

## PROCEDURE WHEN REMOVING TORAH FROM ARK

### Overview

In our shul (Sinai Synagogue) every Shabbos, right after the chazzan takes out of the Torah from the ark, he turns to the congregation and recites 3 passages printed in bold in the siddur: The first is Shma. The second is Echad Elokainu. And then he turns to the ark and bows and says the 3<sup>rd</sup> passage -- Gadlu. And our entire congregation bows along with the chazzan.

When I first saw this when I started davening at Sinai Synagogue, I found it interesting. Because in all other shuls, ONLY the chazan bows, NOT the congregation. To understand who is right (our congregation that bows with the chazan or the other congregations that don't bow with the chazan), I read what the rabbinical authorities had to say on the matter. It turns out we are ALL wrong.

Of all the authorities that address the matter, no one mentions **bowing** at all. They say only that the chazan should **raise** the Torah upon reciting each of the 3 sentences. This makes more sense than bowing, especially for the last sentence ("Gadlu...") which states "and let us **elevate** His name together".

I suspect the custom of bowing got started in the following way: Perhaps a few centuries ago, a rabbi took out a Torah that was too heavy for him to raise. When he got to the 3<sup>rd</sup> sentence of Gadlu, he unintentionally hunched down under the strain of trying to lift the Torah. 2 congregants whispered the following conversation with each other:

1<sup>st</sup> friend: "Hey, what is the rabbi doing?"

2<sup>nd</sup> friend: "I don't know. It looks like he is **bowing down**. I guess that's what we're supposed to do when we take out the Torah, because the rabbi should know."

1<sup>st</sup> friend: "Yeah, but why is the rabbi bowing to **us**. Shouldn't he turn around and bow to **Gd**?"

And from then on, chazans starting bowing to the ark when saying Gadlu. And a couple centuries later, when the custom arrived at Sinai Synagogue, the congregants saw the chazan bowing to the ark and said to themselves "I guess that's what we're supposed to do" and they started bowing to the ark too. And that is my suspicion of how the custom probably got started.

### Background Details

No authority suggests that the chazan, after taking out the Torah, bow or turn around.

The only source of the chazan doing anything with the Torah between taking it out and laying it on the bimah is **Meseches Sofrim** perek 14 (written in 700s in Israel), which says that the chazan recites 3 passages -- Shma, Echad Elokainu, Gadlu -- and raises the Torah when saying each passage.

**Tur** sif 134 and **Magen Avraham** sif 134 (1635 -1682 in Poland) and **Ba'er Haitaiv** sif 134 (1730–1770 in Germany) all cite **Meseches Sofrim's** recommendation.

**Rama** sif 134 (1530–1572 in Poland, also wrote Darkai Moshe on Tur) mentions the chazan reciting **only** the **Gadlu** passage, and doing nothing else.

**Chulchan Aruch** siman 134 (by Yosef Karo 1488–1575 lived in Spain, then Turkey, then Israel) does not mention the chazan saying or doing anything between taking out the Torah and laying it on the bima.