May a Pre-Bar Mitzvah Boy Read from the Torah?

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This paper was adopted as the Minority Opinion on January 13, 1982 by a vote of 6-6. Members voting in favor: Rabbis Salamon Faber, Edward M. Gershfield, David H. Lincoln, David Novak, Israel N. Silverman and Henry A. Sosland. Members in opposition: Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Ben Zion Bokser, Mayer Rabinowitz, Joel Roth, Morris M. Shapiro and Harry Z. Sky.

Note: "May a Minor Read from the Torah?," a paper by Rabbi Joel Roth, was adopted as the Majority Opinion on January 13, 1982 by a vote of 8-4.

SHE'ELAH

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TESHUVAH

There are many references to this particular problem, some of which I mention below.

Were we to permit such an occurrence, there are sources upon which we could rely. However, certain difficulties should be borne in mind:

(1) Distinctions were made regarding an aliyyah and actual reading.
(2) Differences arise as to which part of the reading a minor can intone (e.g., only from shelishi, etc.).
(3) The overwhelming majority of sources discourage such practice.

The Mishnah (Megillah 4:6) says "katan korei baTorah umetargem vekhule..." as does the perush of the Rambam on the same Mishnah. Once again, the commentaries on those passages express certain reservations. Furthermore, the Pri Megadim Mishbetzot Zahav, O.H. 282:6 seems to be in contradiction with the Pri Megadim Eshel Avraham 282:6.

It does seem clear, however, that the Taz, in at least two places (Orah Hayyim 282, Hilkhot Arba Parshiyot 685) allows a katan to read Torah.

Those who do not allow are numerous and once again I mention a few:
(1) The Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 282 of the "Rav" (Lubavitch).
(2) Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik (Mibeit Midrasho Shel Harav) in the Shiurim, p. 31. He deals with the matter and concludes that it is forbidden.

(3) Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe, Orah Hayyim II:72). This is in regard to a Bar Mitzvah learning an "earlier sidra by mistake."

(4) לָֽכְָוָּשׁ שָׁרְז הַאַיִּים רְפֶּה בָּא דַּאָכָי מְצַעָּר הָזְכָר הַכְּוָר.

(5) שעָרְכ הִשְׁלָלְתָה אִַי הָרְפֶּה.

(6) שָׁעָרְו אָרְפָּרָם: אָכְיַי שְׁמַנֵּד שָׁוְדָה לְקָרָה רְק קָטִין. מָנוּ ב לְהָלִיִּת הָיְטָנָה

CONCLUSION

Once again, I personally would discourage a pre-Bar Mitzvah boy from reading Torah. Bar Mitzvah for our youngsters means: Now I can be called to the Torah! Now I can read Torah! To permit those younger than age thirteen could lead to ten and eleven year olds celebrating with a reading, never to be seen in the synagogue or Hebrew School again. The situation with post-B'nai Mitzvah is bad enough.

Of course, the answer to both questions in cases of difficulty is very simple. Everyone agrees that Maftir, Haftarah (including the aliyyah) and recitation of the blessings for those mitzvot, can be said and read by a katan.
III.

BRIT MILAH