



## FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

RAV DANIEL MANN



# Taking Out a Sefer Torah for a Child to See

**Question:** My two-year old loves *sifrei Torah* and when he is with me in the *Beit Midrash*, he is sometimes adamant that I take one out and show him the writing. May I do that?

**Answer:** One must treat a *sefer Torah* with great respect (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 282:1), but the *halachot* mentioned there do not talk about grounds for taking it out of the *aron*.

The main *halacha* about moving a *sefer Torah* is in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 135:14, based on the Yerushalmi (Yoma 7:1). It is forbidden to bring a *sefer Torah* to a new location even to be used for its purpose – *kri'at haTorah*. It is a *bizayon* (disgrace) to bring the *sefer Torah* to people; people should come to it (ibid.)!

Possible exceptions to the rule are discussed: 1. Bringing the *sefer Torah* to a very prominent person, like the *kohen gadol* (ibid.); the Rama (OC 135:14) applies to normal important people. 2. If people, especially a *minyán*, are unable to

come to the place of the *sefer Torah* (the Shulchan Aruch, OC *ibid.* seems to forbid, but the Be'ur Halacha (op. cit.) presents the argument that this is not correct). 3. Things are done to make the *sefer Torah*'s stay more *mechubad* (e.g., have an *aron kodesh* ready for it; keep it there for a while; use it for *laining* several times) (see Rama *ibid.*, commentators ad loc.). 4. The *sefer Torah* is privately owned (see Har Tzvi OC I:71); 5. The *sefer Torah* is designed to serve as a roving *sefer Torah* (see opinions in Living the Halachic Process III, F-1, regarding the propriety of a *sefer Torah* brought regularly for a set *minyán* on the train).

We presented the above list, which do not apply to your question, in order to share our general dilemma. Is the concept of *bizayon* the basis for Chazal forbidding specifically moving a *sefer Torah* from place to place even for good purposes, but taking from the *aron* to the *bima* is permitted even for a neutral purpose? If so, why not show a *sefer Torah* to a sweet kid who will someday learn Torah?! Or is there generally a high bar of respect for the *sefer Torah*, which precludes even positive actions, if they are not in line with what the Torah is supposed to be used for? If so, with all due respect and affection for two-year olds, their love for a *sefer Torah* is like that for a shiny new toy (confirmed

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after consultation with early childhood experts) and in light of the high bar, it is a *bizayon* to take it out.

I have seen few and unimpressive sources on this matter. One forbade taking a *sefer Torah* out to practice *laining* (see Hamaor, vol. 83); Piskei Teshuvot 135:5 understood that some prohibit doing an unnecessary *laining*). While all permit taking out *sifrei Torah* for dancing on Simchat Torah (at least as long as they stay inside – see discussion on taking outside or moving from shul to shul in Yabia Omer VII:56 and elsewhere) but some say that the *minhag* to *lain* at night is to strengthen the justification for taking them out. It is hard to determine which approach is accepted, but the simple reading of the Shulchan Aruch (YD 282:1) is that there is a broad high bar in addition to specific applications that classical sources discussed.

One can argue that there is value in showing off the *sefer Torah* to people. The *gemara* (Yoma 70a) relates how individuals would bring their *sifrei Torah* on Yom Kippur to the *Beit Hamikdash* to show its beauty. One of the explanations why this was permitted is that doing so honored the *sefer Torah*. Some apply this idea broadly (Gur Aryeh Yehuda, YD 24), while others limit it to special cases like the *Beit Hamikdash* (see Beit Avi IV:126, opposing a glass-case display of a *sefer Torah* in a Jewish museum). While we would be supportive of taking out a *sefer Torah* to show a group of unaffiliated Jews to try to impress/inspire them, it is difficult to justify for a small child who has and will *iy"H* see it throughout his life. There are many other ways to build excitement about Torah, and a toddler can be told and rewarded for accepting (on his level) that the *sefer Torah* is so *kadosh* that we take it out only for *kri'at haTorah*. ■

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