁹ distinguishes between leaving the Torah scroll open during the opening blessing and leaving the Torah scroll open during the closing blessing. However, I think my argument still holds that leaving the text exposed could be a concern that argues toward closing the Torah during any blessing, only that there are more counterarguments to support having the Torah open during the opening blessing.
- Rashba’s attempted proof from the Baraita that the Torah should be closed between aliyot³⁰ is, in my opinion, quite difficult (though his rationale for the ruling is in any event more than sufficient). Rashba argues that the fact that the Baraita refers to the person coming to the Torah opening the Torah indicates that the Torah is closed when the person comes up, hence indicating that the Torah would be closed between each *aliyah*. The argument seems to me to

²⁹ Discussed along with Rabbi Kapach’s commentary on Rambam, below p. 26.

³⁰ The same argument is raised by Beth Yoseph in the name of the Mordechai, see below p. 15 text accompanying footnote 38.

be anachronistic, as most probably during the time of Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir only the first person having an *aliyah* would recite the opening blessing and only the last person would say the closing blessing.³¹ Therefore, it is hard to argue that the Baraita gives any indication of proper procedure for anything other than the first *aliyah*. This difficulty is recognized in שו"ת יהודה יעלה חלק א - או"ח סימן נב ד"ה זי"ן מיית³² argument., discussing Mordechai's similar Ya'aleh argues that Mordechai must read the statement in the Baraita that the person having an *aliyah* opens the Torah applies to all persons having an *aliyah*, even those who do not say the blessing.

Meiri Megillah 32a

בית הבחירה למאירי מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א

One who ascends the podium in order to read from the Torah, opens the Torah and sees where one needs to begin and blesses while it, i.e. the Torah scroll, is open and reads, for there is no concern lest people say that the blessings are written in the Torah, but the reader may not aid the translator because in this regard, since we have seen translations in holy scripture people might say that the translation is written in the Torah. And after one reads, regarding whether one needs to roll the scroll closed before one blesses, is not mentioned in the Gemara, but the greatest of the writers (presumably Rambam) wrote that one needs to roll the scroll closed before one blesses since one doesn't need to read in it, for at the beginning, i.e. before saying the opening blessing, since one needs to open it before blessing in order to see where one needs to begin, they

העולה לדוכן כדי לקרות בתורה פותח ספר תורה ורואה היכן צריך להתחיל ומברך כשהוא פתוח וקורא שאין חוששין שמא יאמרו ברכות כתובות בתורה והקורא לא יסייע למתורגמן שבזו הואיל ומצינו תרגום בכתבי הקדש יאמרו תרגום כתוב בתורה ואחר שקרא אם צריך לגלגל קודם שיברך לא הוזכרה בגמרא אלא שגדולי המחברים כתבו שצריך לגלגל קודם שיברך הואיל ואינו צריך לקרות בו שבראשונה הואיל וצריך לפתוח קודם שיברך לראות

³¹ Babylonian Talmud Megillah 21a-b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה דף כא עמוד א

Mishnah: . . . The ones who open and seals, i.e. those who begin and end the reading of the Torah bless before it and after it. **Gemara:** . . . It was taught: "The one who opens, i.e. has the first *aliyah* to the Torah, blesses before it, and the one who seals, i.e. has the last *aliyah*, blesses after it." But now that they all i.e. each person having an *aliyah* make a blessing before it and after it – this is the reason that the rabbis enacted the new system of each person saying the blessings: A decree because of those who enter and leave lest one who enters late believe that no blessing is made on reading from the Torah (Rashi).

/משנה/ . . . הפותח והחותם בתורה - מברך לפניו ולאחריה. גמרא . . . (עמוד ב) . . . תנא: הפותח מברך לפניו, והחותם מברך לאחריה. והאידין דכולהו מברכי לפניו ולאחריה - היינו טעמא דתקיננו רבנן: גזירה משום הנכנסין ומשום היוצאין.

Note: Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History by Ismar Elbogen, Trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin, footnote 106 to page 140 notes that per א עמוד א בבלי מגילה דף כב עמוד א the first and last making the blessings was still the practice of רב ("דרב") ("אי קלע לבבל בתענית צבור, קם קרא בסיפרא, פתח בריך, חתים ולא בריך"). He also notes that Waagena concludes based on that practice in Israel followed the Mishnah "even in later times." Elbogen states on page 140 that the practice changed during Amoraic times.

³²

שו"ת יהודה יעלה חלק א - או"ח סימן נב זי"ן מייתי פרו"מ נ"י ממ"ש המרדכי בב"י /או"ח/ סי' קל"ט לדייק מלשון ר' יהודה בברייתא שלהי מגילה פותח ורואה ומברך כו' שצריך לגלול בין גברא לגברא כו' ור"ל דל"ל אראשון בלבד קאי דמאי קמ"ל פותח לא הל"ל אלא רואה מברך וע"כ אאמצעי קאמר פותח ומברך לפי שצרי' לגלול בין גברא לגברא ומוכח דגם בזמן ר"מ ור"י היה כל א' מברך. דאל"כ ע"כ מברך אראשון קאי ופותח מיותר.

הנה לק"מ דלא מיתורא דייק המרדכי דינו אלא משמעות לשון פותח דייק פותח סתם דומיא דרואה משמע על כל העולים לקרות קאי כמו רואה דסמיך ליה אבל ומברך אראשון לבד קאי. ולמעכ"ת תקשה ליה בגמרא מגילה דף כ"ב כי משני רב בכהני קרי בסיפרא פתח בריך כו' למה ליה למימר הל"ל ראה בריך כיון שתכלית פתיחה הוא רק לראות הכתב אע"כ כונת המרדכי כמ"ש פותח ס"ל דומיא דרואה אכולהו קרואים קאי כנ"ל.

³³ Quoted in Beth Yoseph below p. 14.

did not require him to roll the scroll closed and to bless and to again open the scroll before reading from it, but in the end, one definitely needs to roll the scroll closed and afterwards say the blessing. → And some say that even with this, i.e. with the closing blessing, one does not need to roll the scroll closed before making the blessing, but rather one may bless even though it (the Torah) is open, since in any event the reason was recorded that we do not worry that someone may say (Lit. “to say”) that the blessings are written in the Torah. ←

היכן הוא צריך להתחיל לא הטריחוהו לגלגל ולברך ולחזור ולפתוח אבל באחרונה ודאי צריך לגלגל ואח"כ יברך ← ויש אומרים שאף בזו אין צריך לגלגל אלא מברך אע"פ שהוא פתוח הואיל ומ"מ הוזכר בו טעם שאין חוששין לומר ברכות כתובות בתורה... →

Rabbenu Yerucham Tol'dat Adam 2:3 p. 20c רבינו ירוחם - תולדות אדם ותורה נתיב ב חלק ג דף כ טור ג

One who ascends to read the Torah opens and sees whatever place one should read and blesses and reads: i.e., and one does not need to roll the Torah closed when one reads. This is explicit in Tractate Megillah.

העולה לקרות פותח ורואה באו זה מקום יש לו לקרות ומברך וקור' פ' ואינו צריך לגלול כשמברך פשוט במגלה.

Ran on Megillah 32a (selection) חידושי הר"ן מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א

Opens and sees, etc. The reasoning of Rabbi Meir is so that people don't say the blessing is in the Torah, and the halakhah is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah.

פותח ורואה וכו'. טעמא דר' מאיר כדי שלא יאמרו ברכה כתובה בתורה (וכן) והלכה כר' יהודה.

Our teacher Rabbi Moshe (Rambam) of blessed memory wrote that the rule of keeping the Torah scroll open applies only for the first blessing, i.e. the blessing before reading from the Torah, for the law is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah that one does not need to roll the Torah scroll closed when one blesses, but for the last blessing one needs to roll the scroll closed, because the disagreement between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah is only regarding the first blessing, as it teaches the opinion of Rabbi Meir that one “re-opens and reads” and the Baraita does not deal with the ending blessing, demonstrating that Rabbi Yehudah only disagrees with Rabbi Meir regarding the first blessing. But this argument is not clear, because the reason of Rabbi Yehudah is applicable to both, because the reason is explained “with regard to blessings –it is not possible to err,” and since people do not say the blessings are written in the Torah.

כתב הרב רבינו משה ז"ל דוקא בברכה ראשונה הוא דהילכתא כר' יהודה. [דאינו] צריך לגלול כשמברך אבל בברכה אחרונה צריך לגלול דפלוגתא דר' מאיר ור' יהודה לא הוי אלא בברכה ראשונה כדקתני וחזור ופותח וקורא ולא מיירי בבתרייתא אלמא ר' יהודה לא פליג אלא בקמייתא ולא נהיר דטעמא דר' יהודה בתרוייהו שייך דמפרש טעמא בברכה ליכא למיטעי. וכיון שכן אין אומרים ברכות כתובות בתורה:

Kol Bo 20 s.v. “And the Reader Stands

ספר כלבו סימן כ ד"ה ועומד הקורא

And the reader stands and opens the scroll to see what one will read in it, and rolls the scroll closed and blesses, but some say that the reader should not roll it, but rather one opens and sees and blesses, and thus is the opinion of the Rabbi Moshe (Rambam)³⁴, and there are those to say there is reason for him to turn his head so that it does not appear as if the blessings are written in the Torah . . . and afterwards, i.e. after the Torah is read, the reader rolls the scroll closed and blesses the blessing recited after it

ועומד הקורא ופותח הספר לראות מה יקרא בו, וגוללו ומברך, יש אומרים שלא יגלול אותו אלא פותח ורואה ומברך וכן דעת הר"מ ז"ל, ויש אומרים שיש לו להפך פניו שלא יראה כאלו הברכות כתובות בתוכה . . . ואחר כך גולל הספר ומברך לאחריה

Tur Orach Chayim 139

טור אורח חיים סימן קלט

And the person having the *aliyah* opens the scroll before the person blesses, and then one should bless, as it is taught: “opens and sees and rolls and blesses,” i.e. after one opens one again closes and then blesses and again opens and reads, “these are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says, ‘opens and sees and blesses.’” And the halakha is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah. And after the reader reads, the reader rolls the scroll closed and blesses.

ופותח הספר קודם שיברך ואחר כך יברך דתניא פותח ורואה וגולל ומברך פי' לאחר שפתח חוזר וסוגרו ואז מברך וחוזר ופותח וקורא דברי רבי מאיר ר' יהודה אומר פותח ורואה ומברך והלכה כרבי יהודה ולאחר שקרא גולל ומברך

Beth Yoseph On Tur Orach Chayim 139 (selections)

בית יוסף אורח חיים סימן קלט

AND the person having the *aliyah* OPENS THE SCROLL BEFORE one BLESSES, AND THEN ONE SHOULD BLESS, AS IT IS TAUGHT: “OPENS AND SEES AND ROLLS AND BLESSES,” ETC. This text appears at the end of Chapter “The People of the Town,” and the Gemara explains there that the reasoning of Rabbi Meir is so that people will not say that the blessings are written in the Torah, whereas Rabbi Yehudah believed that everyone knows that the blessings are not written in the Torah and therefore one does not need to roll the scroll closed before one blesses, and the halakha is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah, and thus Rambam ruled. But even so, Rambam wrote that after one read from the Torah one rolls the scroll closed and then blesses, just as our teacher, i.e. Tur, wrote. →But the Ran³⁵ expressed wonder at him, i.e. toward Rambam, but it appears to me that the reason Rambam thus ruled is that he believed that Rabbi Yehudah only disagreed regarding the beginning, i.e. the blessing before reading from the Torah, as Rabbi Meir

ופותח הספר קודם שיברך ואח"כ יברך דתניא פותח ורואה וכו'. בסוף פרק בני העיר (לב.) ומפרש בגמרא שם דטעמא דרבי מאיר כדי שלא יאמרו ברכות כתובות בתורה ורבי יהודה סבר שהכל יודעים שאין ברכות כתובות בתורה ולפיכך אינו צריך לגלול קודם שיברך והלכה כרבי יהודה וכן פסק הרמב"ם (תפלה פי"ב ה"ה) ואף על פי כן כתב שלאחר שקרא גולל ואח"כ מברך וכמו שכתב רבינו ← ותמה הר"ן (יא: סוף דיבור ראשון)³⁵ עליו ולי נראה דטעמא משום דסבירא ליה דעד כאן לא פליג רבי יהודה אלא בתחלה דלרבי מאיר צריך לגלול ולברך ואח"כ לפתוח ולקרות וטריחא מילתא הילכך לא צריך

³⁴ The text of Rambam appears above at page 8.

³⁵ The gloss refers to Ran's comment on Rif (ר"ף) ruling was quoted above p. 6). However, Ran's comment there regarding Rambam's ruling that the Torah is closed before the closing blessing is quite brief (he writes “וקי"ל הכי ומיהו “ and it is established for us thus (i.e. in accord with Rabbi Yehudah), however the Rambam wrote that with regard to the closing blessing one rolls the scroll closed and then blesses.”) and only arguably indicates surprise at this ruling. Ran's surprise is more apparent in his commentary on the Talmud, quoted above, p. 13.

holds that one **must roll and then bless and then afterwards open and read, and such things are a bother and therefore not necessary per Rabbi Yehudah, but in the end**, i.e. after the Torah is read, **since there is no greater bother** in doing so, one **rolls the scroll closed and afterwards blesses.** ←

The Mordechai derived from Chapter “The People of the Town” from that which was taught, “Opens and sees,” etc. that from there it appears that the Torah scroll should not be open between each person’s *aliyah*, and nowadays they have the custom to cover the writing with a scarf between each person.

The Kol Bo wrote . . .³⁶

And Rabbi David Avudraham wrote in the name of Saadya that the reader should not say “*Barechu*” until one sees the verse that the reader starts the reading with, and one must bless the first blessing with the Torah scroll opened and not closed.

לרבי יהודה אבל בסוף שאין טורח יותר גולל ואח"כ מברך: →

ה המרדכי דקדק בפרק בני העיר (סו"ס תתלא) מהא דתניא פותח ורואה וכו' דמכאן משמע דס"ת לא תהיה פתוחה בין גברא לגברא ועכשיו נהגו לכסות הכתב בסודר בין גברא לגברא:

ד (ב) כתב הכל בו . . .³⁶
וה"ר דוד אבודרהם (סוף עמ' קלב) כתב בשם רבינו סעדיה שאין לקורא לומר ברכו עד שיראה הפסוק שמתחיל בו וצריך לברך ברכה ראשונה וס"ת פתוח לא סתום:

Discussion

- Tur and Beth Yoseph point toward a preference for keeping the Torah scroll open during the opening blessing, but they are not explicit on the point. Beth Yoseph quotes Kol Bo, who seems to indicate that the Torah should be closed (though Kol Bo mentions Rambam's contrary opinion), but also quotes the opinion of Saadya Gaon³⁷ to the effect that the scroll should be left open.
- R. Karo in Beth Yoseph introduces the term טרחה (trouble/bother) with regard to why one is not supposed to/required to close the Torah scroll prior to making the opening blessing. Whether the bother refers to the person with the *aliyah* or to the congregation (in terms of potential delay) is not clear.
- Beth Yoseph quotes Mordechai for the argument that we saw above from Rashba³⁸ as a proof that the Torah scroll should be closed between each *aliyah*. Above we discussed the difficulty with this proof.

³⁶ See text of Kol Bo above p. 13. The quote in Beth Yoseph does not include the statement in Kol Bo about closing the Torah scroll before the closing blessing of an *aliyah*.

³⁷ See quotation from Saadya Gaon's siddur above p. 4.

³⁸ Text accompanying footnote 30, above p.11.

כסף משנה הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק יב הלכה ה **Kesef Mishnah on Rambam Prayer 12:5³⁹**

EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THE READERS ETC. The source of this text is **There** (BT Megillah 32b) . . . **Explanation: one sees the verse that one has to begin reading and rolls the Torah scroll closed and blesses the blessing on the Torah before the reading and again opens and reads, according to Rabbi Meir. And we say in the Gemara that the reasoning of Rabbi Meir is so people will not say that the blessings are written in the Torah. And the halakha is decided in the Gemara in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah, but even so our teacher (Rambam) wrote that at the end, i.e. after reading from the Torah, one rolls the scroll closed and then blesses because he, of blessed memory, believed that Rabbi Yehudah only disagreed regarding whether to keep the Torah open during the blessing at the beginning, since according to Rabbi Meir, one needs to bother to roll the scroll closed and then to open it again to read, but in the end, i.e. after reading from the Torah, where there is no greater bother one rolls and then blesses, per the aphorism “if you can be good, don’t be called bad.” → And after I wrote thus, I found in Tractate Soferim Chapter 13 written in accordance with our teacher, i.e. stating that the Torah should be closed before the closing blessing and the rule is for the reason I wrote. ←**

כל אחד ואחד מן הקורין וכו'. שם (ד' ל"ב). . . פי' שפותח ורואה אותו פסוק שיש לו להתחיל ולקרות וגולל ס"ת ומברך ברכת התורה לפני קריאתה וחוזר ופותח וקורא דר"מ. ואמרינן בגמרא דטעמא דר"מ כדי שלא יאמרו ברכות כתובות בתורה ואיפסיקא בגמרא הלכה כר' יהודה ואף על פי כן כתב רבינו שבסוף גולל ואחר כך מברך משום דס"ל ז"ל דע"כ לא פליג רבי יהודה אלא בתחלה דצריך למטרח לגלול והדר לפתוח ולקרות אבל בסוף דאין שם טורח יותר גולל ואחר כך מברך דמהיות טוב אל תקרי רע כנ"ל ← אחר כך מצאתי שבמסכת סופרים פי"ג כתוב כדברי רבינו והוא מהטעם שכתבתי: →

Shulchan Arukh Orah Hayim 139:4

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן קלט סעיף ד

→ All those called for an *aliyah* bless before and after. One opens the scroll before one blesses and sees the verse that one needs to begin with and then one should bless; and after one reads, one rolls the scroll closed and blesses. Note written by Rabbi Moses Isserles: And when one blesses the first blessing, one should turn one's face to the side, so as not to appear to be blessing by reading text of the blessing from the Torah, and it seems to me that one should turn one's face to one's left. ←

← כל הקורים מברכים לפנייה ולאחריה, ופותח הספר קודם שיברך ורואה הפסוק שצריך להתחיל בו ואחר כך יברך; ולאחר שקרא, גולל ומברך. (נהגה: ובשעה שמברך ברכה ראשונה יהפוך פניו על הצד, שלא יהא נראה כמברך מן התורה (נכל בו); ונראה לי דיהפוך פניו לצד שמאלו.) →

Discussion

- Rabbi Karo and Rabbi Isserles appear to say that the Torah should be held open during the opening blessing. This is particularly apparent from Rabbi Isserles's comment that one should turn away from the Torah to avoid the appearance of reading the blessing from the Torah, which would not be necessary if the scroll were closed (though I suppose one could quibble that people might not see that the scroll is closed but could see a person's head turned).

³⁹ See text of Rambam on p. 8.

Maharsha Megillah 32a

מהרש"א חידושי הלכות מסכת מגילה דף לב עמוד א

On the same words “AND OPTIMALLY, ONE ROLLS, ETC., BECAUSE IGNORAMUSES ARE NOT SO COMMON TODAY, ETC.”⁴⁰ END OF QUOTE. Their (Tosafot’s) words are not understood, since the comment of Tosafot implies that now that ignoramuses are not so common there is no need to worry *ex post facto*, i.e. after someone happens to say the opening blessing with the scroll opened, but during the times of the sages of the Talmud there was (lit. “there is”) reason to worry even *ex post facto*. But why? Behold Rav Matnah stated that the halakha is “opens and sees and blesses,” implying that even *ab initio* it is permissible to do thusly.

בא"ד ולכתחלה הוא גוללו כו' שהרי לא שכיחי ע"ה כ"כ עתה כו' עכ"ל אין דבריהם מובנים דמשמע עתה דלא שכיחי ע"ה אין לחוש בדיעבד אבל בימי חכמי התלמוד יש לחוש אפילו בדיעבד ואמאי הא אמר רב מתנה הלכה פותח ורואה ומברך ואף לכתחלה שרי לעשות כן . . .

Discussion

- The difficulty introduced here, and one possible solution is discussed above in the discussion of Tosafot’s text.⁴¹

Bach Commentary on Tur Orach Chayim 139 s.v. “Opens” ב"ה אורח חיים סימן קלט ד"ה ופותח

→The Kol Bo wrote , and Beth Yoseph quotes (lit. “brings”) him, “ One opens the scroll to see what one will read in it and rolls the scroll closed and blesses, but some say that the reader should not roll it, but rather one opens and sees and blesses, and thus is the opinion of the Rabbi Moshe (Rambam),⁴² and there are those who say there is reason to turn one’s head so that it does not appear as if the blessings are written in the Torah” end of quote. And the first opinion is per the words of Tosafot⁴³ that even according to Rabbi Yehudah it is best to roll it, i.e. to close the Torah scroll, before one blesses the first blessing, and the second opinion is per the plain meaning of the discussion in the Talmud, i.e. that according to Rabbi Yehudah one blesses while it, i.e. the Torah scroll, is open, and since the halakha is in accord with Rabbi Yehudah, if so one who comes to roll the scroll closed and bless violates the words of Rabbi Yehudah and acts according to Rabbi Meir. Therefore, one must bless the first blessing with the Torah scroll open and not closed. Thus is written in Abudraham in the name of Saadya Gaon.⁴⁴ And the third opinion, that one should turn one’s face, I do not know a source for it, and perhaps their reasoning is that since there is a doubt in the words of Rabbi Yehudah if he believes one rolls the scroll closed and blesses *ab initio*, etc., as the Tosafot wrote, or one

←כתב הכל בו ומביאו ב"י פותח הספר לראות מה יקרא בו וגוללו ומברך ויש אומרים שלא יגלול אותו אלא פותח ורואה ומברך וכן דעת הר"ם ז"ל ויש אומרים שיש להפוך פניו שלא יראה כאילו ברכות כתובות בתורה עכ"ל והסברא הראשונה היא על פי דברי התוספות שאף לרבי יהודא לכתחלה גוללו קודם שיברך ברכה ראשונה והסברא השנייה היא על פי פשטא דסוגיא דלרבי יהודה דוקא מברך כשהוא פתוח וכיון דהלכה כר' יהודא אם כן הבא לגלול ולברך עובר על דברי רבי יהודא ועביד כרבי מאיר ולכן צריך לברך ברכה ראשונה בס"ת פתוח ולא סתום וכן כתב באבודרהם על שם רבינו סעדיה והסברא השלישית שיש לו להפך פניו איני יודע לה עיקר ואפשר שטעמן כיון דאיכא ספק בדברי רבי יהודא אי סבירא ליה גולל ומברך לכתחלה וכו' כמו שכתבו התוספות

⁴⁰ Maharsha is commenting on the Tosafot text found above p. 5.

⁴¹ See bullet point accompanying footnotes 11-13.

⁴² The text of Rambam appears above at page 8.

⁴³ Quoted above p. 5.

⁴⁴ See quotation from Saadya Gaon’s siddur above p. 4.

blesse specifically (i.e. best practice) **when it is open, therefore in order to remove all doubt** (lit. to go out from the hands of doubt) one should **turn one's face, etc.** **And thus wrote the Rabbi Isserles in a gloss on Shulchan Arukh, but in my humble opinion it is best that it be entirely opened at the time of blessing and one should not turn one's face at all, because thus is the opinion of the halakhic decisors and renowned Geonim and thus I act.** ←

או מברך דוקא כשהוא פתוח על כן כדי שיצא מידי ספק יהפוך פניו וכו' וכן כתב הרב בהגהת שלחן ערוך (ס"ד) ולפע"ד נראה הגון שיהא פתוח בשעת ברכה לגמרי ולא יהפוך פניו כלל דכך הוא דעת הפוסקים והגאונים המפורסמים וכך אני נוהג: →

Taz Orach Chayim 139:4

ט"ז אורח חיים סימן קלט ס"ק ד

AND SEES THE VERSE, ETC. – The source of this rule may be found in the Baraita: . . .⁴⁵ **And the Tosafot wrote: . . .⁴⁶ and one may investigate, why did Tosafot worry about the opinion of Rabbi Meir, since the halakha is not in accordance with him? And it seems to me that the Tosafot believed that since the reason for Rabbi Yehudah was that with regard to blessings there is no reason to err and believe they are written in the Torah, this, i.e. Rabbi Yehudah's reasoning, applies only in their, i.e. the Sage's, times where the generation were people of Torah, i.e. knowledgeable people, but later on, when the generations had been damaged and there are ignoramuses who do not know anything, it is appropriate to worry about this just as Rabbi Meir worried and perforce one must be concerned *ab initio*. And that which Tosafot wrote, that nonetheless *ex post facto* one need not worry, the explanation of their statement is that if one already instructed that people should keep the Torah scroll open during the blessing before reading from the Torah afterwards, there is no reason to worry and nullify one's instructions, because even if there are ignoramuses now, nonetheless they are not so common, as previously mentioned. Thus appears to me appropriate to explain their words. But the halakhic decisors did not worry about this, i.e. about Tosafot's concerns, but rather ruled that even *ab initio* one blesses when it, i.e. the Torah scroll, is open, although the Beth Yoseph quoted in the name of the Kol Bo⁴⁷ “. . . and there are those who say there is reason for one to turn one's head so that it does not appear as if the blessings are written in the Torah” end of quote. This Rabbi Moses Isserles adopted (lit. “brought”). And if so that Rabbi Isserles adopts Kol Bo's suggestion, it is because he believes according to the Tosafot that I mentioned. → But this ruling that it is best to turn one's face away from the Torah while reciting the blessing before reading the Torah is not sensible at all, for if it is so that turning one's head is sufficient, it is difficult to understand why Rabbi Meir requires one to roll the Torah scroll closed before the blessings,**

(ד) ורואה הפסוק כו'. -⁴⁵ . . . וכתבו התוספות⁴⁶ . . . ואיכ' למידק מ"ט חשו התו' לדברי ר"מ כיון דלית הלכתא כוותיה ונ"ל דהתוס' סוברים כיון שהטעם לר"י דברכות ליכא למטעי היינו בזמנם שהי' הדור בעלי תור' אבל אח"כ שנתקלקלו הדורות ויש ע"ה דלא ידעו כלום ושייך חיישינן לזה כמו שחש ר"מ וע"כ יש לחוש לכתחלה ומ"ש אבל בדיעבד פ"א אם כבר הורה אח"כ אין לחוש לבטל הוראתו דאף אם יש עכשיו ע"ה מ"מ לא שכיחי כ"כ כנ"ל לישב דבריהם אבל הפוסקים לא חשו לזה אלא אפי' לכתחלה מברך כשהי' פתוח רק שהב"י בשם כל בו⁴⁷ כתב . . . וי"א שיש לו להפוך פניו שלא יראה כאלו ברכות כתובו בתורה עכ"ל זה הביא רמ"א וא"כ היינו שס"ל כהתו' שזכרתי ← ולא מסתבר כלל דבר זה דא"כ ק' אמאי בעי ר"מ שיגלול קודם הברכ' שהיא טרח' כמ"ש ב"י והיה לו להניח' פתוח רק יהפוך פניו אלא דהפיכ' פנים כאן אינו נכון דמראה עצמו כאלו אינו

⁴⁵ Taz quotes the Babylonian Talmud, above p. 1.

⁴⁶ Taz quotes the Tosafot text found above p. 5.

⁴⁷ Full text of Kol Bo above p. 13.

which is a bother as Beth Yoseph wrote. One could have left it open and just turned one's head, but rather Rabbi Meir's ruling demonstrates that turning of the face here is not appropriate, since one makes oneself look as if one is not blessing on what one will read but rather regarding something else, because one makes oneself look as if one is turning away, and thus wrote my teacher/father-in-law⁴⁸ of blessed memory that "it is best that it be entirely opened at the time of blessing and one should not turn his face at all, because thus is the opinion of the halakhic decisors and renowned Geonim and thus I act," end of quote. ←

מברך על מה שיקרא רק על מידי אחריו' דהא מראה עצמו כאלו מסלק פניו ממנה וכ"כ מו"ה ז"ל⁴⁸ הגון שיהיה פתוח בשעת הברכה לגמרי ולא יהפוך פניו כלל דכך היא דעת הפוסקים והגאונים המפורסמים וכן אני נוהג עכ"ל: →

Discussion

- Bach and Taz clearly hold that the Torah should be held open during the opening blessing and further argue, contrary to Rabbi Isserles, that it is inappropriate to turn away from the Torah when reciting the blessings, as one should focus on the object of the blessing while reciting the blessing.⁴⁹ Note that this reason also supports leaving the Torah scroll open while saying the blessing.
- Bach and Taz disagree as to Tosafot's reasoning for preferring to close the Torah during the opening blessing. Shach says that Tosafot believed that Rabbi Yehudah prefers the Torah to be closed, although he permitted it to be left open,⁵⁰ while Taz suggests that Tosafot believed that their times were different than the Talmudic times making Rabbi Meir's position preferred. As argued in the discussion of Tosafot above,⁵¹ there are some reasons to prefer Taz's explanation.
- Taz argues that Rabbi Meir's opinion, that the Torah should be held closed during the opening blessing, demonstrates that turning one's head away is inappropriate, because had turning one's head away been appropriate, Rabbi Meir would have required turning the head away rather than closing the scroll. This argument is not 100% convincing, because it is possible that Rabbi Meir would not have considered turning one's head to be sufficient to obviate his concerns,⁵² if, for example, he felt that people would not be able to tell that a head was turned (or if I am correct that part of the issue for Rabbi Meir might have been that keeping the Torah scroll open during the blessing is disrespectful⁵³). So, perhaps turning one's head away might not have been a complete solution for Rabbi Meir, but doing so might at least partially obviate his concerns and might not be inappropriate in Rabbi Meir's judgment.

⁴⁸ Bach, see above p. 17.

⁴⁹ It strikes me that this would be true as a matter of propriety even if, technically, the blessing before the reading of the Torah is not considered a *birkat mitzvah* (blessing on performing a mitzvah) as per e.g. Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayim 139:8.

⁵⁰ Note that Magen Avraham 139:6, below p. 20, and Aruch Hashulchan 139:12, below p. 22, read Tosafot this way as well.

⁵¹ Page 5 and bullet points accompanying footnotes 8-13 in the discussion of Tosafot.

⁵² This point is raised by Arukh Hashulchan Orach Chayim 139:13, text below p. 22

⁵³ See second bullet point discussing Rashba, p. 11,

Taz Orach Chayim 139:5

ט"ז אורח חיים סימן קלט ס"ק ה

AND AFTER ONE READS, ONE ROLLS – Thus is written also in the name of the Tosafot.⁵⁴ And that which is written in Tosafot that this the ruling that one closes the Torah scroll before the closing blessing according to Rabbi Yehudah, the meaning is that this ruling is even according to Rabbi Yehudah, i.e. it is consistent even with the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, who agrees in this regard with Rabbi Meir. And as Beth Yoseph explained,⁵⁵ the reason is that at the beginning, i.e. during the blessing before the Torah is read, where one needs according to Rabbi Meir to roll the scroll closed and to bless and afterwards to open, this is a bother “and therefore one does not need to close the scroll according to Rabbi Yehudah, but in the end, i.e. after the Torah is read, since there is no greater bother in doing so, one rolls the scroll closed and afterwards blesses,” end of quote. . . . And thus Rabbi Shlomo Luria, of blessed memory wrote: “The last blessing, i.e. the blessing after reading from the Torah, is not similar to the first blessing, i.e. the blessing before reading from the Torah, because the first one comes for the purpose of reading, and therefore it is logical that it, i.e. the Torah scroll, be open so that one see what one will read, but one who already read, why should it be open? Rather, this is the practice of unsophisticated people, because we do not say that immediately after the reading of the Torah one rolls the scroll closed and blesses and again opens, rather it remains closed until another person comes and opens it for the purpose of reading it,” end of quote.

(ה) ולאחר שקורא גולל.
- כ"כ גם בשם התוס' 54 כן
ומ"ש לר"י פי' אפי' לר"י
דמודה בזה לר"מ וכב"י 55.
הטע' דבתחל' דצריך
לר"מ לגלול ולברך
ואח"כ לפתוח וזהו טירח'
הלכך לא צריך לר"י אבל
בסוף שאין טורח יותר
גולל ואח"כ מברך עכ"ל.
. . וכ"כ רש"ל וז"ל ל"ד
ברכה אחרונה לראשונ'
דראשונ' דבא לצורך
הקריא' דין הוא שתהא
פתוחה שיראה מה שיקרא
אבל זה שכבר קרא למה
תהא פתוחה אבל זה מנהג
בורות דלא אמרינן דמיד
אחר שגולל ומברך חוזר
ופותח אלא תהא סתומה
עד דאת' גברא ויפתח
לצורך קריאתו עכ"ל:

Discussion

- Taz's quotation of Rabbi Shlomo Luria demonstrates that Rabbi Shlomo Luria held that the Torah should be kept open and the person saying the blessing should look at the place where the reading begins while saying the blessing. Rabbi Shlomo Luria provides a slightly different reason for this, which is that it is appropriate for the person to see what the person will read while reciting the blessings.

Magen Avraham 139:6

מגן אברהם סימן קלט ס"ק ו

→ OPENS, ETC. – In Tosafot⁵⁶ it is written that one should close the Torah scroll before blessing because even Rabbi Yehudah agrees in this regard that this is better to roll it closed so that people not say blessings are written in the Torah. And so too is written in the writings, i.e. writings associated with Rabbi Isaac Luria, that thus there is good reason to act, but Bach wrote that he instructed to have the Torah scroll open as the great decisors wrote and also not to turn his head. ←

← ופותח וכו' - ובתוס' 56 כתוב
שיסתום קודם שיברך דאף ר"י
מודה בזה דעדיף טפי לגוללו שלא
יאמרו ברכות כתובות בתורה
וכ"כ בכתבים שכן יש לנהוג,
וב"ה כתב שהוא נהג שתהיה
הס"ת פתוחה כמ"ש גדולי
הפוסקים וגם לא יהפוך פניו. →

⁵⁴ Tosafot text above p. 5.

⁵⁵ Note Beth Yoseph, text above p. 14 was explaining why Rambam says to close the Torah scroll before the closing blessing, which basically explains why Rabbi Yehudah would agree that the scroll should be closed. Also, much of Taz's quotation of Beth Yoseph is more paraphrase than quotation.

⁵⁶ Text above p. 5.

Discussion

- Magen Avraham mentions one of the very few votes in favor of Tosafot's position of closing the Torah scroll during the opening blessing, that of Rabbi Isaac Luria.⁵⁷
- Magen Avraham is the jumping off point of a misleading note in the ArtScroll Talmud on this subject. In footnote 7 to page 32a, the ArtScroll Talmud comments regarding Rabbi Yehudah's position, "I.e. it is not necessary for him to resort to the laborious procedure of rolling the Torah shut and then opening it again. However, according to R' Yehudah, it is *better* to close the Torah scroll before reciting the blessing in order to avoid the possible misconception in the Gemara (*Tosafos*, ד"ה גוללו, as understood by *Magen Avraham* 139:6, c.f. *Maharsha*)" There is no hint I could find in the ArtScroll Talmud that Tosafot is in the minority as to their reading that the Torah should be closed during the blessing before the reading of the Torah, as to how to understand Rabbi Yehudah's ruling, as to the fact that Magen Avraham notes Bach's opinion rejecting Tosafot, or as to the fact that Tosafot's reading is rejected by Maharsha.⁵⁸ Also note that above I argue that Tosafot may be better understood as stating that in their days they preferred to rule in accordance with Rabbi Meir, at least *ab initio*.⁵⁹

Vilna Gaon Orach Chayim 139:4

ביאור הגר"א אורח חיים סימן קלט סעיף ד

AND AFTER, ETC. - Shulchan Arukh rules that the Torah should be closed before the blessing after the Torah is read **because** Rabbi Yehudah **only ruled** that the Torah scroll should be kept open **regarding** the blessing **before** reading the Torah because of **the trouble of the congregation**

AND WHEN ONE BLESSES, ETC. – Regarding Rabbi Isserles's ruling that one should turn one's face to the side while making the blessing before reading from the Torah, **this seems correct to me, for then there is no trouble of the congregation** caused by doing so.

ולאחר כו'. דל"פ
אלא בלפניה משום
טירחא דציבורא
ובשעה כו'. כנ"ל
דבזה ליכא טירחא
דציבורא:

Discussion

- The Vilna Gaon agrees with Rabbi Isserles that the Torah should be held open and that one should turn one's head away from the Torah during the blessing before reading from the Torah.

⁵⁷ Thank you to Rabbi Ya'akov Siegel who provided the source for Rabbi Luria's opinion on this, which is Rabbi Hayim Vital's שער הכוונות in which he provides the following opinion of Rabbi Luria in ג' דרוש:

And now we will explain the matter of the man himself, when he goes up to read the Torah, he must take care that he see the place of the reading, and look at the verse where the reader will begin, and afterwards cover the writing with the cloth used for covering the Torah scroll, and then bless the blessing of the Torah that is before her, i.e. the blessing recited before reading the Torah, and afterwards open and read. And afterwards again close the writing (perhaps meaning to close the Torah, perhaps to cover it) **and then say the blessing on the Torah for after her, i.e. the Torah's, reading. And this is true even though there are decisors who wrote that there is no need for this, as Beth Yoseph wrote, see there.**

ט) ועתה נבאר ענין האדם עצמו כשעולה לקרוא בתורה צריך לזהר שיראה מקום הקריאה ויסתכל במסוק אשר עתיד להתחיל. אח"כ תכסה הכתיבה ע"י מפה של הטיה או תבדק ברכת התורה שלפניה ואח"כ תפתח ותקרא. ואח"כ תחזור ותסתם הכתיבה או תבדק ברכת התורה של אחריה. ואעפ"י שיש פוסקים שכתבו שאין צורך לכל זה. כפי"ש ב"י וע"ש.

Text from page 315 שער הכוונות as available at <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/14181>

⁵⁸ Quoted above p. 16.

⁵⁹ Page 5 and bullet points accompanying footnotes 8-13 in the discussion of Tosafot.

- The Vilna Gaon says that the issue with closing the Torah during the opening blessing is the trouble of the congregation, i.e. that this will cause a delay in the reading. Beth Yoseph mentioned טירחה but was not explicit as to whether the טירחה was of the person having the *aliyah* or of the congregation.

Arukh HaShulchan Orach Chayim 139:12-13

SECTION 12: One who ascends to the Torah opens the Torah and sees the verse that one needs to read from and blesses while it, i.e. the Torah, is open . . . thus ruled Rambam, Tur and Shulchan Arukh subsection 4, and thus we practice. However, our teachers the authors of the Tosafot there⁶⁰ wrote that preferably one should roll the scroll closed, see there, and it appears that they believe that Rabbi Yehudah also agrees that it is preferable to roll it closed, but that he believes that it is not necessary [the Bach also wrote this, i.e. Bach also understood Tosafot this way] and there are those who practice thus, i.e. who close the Torah scroll during the opening blessing, and I do not know if it is correct to do thus after all the decisors do not appear to rule thus, and they, i.e. the decisors, believed that Rabbi Yehudah specifically held that one should bless when it is open, since one needs to read it upon completing the blessing, how can one close it. And therefore they all ruled that after the reading one should roll it closed and bless. Since one finished reading, one needs to close it until the next person comes up and opens it [And in Pri Etz Chayim the author wrote according to Tosafot, and see Magen Avraham, Taz, Bach, and Eliah Rabbah – and all of them agreed with the ruling of the Shulchan Arukh. And regarding what Taz wrote that the Tosafot distinguish between their time, i.e. the time of the sages, and our time, see there, I do not know who (perhaps better: what) convinced of this position, rather their, i.e. Tosafot's, reason is as I have written, and so too Bach wrote.⁶¹]

SECTION 13: And our Teacher Rabbi Moses Isserles wrote that at the time that one blesses the first blessing, i.e. the blessing before reading the Torah, one should turn his face to the side Aruch HaShulchan discusses whether the face should be turned to the right or to the left . . . but there are those of the great scholars who complained about this rule and wrote⁶² that if so why does Rabbi Meir say to roll the Torah scroll closed so that people not say the blessings are written in the Torah? He, i.e. Rabbi Meir could have said for one to turn one's face. In my humble opinion it appears

ערוך השולחן אורח חיים סימן קלט

סעיף יב העולה לתורה פותח התורה ורואה הפסוק שצריך לקרות ומברך כשהיא פתוחה . . . וכך פסקו הרמב"ם . . . והטור והש"ע סעיף ד' וכן נוהגים אבל רבותינו בעלי התוס' שם⁶⁰ [ד"ה גוללן] כתבו דלכתחלה יגלול ע"ש ונראה דס"ל דגם ר"י מודה דזה עדיף טפי לגוללה אלא דס"ל דא"צ לכך [וכ"כ הב"ח] ויש מי שנוהג כן ולא ידעתי אם נכון לעשות כן אחרי שמכל הפוסקים לא נראה כן ואינהו ס"ל דלר"י דווקא יברך כשהיא פתוחה דכיון שצריך לקרותה איך יסתמנה ולכן פסקו כולם דאחר הקריאה יגללה ויברך מפני שכשגמר הקריאה צריך לסתום אותה עד שיעלה אחר ויפתחנה [ובפרע"ה ד' ע"ב: כתב ג"כ כהתוס' ועמג"א סק"ו וט"ז סק"ד וב"ח וא"ר סק"ז וכולם הסכימו כפסק הטוש"ע ומ"ש הט"ז שהתוס' מחלקים בין זמנם לזמנינו ע"ש לא ידעתי מי הכריחו לזה וטעמם הוא כמו שכתבתי וכ"כ הב"ח]:⁶¹

סעיף יג וכתב רבינו הרמ"א דבשעה שמברך ברכה ראשונה יהפוך פניו אל הצד . . . ונ"ל דיהפוך פניו לצד שמאלו עכ"ל . . . אבל יש מהגדולים שהתרעמו על עיקר דין זה וכתבו⁶² דא"כ למה אומר ר"מ לסותמה כדי שלא יאמרו ברכות כתובות

⁶⁰ I.e. commenting on the Talmud text above p 1. Tosafot's text is found at p. 5.

⁶¹ However, see page 5 and bullet points accompanying footnotes 8-13 in the discussion of Tosafot, where I argue that Taz's read makes more sense.

⁶² Aruch Hashulchan is responding to Taz's argument in 139:4, above p. 18.

that this is no disproof to Rabbi Isserles's position, **and there is basis to say that Rabbi Meir believes that this behavior** for purposes of **recognition** that the blessings are not written in the Torah **is not sufficient, whereas Rabbi Yehudah believes that this**, i.e. the turning of the face, **is sufficient, and the reason why this is not mentioned**, i.e. the why Rabbi Yehudah doesn't state that one should turn one's face **is because one could make any gesture** that facilitates **recognition** that the blessings are not written in the Torah. **And there are those of the great Rabbis who would look outside the Torah scroll and not look at the writing.**

בתורה היה לו לומר להפך פנים [ט"ז שם וב"ה וא"ר] ולענ"ד נראה שאין זה סתירה וי"ל דר"מ ס"ל דאינו די בהיכר זה ור"י ס"ל דדי בזה ומה שלא הזכיר זה לפי שיכול לעשות איזה היכר אחר ויש מהגדולים שהיה מביט חוץ לס"ת ולא יביט בהכתב [א"ר בשם כנה"ג]

Discussion

- The Arukh Hashulchan clearly believes that the Torah should be held open during the blessing before the Torah is read and sees wide consensus on this point.
- Arukh Hashulchan seems to agree with Rabbi Isserles that one should turn one's head away from the Torah when reciting the blessing. He responds to Taz's argument⁶³ explaining that Rabbi Meir might require closing the Torah scroll because he feels that turning away would not be sufficient to avoid any misconceptions regarding the blessings being written in the Torah.
 - Arukh Hashulchan also speculates that Rabbi Yehudah might also require some act to demonstrate that the blessings are not written in the Torah. This point seems highly speculative – in that case עיקר חסר מן הספר – *the main point has been left out of the book*, since as the Talmud indicates that Rabbi Yehudah is not at all concerned with any misconception as to the blessing being written in the Torah.⁶⁴

Mishnah Berurah 139:17

משנה ברורה סימן קלט ס"ק יז-יח

(17) AND THEN ONE SHOULD BLESS – He, i.e. Rabbi Karo, **intends to say that one does not need to roll the Torah scroll closed during his blessing, and there is no need to worry lest people say the blessings are written in the Torah and that one is blessing from**, i.e. by reading the text of the blessing in the scroll, **because everyone knows that the blessings are not written in the Torah scroll. And it is particularly regarding the first blessing that they did not worry about this because of the trouble of the congregation who will have to wait until the reader reopens the scroll. But with the final blessing**, i.e. the blessing after the Torah is read, **where there is not this reason** to leave the scroll open, **because even without this**, i.e. without requiring that the person close the Torah during the closing blessing, one **needs to roll the Torah scroll closed between each person** having an *aliyah*, **certainly it is better to roll before the closing blessing, and this**

(יז) ואח"כ יברך - ר"ל שאין צריך לגלול הס"ת בשעת ברכתו וליכא למיחש שמא יאמרו ברכות כתובות בתורה והוא מברך מן הספר דהכל יודעין שאין ברכות כתובות בס"ת. ודוקא בברכה ראשונה לא חששו לזה משום טרחא דצבורא שיצטרכו להמתין עד שיחזיר ויפתח אבל בברכה אחרונה דליכא טעם זה וגם דבלא"ה צריך לגלול הס"ת בין גברא לגברא בודאי עדיף יותר שיגלול קודם הברכה וזהו

⁶³ Taz 139:4, above p. 18.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Lechem Yehudah quoted in R. Kapach's commentary on Rambam, below p. 26. This point is also reflected in the question and answer in the responsum of Rashba, above p. 9 and the minority opinion noted at the end Meiri, above p. 12.

is why **the author** of the Shulchan Arukh, Rabbi Karo, **concludes that after one reads one rolls the scroll closed and blesses.**

(18) ONE SHOULD TURN HIS FACE, ETC. - He, i.e. Rabbi Isserles, believes that since in doing this there is no trouble of the congregation, it is good to worry even with the first blessing about the concern that people should not say the blessings are written in the Torah, as we have written similarly in subsection 17.

שמסיים המחבר דלאחר שקורא גולל ומברך:
(יח) יהפוך פניו וכו' - סבירא ליה דכיון דבזה ליכא טרחא דצבורא טוב לחוש גם בברכה ראשונה לחשש שלא יאמרו ברכות כתובות בתורה וכמו שכתבנו כעין זה בסקי"ז:

Beur Halakhah 139 s.v. "And sees the verse"

ביאור הלכה סימן קלט ד"ה * ורואה הפסוק

AND SEES THE VERSE THAT ONE NEEDS TO BEGIN WITH, ETC. – See Mishna Berurah s.v. "and then one should bless."⁶⁵ And know that there are halakhic decisors who believe that if one wants to roll the scroll closed and then to bless that is more preferable, except that the halakha is in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah that one is not obligated to do thusly, and accordingly some places practice that they see the verse where they will start and roll the scroll closed and bless, and each river continues, i.e. "to each his own".

* ורואה הפסוק שצריך להתחיל בו וכו' - עיין במ"ב ד"ה ואח"כ יברך⁶⁵ ודע שיש פוסקים שסוברים דאם רוצה לגלול ואח"כ לברך עדיף טפי אלא דהלכה כר' יהודה שאינו מחוייב לעשות כן ועפ"ז נוהגין איזה מקומות שרואין וגוללין ואח"כ מברכין ונהרא נהרא ופשטיה [אחרונים]

Discussion

- Rabbi Kagan (author of Mishnah Berurah and Beur Halakha) recognizes a split in authority as to whether to hold the Torah scroll open during the opening blessing and does not state a personal preference.

R. Yoseph Kapach on Rambam

פירוש הרב יוסף קאפח על משנה תורה תפילה ונשיאת כפים יב:ט⁶⁶

Text scanned from printing of משנת הרמב"ם, 5th edition printed תשע"ה

9) The source for this is Babylonian Talmud 32a⁶⁷

ט) מגלה לב א: . . . 67

⁶⁵ I.e. Mishnah Berurah 139:17, above p.23.

⁶⁶ Rabbi Kapach is commenting on Rambam's Laws of Prayer 19:12, text above p. 8.

⁶⁷ Rabbi Kapach quotes the text of BT 32a, above p. 1.

Rabbi Saadya Gaon wrote in his prayer book, page 392 in the Order of the Public Reading of the Torah⁶⁸: “And one should not begin *Barechu*, i.e. the beginning of the blessing, before the reading of the Torah, until one looks at the verse from which one will begin reading, and one should only bless the first blessing when the open scroll is before him, and one should not bless the final blessing, i.e. the blessing after the *aliyah*, until one covers the Torah scroll,” end of quote. And this is our practice: one opens and sees and looks upon the verse that one needs to start reading from the entire time of the blessing, and when the public finishes saying “Amen,” one begins to read. And before the final blessing, we cover the Torah scroll but do not roll it

כתב רס"ג בסדור עמ' שנט בסדר קריאת התורה בצבור: ולא יתחיל ברכו עד שיביט בפסוק אשר בו יתחיל, ולא יברך הברכה הראשונה אלא כשהספר פתוח לפניו, ולא יברך הברכה האחרונה עד שיכסה הספר, ע"כ. וכך הוא מנהגנו פותח ורואה ומביט כל שעת הברכה על הפסוק שהוא צריך להתחיל וכשגומר הצבור אמן מתחיל לקרוא. ולפני ברכה אחרונה מכסין את הספר ואין גוללין. ואין לכסות את התורה בשעת ברכה ראשונה דבהדיא נפסקה הלכה כר' יהודה. וכמה קשה הדבר בעיני מי שרגיל כשטת הש"ס והגאונים ורבנו כאשר רואה אותם המחזירים פניהם מן התורה או עוצם עיניו מראות בתורה. ובכל סדורי תימן העתיקים כשטת חז"ל פותח ורואה ומביט ומברך וקורא.

closed.⁶⁹ And it is not proper (lit. “and there is not”) to cover the Torah during the time of the first blessing since the halakha is explicitly decided in the Talmud according to Rabbi Yehudah. And how difficult is it in the eyes of one who is practiced in the opinions of the Talmud, Geonim, and our teacher (Rambam) when one sees those who turn their face from the Torah or closes their eyes from seeing the Torah. And in all the old prayer books of Yemen is written in accordance with the opinion of our sages of blessed memory, “opens, sees, looks, blesses and reads.”

The Kesef Mishnah wrote after he quoted (lit. “brought”) the language of the Gemara: . . .⁷⁰ And it is possible that Rabbi Karo did not see the words of Rashba below, which are: . . .⁷¹

כתב הכס"מ לאחר שהביא לשון הגמ': . . .
... ואפשר שלא ראה דברי הרשב"א
דלקמן, ואלה דבריו.

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⁶⁸ We saw this text, with minor variations, above, p. 4.

⁶⁹ This is probably a function of a Sefardi Torah scroll, as Sefardim often drape a cloth over the exposed portion of the Torah rather than closing the Torah due to the cumbersome nature of closing the Torah and therefore it is best to cover the Torah before the closing blessing to avoid the misconception that the blessings are written in the scroll.

⁷⁰ Rabbi Kapach quotes the text of Kesef Mishnah found above p. 15. There, Rav Karo explains that Rambam rules that the Torah scroll is closed during the closing blessing because Rabbi Yehudah holds that the Torah should be kept open during the opening blessing to avoid טירחה (trouble) while the same does not hold for the closing blessing, where there is no increased bother in closing the Torah.

⁷¹ See text of Rashba above p. 9, where he argues that closing the scroll before the closing blessings is out of a matter of respect for the scroll, so that it should not be exposed while not being read.

→The Lechem Yehudah wrote “in Babylonian Talmud Megillah 32 we find the disagreement between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah, that Rabbi Meir believed that one opens, sees, rolls the scroll closed and blesses, so that not (sic) blessings written in the Torah, and Rabbi Yehudah believed that one does not roll the scroll closed because regarding blessings there is not a reason for people to err and believe the blessings are written in the Torah, and Rashi explained ‘that everyone knows that the blessings aren’t written in the Torah,’ end of quote. This explicitly indicates that Rabbi Yehudah did not worry at all about the error of the masses, and if so, we need a reason for that which our teacher (Rambam) wrote that at the end, i.e. before the blessing after reading from the Torah, one rolls and blesses, because we cannot say, as is indicated in the Kesef Mishnah, that it is because of the concern of the error of those who see the person looking at the

כתב הלח"י במגלה דף לב מחלוקת ר"מ ור"י.
דר"מ סבר פותח ורואה וגולל ומברך כדי שלא ברכות כתובות בתורה, ור"י סבר דאינו גולל דבברכות ליכא למטעי, ופרש"י דהכל יודעין שאין ברכות כתובין בתורה, ע"כ. משמע בהדיא דר"י לא חייש כלל לטעות ההמון, וא"כ צריך טעם למ"ש רבנו דלסוף גולל ומברך דאינו לומר כדמשמע מהכ"מ שהוא משום חשש טעות של הרואין וכו' ע"ש, דלענ"ד לא חששו כלל לטעות, אלא כיון דהטעם שצריך לכסותו בין גברא לגברא הוא משום ולול ס"ת שישאר פתוח ה"נ צריך לגללו קודם הברכה מהך טעמא, ולא שייך לפלוגתא דר"מ ור"י כלל, ולא תקשי כיון דאפילו בשעת הברכה יש גנאי בהשארות הס"ת פתוח א"כ בתחלה נמי, דליתא, דהתם כיון דהוא רוצה לקרוא אין בזה גנאי, דהא דעתו לקרוא והוה ליה חלק מצרכי הקריאה, מש"כ לבסוף דסיים ואין בדעתו לקרוא, עכ"ל. ויפה כיון לדעת הרשב"א. ...

Torah scroll and think the person is reading the blessings from the scroll, etc., see there, because in my humble opinion we do not worry at all about this error. Rather, since the reason that we need to cover it, i.e. the Torah scroll, between each person having an *aliyah* is because of avoiding disrespect of the Torah scroll that would result if it remained open, so too one needs to roll the scroll closed before the blessing for this reason, and the disagreement of Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah is not relevant at all. And do not wonder that since even in the time of the closing blessing there is insult toward the Torah scroll in the Torah scroll being left open, if so at the beginning, i.e. during the opening blessing, also it should be an insult to the Torah for it to be held open, for there is not insult to the Torah by leaving it opened during the opening blessing, for there, i.e. during the opening blessing, because he intends to read the Torah, there is no insult in leaving it open, because his intent is to read from it and keeping the Torah opened is part of the needs of the reading, something that is not so at the end of the *aliyah* where one finished and does not intend to read from the Torah such that there is no purpose in leaving the scroll open,” end of quote. And Lechem Yehudah pointed well to the opinion of the Rashba, i.e. he did well to arrive at Rashab’s conclusion on his own. . . . ←

Discussion

- Rabbi Kapach strongly advocates for leaving the Torah scroll open and looking at the Torah while saying the opening blessing. He elicits sources that argue that there is absolutely no concern for people mistakenly believing that the blessings are written in the Torah (seeing that concern as rejected by the Rabbi Yehudah and the conclusion of the Talmud) and argues instead that the reason to close the Torah scroll before the final blessing is because it is generally disrespectful to leave the words of the Torah exposed while not reading from it.⁷²

⁷² Per Rashba discussed further above, p. 9 and Lechem Yehudah quoted by Rabbi Kapach.

- Through the comments of Rabbi Saadya Gaon and Lechem Yehudah, Rabbi Kapach notes that keeping the Torah open during the blessing prior to reading from the Torah is part of preparedness for reading from the Torah.
- The Lechem Yehudah notes that the fact that leaving the Torah scroll open while not being read is insulting to the Torah is no reason to close the Torah scroll during the blessing before reading from the Torah, as keeping the Torah scroll open at this point is for the purposes of reading from it immediately upon completing the blessing and hence represents no affront to the Torah.⁷³

Conclusions

- It is clear that the Torah scroll should be kept open while one recites the blessing prior to the reading of the Torah.
 - This is the plain meaning of Babylonian Talmud Megillah 32a (text above p. 1).
 - Saadya Gaon (p. 4) explicitly states that the Torah should be held open (as do, conservatively speaking, Maharsha (p. 16), Bach (p. 17), Taz 139:4 (p. 18), Rabbi Shlomo Luria quoted in Taz 139:5 (p. 19), R. Kapach (p. 24), and Lechem Yehudah quoted in R. Kapach's commentary on Rambam (p. 26).
 - Tosafot's statement (p. 5) that it is preferable to close the Torah scroll is very difficult to understand and has been fairly roundly rejected. To the extent the Babylonian Talmud's ruling in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah can be read as indicating that keeping the Torah scroll open during the opening blessing is merely acceptable, and not preferable, a number of other rulings on the issue could possibly (but with difficulty) be read to say the same thing. However, as argued above,⁷⁴ most probably not even Tosafot reads Rabbi Yehudah this way, but rather Tosafot is arguing for some deference to Rabbi Meir's position in their day, in which case certainly very few authorities follow them. Among those who speak explicitly to the issue, only Kol Bo (p. 13) and the (R. Isaac) Lurianic "writings" quoted in Magen Avraham (p. 20) adopt Tosafot's position, and even then with Kol Bo mentioning Rambam's contrary opinion.
 - The fact that the Jerusalem Talmud (p. 3) and Tractate Soferim (p. 4) support the opinion saying to open the Torah scroll and then bless with biblical texts discussing Ezra's behavior strongly indicates that this it is preferable, and not merely acceptable, to leave the Torah scroll open during the blessing.
 - There is good reason to keep Torah scroll open during the opening blessing, mostly around facilitating immediate reading of the Torah after the blessing, as this both avoids טירחה (trouble) (e.g. Beth Yoseph p. 14/Kesef Mishnah p. 15) and is a form of preparedness for performing the *mitzvah* for which one is blessing (e.g. Lechem Yehudah quoted in R. Kapach's commentary on Rambam p. 26, Rabbi Shlomo Luria quoted in Taz 139:5, p. 19.).
 - Note that this reasoning applies in large part even today, where a designated person will read the Torah rather than the person reciting the blessing.

⁷³ Nonetheless, as argued above p. 11, I do believe there is some room to speculate that Rabbi Meir may well have seen some disrespect in leaving the Torah scroll open during the opening blessing, and this may be, at least in part, an explanation for Rabbi Meir's opinion.

⁷⁴ Page 5 and bullet points accompanying footnotes 8-13 in the discussion of Tosafot.

- It seems to me preferable for one to continue to look at the Torah while reciting the opening blessing (presuming one knows the words to the blessing), per Bach (p. 17), Taz (p. 18), R. Rabbi Shlomo Luria quoted in Taz 139:5 (p. 19), R. Kapach (p. 24) and probably R. Saadya Gaon (p. 4), and contrary to Kol Bo (p. 13), R. Isserles (p. 16), Vilna Gaon (p. 20) and Akukh Hashulchan 139:13 (p. 22). As the list of opinions implies, this is a closer call. However, Rabbi Yehudah, whose opinion is adopted in the Talmud (p. 1) is explained as based on the position of *ברכות ליכא למיטעי*, i.e. that there is no concern whatsoever for causing an erroneous belief that the blessings are written in the Torah (see e.g. Lechem Yehudah quoted in R. Kapach's commentary on Rambam (p. 26)), this is also implied by the question and answer in Rashba (p. 9) and the minority opinion noted at the end Meiri (p. 12)). Therefore, any behavior predicated on this concern should probably be rejected if there is any other valid reason to believe the behavior is improper. As argued by some of the scholars referenced in this bullet point who advocate for looking at the Torah scroll during the opening blessing, it seems disrespectful to deliberately turn away from the Torah scroll (though perhaps less so if one does so for a reasonable halakhic reason) and additionally it is particularly proper to be looking at what will be read while saying the blessing on the Torah (though admittedly this propriety may be significantly reduced nowadays, where there is a designated person reading the Torah rather than the person having the *aliyah*). For those who wish to justify not looking at the Torah during the opening blessing, it may be reasonable to encourage all people with an *aliyah* to read the opening blessing from a text, which could be justified as avoiding any embarrassment to those who are not capable of reciting the blessing by heart, *a la* Mishnah Bikkurim 3:7. Additionally, looking away from the Torah scroll in order to read blessings for the *aliyah* would not seem in any way insulting to the Torah.
- It is fairly universally agreed that the Torah scroll should be closed during the blessing after the Torah is read.⁷⁵ One point worth considering is that per Rashba (p. 9) and Lechem Yehudah quoted in R. Kapach's commentary on Rambam (p. 26), the propriety of doing so is out of respect for the Torah, so that the writing in the Torah is not exposed while not being read. There seems to be universal agreement that since the Torah would be closed anyway between *aliyot*, one might as well close the Torah during the blessing after the reading from the Torah. It seems to me that putting two and two together, any respect that is accorded to the Torah scroll between *aliyot* should be put into action immediately after the Torah has been read. Therefore, for example, *if* a cover is placed over the Torah between *aliyot*, that cover should be placed over the Torah immediately after the Torah is read, as opposed to the common practice of waiting to cover the Torah until after the closing blessing has been recited.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The only contrary opinions we have seen are Ran, above p. 13 and a minority opinion mentioned in Meiri, above p.12.

⁷⁶ Rabbi Ephraim Halivni challenged me on my conclusion here, and his challenge has some merit. He notes, and I would agree, that if there is no delay between aliyot (for instance no *mi sheberakh* for the person having the aliyah), there is no need to cover the Torah during the post-aliyah blessings and doing so will only delay the proceedings. Therefore, he argues that it would be inconsistent to cover the Torah during the post-aliyah blessings sometimes (i.e. when there will be further delay before the next aliyah) and not at other times (i.e. when there will be no further delay). I take his point, but it seems to me that this distinction would be clear enough and should not be too confusing. Rabbi Halivni also argues that covering the Torah may cause a delay in the reciting of the post-aliyah blessings. It seems to me that if the *gabay* covers the Torah while the person having the aliyah says the blessings, there would not have to

- Much of the above analysis turns on the question of how we can best accord honor to the Torah. In this regard, it is worth closing with the thought that all our actions in life should be guided by the principal of acting in such a way as to accord honor to the Torah. As we delve into ritual minutia as to how to accord such respect, our study should serve as a reminder that we should always be fastidious in considering how our actions may reflect on Torah. May God sustain us and guide us in a life that brings honor to the Torah.

be any delay (though one could argue that covering the Torah while the person says the blessings may be distracting to the person having the aliyah).