

**Addendum Regarding Special Shabbatot  
to “Hazak, Hazak in the Triennial Cycle”  
Elliot N. Dorff**

*This teshuvah was passed on October 16, 2018, with a vote of sixteen in favor, two against, and two abstained. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Pamela Barmash, David Booth, Elliot Dorff, Reuven Hammer, David Hoffman, Jeremy Kalmanofsky, Jane Kanarek, Steven Kane, Gail Labovitz, Jonathan Lubliner, Daniel Nevins, Micah Peltz, Robert Scheinberg, Deborah Silver, and Ellen Wolintz-Fields. Voting against: Rabbis Baruch Frydman-Kohl and Amy Levin. Abstained: Rabbis Susan Grossman and Joshua Heller.*

In my teshuvah, “Hazak, Hazak in the Triennial Cycle,” approved by the CJLS on May 12, 2015, I maintained that those congregations that are using the triennial cycle for Torah reading may say “hazak, hazak, v’nithazek” each year of the cycle after the congregation’s reading of a given book of the Torah. In my teshuvah, I describe how that should be done.

What, however, should be done when the concluding section of a given book of the Torah occurs on a Shabbat when a second Torah is taken out of the ark for an additional reading (Shekalim, Parah, Ha-Hodesh, etc.)? There are three possibilities for addressing this situation, any of which I would endorse, although I would recommend one over the other two. Because reciting “hazak...” originated as a matter of custom and remains so, with no blessing or other halakhically restricted liturgical elements involved, I think that we should allow for varying customs in this matter. This would follow the lead of the *Shulhan Arukh* with varying customs for Ashkenazi communities recorded in his *Mappah* by Rabbi Moshe Isserles, and even within those two texts the authors sometimes allow for varying customs among the various communities of their region. So here are three possibilities, labeled A, B, and C below, all of which I find acceptable, even though I think that B is best:

- A. Recite “hazak...” after the reading for the seventh *aliyah* when the community has concluded whatever it will be reading from the Torah this year in that book of the Torah. Then proceed as usual: *hatzi kaddish*, lift and wrap the first Torah scroll, and proceed with calling up the person who will be saying the blessings over the special Maftir reading for the day in the second Torah scroll, read it in that scroll, etc.

The problem with this approach is that during the first or second years of the triennial cycle, the congregation will be saying “hazak...” after a reading that is not at the end of the book of the Torah. Because saying “hazak...” is a matter of custom and not law, there is no halakhic objection to doing this, but it may seem aesthetically inappropriate and even a bit jarring to those used to saying it only after actually completing the book. This, I take it, was the thinking behind Rabbi Richard Eisenberg’s ruling (in his 1988 responsum, “A Complete Triennial Reading of the Torah,” which established the readings for the triennial cycle) and cited by Rabbi Nechama Goldberg in her 2000 responsum, “Hazak, Hazak, v’Nithazek,” that “hazak...” should be said only after

completing the books of the Torah in the third cycle. Another option that takes this aesthetic point into account would be to read the entire *parashah* that ends the book during the first or second years of the cycle so that the community can say “*hazak...*” after the last verses of the book are read even in those years. That, of course, would involve a much longer Torah reading, and one of the points of adopting the triennial cycle in the first place was to shorten the Torah reading. So for those not bothered by the prospect of saying “*hazak...*” after the seventh reading this year, even if the seventh reading does not include the last verses of the book, this method is acceptable because, as indicated earlier, saying “*hazak...*” is not halakhically restricted.

- B. My 2015 responsum, cited above, is based on two precedents: first, the Mishnah's rule that we may skip verses and even from book to book in readings from the Prophets, but we may not skip in reading the Torah (*medalgin banevi'im, v'ain medalgin baTorah* -- M. *Megillah* 4:4, which appears in Chapter Three in the Bavli, B. *Megillah* 23b-24a), and, second, our practice on minor fast days of skipping from Exodus 32 for the first reading to Exodus 34 for the second and third readings despite the Mishnah's rule, presumably because rolling from one to the other is very easy and quick. Rashi suggests that the Mishnah's rule is intended to avoid the congregation getting mixed up – but then the same thing might apply to skipping from one selection in a prophetic reading to another or, even more, from one prophet to another, as we do on Shabbat Shuvah. I would suggest instead a theological rationale for the Mishnah's rule – namely, that we do not have the authority to edit what God has told us directly in the Torah (however one understands the process of revelation), but we may edit what the prophets with lesser authority than Moses have told us.

Whatever the rationale for the Mishnah's rule, it is to abide by the Mishnah's rule as much as possible that I suggested that we say *hatzi kaddish* after the seventh reading of the triennial cycle, thus marking what we have read as the set reading of the day, and then proceed with officially another reading for *aharon* at the end of the book of the Torah without the need to take out another Torah to do so because the end of the book will be only a few columns away from the last reading for the second and even the first cycle. In accordance with the Mishnah Berurah on S.A. Orah Hayyim 144:1, on Shabbat (in contrast to weekdays and Yom Tov) adding an *aliyah* is permissible (in this case, as *aharon*), and that certainly has become accepted practice. (Some synagogues for various reasons add even more than one *aliyah*, but that frankly is a burden on the community, a *tirha d'tzibbura*. Adding just one *aliyah* to read the verses at the end of a book of the Torah for the sake of saying “*hazak...*,” however, is not an undue burden on the community, especially because the community is adding the *aliyah* for its own sake – namely, because it wants to say “*hazak...*” at the end of the book.)

Along these lines, when there is yet another (*maftir*) for the special reading of the day, I would suggest the following for those communities who want to say “*hazak...*” only after the last verses of a book of the Torah:

1. Recite *hatzi kaddish* at the end of *shevi'i* to mark the end of the week's regular reading.

2. Roll the Torah scroll to the end of the book, call an *aharon* for reading the last few verses of the book, followed by reciting “*hazak, hazak, v'nithazek.*”
3. Then lift and wrap the first Torah scroll, and proceed as usual with the special reading from the second Torah scroll.

Some rabbis may choose to read more than the minimum three verses at the end of the book of the Torah for the *aharon* reading to give those verses some context; exactly how many verses at the end of the Torah should be read for the *aharon* reading – whether the minimum of three or more than that – should be determined by the rabbi of each congregation.

- C. When I suggested this last method (B) in a note to the Rabbinical Assembly, our colleague, Rabbi Judah Kogen, pointed out to me some have the custom to say *hatzi kaddish* immediately before the last reading from the Torah. In order to honor the Mishnah's rule and also that custom, he suggests that we follow the Sephardic custom, which has us say *hatzi kaddish* both before the last reading and after it. In this case, it would mean reciting *hatzi kaddish* after *shevi'i* to mark the end of the regular Torah reading, and again after *aharon*, before the special reading of the day. The community would say “*hazak...*” after the last several verses of the book of the Torah that is being concluded that day are read.

There are two problems with this approach. First, it would undoubtedly seem odd to congregations used to the Ashkenazi custom of saying *hatzi kaddish* only after the last reading to switch to the Sephardi custom of saying it both before and after the *aharon* reading, even though it would only happen on the special occasions addressed by this addendum to my responsum -- that is, when reading the end of a book of the Torah corresponds with a day on which a special reading is also read. Second, this will mean reciting *hatzi kaddish* twice (before and after the *aharon* reading) and then a third time shortly thereafter before Musaf (although in many congregations the sermon would intervene). This repetition in close succession may seem aesthetically to be an overuse of *hatzi kaddish*, thus reducing its meaning, and perhaps even a burden on the community (*tirhah d'tzibbura*), even though it takes less than a minute to say it. These are not major issues, but they lead me to prefer option B to option C.

I have explained why I think that option B is the best approach, but the problems I have raised with options A and C are not halakhic and definitely open to differing aesthetic sensibilities. So this addendum is intended to prefer option B above but to endorse all three of these ways to enable congregations to recite “*hazak...*” after the congregation's completion of its reading of a given book of the Torah on the triennial cycle when that reading occurs on a Shabbat that also has a special reading.

*P'sak:* The recommended way to read the Torah and enable congregations using the triennial cycle to say “*hazak, hazak, ve'nit hazek*” during the first and second years of the cycle when there is a special *maftir* reading for the day is option B above, but options A and C are also acceptable.

I would like to thank Rabbi Daniel Nevins for his thorough reading of previous drafts of this addendum and for his written suggestions at various stages of revising it.