

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary  
Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

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**Symposium: Torah Study in the Digital Age**

Rabbi Dovid Bashevkin • Rabbi Efrem Goldberg  
Rona Novick, PhD and Laya Salomon, EdD  
Rabbi Ezra Schwartz

**Shavuot Divrei Torah**

Rabbi Hershel Reichman • Rabbi Moshe Schapiro

**Shavuot Learning Program**

Mrs. Aliza Abrams Konig and Rabbi Joshua Flug



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# Introduction

Walking into a contemporary yeshiva classroom, one cannot help but notice the plethora of technological tools that have been introduced to our educational environment. From smartboards to laptops, from tracking our children's homework online to the assignments that require internet-based research, it is clear that the transmission of *mesorah* has entered the Digital Age. Recently, while sitting with a group of esteemed educators, I inquired whether they believed that the technological developments in the classroom were representative of a substantive upgrade in the quality of education, or rather tools that have been designed to meet the same expectations as previous generations, but in a manner that resonates with the youth of today. Are we indeed “progressing” in *limud HaTorah* (Torah learning), or simply making it palatable to a new generation?

The Torah tells us in Parshas Terumah (Shemos 25:15):

בְּטַבְעֹת הָאֲרוֹן יִהְיוּ הַבְּדִים לֹא יִסְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ.  
*In the rings of the ark, there shall be the poles, they should not be removed.*

The Rambam records in *Sefer HaMitzvos* (negative commandment no. 86) that there is a biblical prohibition against removing the poles which support the Aron in its mobility. Many commentaries inquire: If the purpose of the poles was to provide a mechanism of portability for the Aron, then why do they have to remain embedded in the vessel when it is in a state of rest?



## Rabbi Yaakov Glasser

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R' Shamshon Rafael Hirsch explains that the poles remain connected to the Aron indefinitely because the Torah's substance and message is forever related to our capacity to transport it to the next destination in the journey of the Jewish people. That journey is not only geographic, it is also historical. Different eras of Jewish history have demanded different approaches in how to ensure that Torah remains the eternal life-force in the heart of the Jewish people.

The current technological revolution has produced a generation that relates to information in an entirely new way. The internet has introduced dramatically new possibilities to engage a wide spectrum of our community in Jewish educational projects. The questions that we must explore are how this “progress” can become not only an opportunity to ensure that our timeless values and ideals resonate with a new generation, but a platform for qualitative development in our experience of *limud HaTorah*.

As we embrace *zman matan Toraseinu*, the time in which the Torah was given, we recognize that *kabalas HaTorah*, our acceptance of the Torah, is re-experienced in every generation. In our shuls, schools, and homes, we are

constantly recreating the moment of *kabalas HaTorah*. This issue of Torah To Go includes a symposium that explores the role of technology in enhancing that experience and ultimately propelling the study of Torah forward in its vibrancy and depth.

The symposium contains four articles representing four different perspectives on Jewish education. Rabbi Dovid Bashevkin is the International Director of Education for NCSY. In that role, he develops and oversees many of the educational materials used for NCSY programs. He shares with us his expertise in reaching teenagers through various mediums. Rabbi Efreim Goldberg is the Senior Rabbi at the Boca Raton Synagogue. In addition to being a master adult educator, he has been a pioneer in using the internet and social media to spread Torah and its values. He shares his perspective on the interplay of technology and *limud HaTorah* in adult education. Dr. Rona Novick, Dean of the Azrieli Graduate of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University, and Dr. Laya Salomon, Assistant Professor of Education at Azrieli, are both on the cutting edge of Jewish education, and provide firsthand knowledge of teaching methods in

Jewish day schools throughout the country, and offer researched-based approaches to this issue. Rabbi Ezra Schwartz, a Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS and assistant director of RIETS, as well as rabbi of the Mount Sinai Congregation in Washington Heights, NY, shares his perspective in teaching the “Millennial” generation within the walls of the yeshiva and beyond.

We asked the authors to specifically address the relationship between *limud HaTorah* and technology. What

are the opportunities and challenges for teachers (both for children and adults) and learners? How has technology impacted the formal classroom setting? What impact have sites like yutorah.org — which is used on average by 5,000-6,000 people per day to learn Torah online, without a face-to-face interaction with a teacher — had on the way people learn, both in the classroom and out of the classroom?

The necessity of integrating technology into the world of *limud HaTorah* may be driven by the needs of the generation, but our mission is to discover how these elements of human experience can fulfill their ultimate purpose in elevating the commitment to and engagement in Torah growth for our generation.



# TORAH STUDY IN THE DIGITAL AGE



# Medium Matters: The Medium and Message of Torah in the Digital Age

In 1964, just as the television was becoming a fixture of the American home, Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), a renowned professor and philosopher of communication theory, published a groundbreaking book discussing the effects of different forms of content consumption.<sup>1</sup> McLuhan explored the relationship between the way content is delivered, for instance either through print books or visually through movies, and its effect on the human psyche. He summarized his basic thesis with his oft-cited idiom, “the medium is the message.” According to McLuhan, major changes in society result from the mediums in which content is delivered, not necessarily from the messages of such content. For instance, he explains, movies changed society not so much from the messages of film but from the medium of film itself. He writes:

*The movie, by sheer speeding up the mechanical, carried us from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure. The message of the movie medium is that of transition from lineal connections to configurations.*

His writing, while a little obscure, had a pivotal impact on media studies. As a result of his adage “the medium



Rabbi Dovid Bashevkin

Director of Education, NCSY

is the message” future scholars paid closer attention to the forms in which we deliver content, rather than just the messages contained therein.

## Does the Medium Matter in Jewish Tradition?

Though McLuhan coined the phrase “the medium is the message,” the underlying concept is a central tenet of Jewish law and thought. The Talmud (*Gittin* 60b) records the following:

כתוב כותב לך את הדברים האלה וכתוב כי ע“פ הדברים האלה הא כיצד דברים שבכתב אי אתה רשאי לאומרו על פה דברים שבעל פה אי אתה רשאי לאומרו בכתב.

*One verse (Shemot 34:27) states, “Write for yourself the following words” and another verse (ibid.) states “For according to the mouth of these words.” How can these be reconciled (whether the words should be written or spoken)? This means, that which is written cannot be recited orally (without the text present), and that which is transmitted through speech cannot be written down.*

Here, the Torah prohibits writing the spoken word and speaking the written word.<sup>2</sup> Underscoring the Torah’s sensitivity to the importance of the medium, Rabbi Yehudah Lowe (1520-1609), known as the Maharal of Prague, explains the reasoning as follows:

דע, כי אין ראוי שתהיה התורה שבעל פה בכתובה, מפני שהתורה שבעל פה הם פרטי המצוה ופרושיה. ודבר זה אין קץ וסוף, כי הפרטים אין להם קץ. ולא היה דבר שלם אם היה כותב מקצת בלבד, לכך אין לכתוב כלל התורה שבעל פה חסירה. כי הכתיבה מורה על התמימות, שיהיה כאן הכל ביחד, והרי בתורה שבעל פה אי אפשר, כמו שאמרנו. אבל על פה, הרי כי ענין הפה כך הוא, שאין הכל ביחד. כי כאשר מדבר דבור, ואחר כך השני, כבר הלך לו דבור הראשון.

*Understand, it is not fitting to write down the oral tradition because the oral tradition delineates all of the details and explanations of the commandments — and such an endeavor is infinite, there are no bounds to the details. If they were to be written, even just a portion, it would not be complete; therefore,*



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*it is better to write nothing at all. For writing presents issues in their complete static form — with everything outlined together — which would be impossible with the oral law. However, when ideas are spoken, inherently the nature of speech is that not everything is present at once. Once one word is spoken, the previous word has already dissipated.*  
**Tiferes Yisroel, ch. 68**

The Maharal's distinction between reading and writing is reflected in our figures of speech. When we want to make sure understanding is static and clear, without ambiguity, we ask that everyone should “be on the same page.” Alternatively, when we solicit interpretation and engagement we request the listener to “hear us out.” Aside from the messages conveyed through the written or spoken word, the Torah demands that we are equally sensitive to the medium of transmission.

**The Ever-Evolving Medium of Torah**

Much of this distinction has been blurred since the prohibition of writing the Oral Law was rescinded. As more and more Jews were unable to preserve the oral tradition due to increased communal instability, the oral tradition was reluctantly allowed to be written.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless,

even after our oral traditions were committed to writing, the form of such writing tried to preserve some of the characteristics of its original oral form. So, as rabbinic students are surely familiar, the Mishnah is written concisely, often in rhyming constructs, allowing its words to be easily committed to memory.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Talmud's desultory structure mimics the original oral dialect in which these texts were initially developed.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, there is a debate as to whether the original prohibition to write down the oral tradition was completely abrogated or, for those who do not have trouble committing it to memory, it still remains in place. Rabbi Nossan Adler (1741-1800), noted German kabbalist and teacher of R. Moses Sofer (Chassam Sofer), developed a form of braille language to write down his Torah ideas, as he felt his sharp memory excluded him from the allowance to write down oral traditions.<sup>6</sup> Later rabbinic figures, however, pointed out that the shift in medium from an oral tradition to a written one was definite and deliberate, regardless of one's memory prowess.<sup>7</sup> The transition from a culture of orality to the medium of writing, they explained, provided unique opportunities for the perpetuation of Torah in future generations.

**The Media Studies of Rav Akiva Eiger**

One champion of the opportunities presented in a decidedly written tradition was Rav Akiva Eiger (1761-1837). In his introduction to his responsa, he instructs his children to be sure that they embrace the opportunities inherent in the printed medium. “I request of you my beloved child,” he writes to his children of his manuscripts, “that it should be printed on beautiful paper with dark ink and a pleasing font.” Rav Akiva Eiger intuitively understood that the medium is a crucial part of the message. It is not enough to transmit the right message, but the medium we use to deliver those messages must be properly considered as well. As Rav Akiva Eiger continues to explain, “because in my opinion, the soul is affected and the mind is expanded and focus is awakened from learning from an attractive and elegant book.” His children took his advice seriously and somewhat literally. In the first edition of his responsa, when there was room left on the page, his children added beautiful pictures of deer, birds, and trees.<sup>8</sup> With the page absent of Rav Eiger's written message, his children were still mindful of the opportunities that the medium presented.



**Images printed in Teshuvot Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Warsaw, 1835)**

## Online Torah: Untapped Opportunities within the Medium

If the message of the medium provided unique opportunities for the published word, what are the opportunities when transmitting Torah with modern technology? Rav Akiva Eiger concerned himself with using the proper font and clear typography — what are the opportunities contained in the medium of the internet that we should be considering when disseminating Torah? I believe there are three important opportunities that an online medium offers to Torah development.

**Distribution:** On the simplest level, the internet allows us to reach a wider audience. The host of social media platforms each offers a unique way to distribute Torah and construct Torah ideas. While the former point is obvious, the latter demands more careful attention. It is not enough to upload or email our Torah, but the different medium of each social media platform needs to be considered as well. The medium of Instagram presents different opportunities than the medium of Twitter and it is important not to overlook those differences. For instance, a Torah idea on Instagram needs a visual presentation — a picture, a sharp design — while ideas successfully transmitted on Twitter require concise and clever verbal formulations. Much of the Torah world already understands the power online distribution offers our messages, it is time we paid closer attention to the different mediums.

**Collaboration:** Alvin Toffler, in his 1980 book *The Third Wave*, coined the term “prosumer” to describe the

new way in which people engage with content. People are no longer divided among strict lines of producers and consumers; nowadays everyone wants to be both. Think about Facebook. Or Twitter. Or Instagram. What makes them so attractive? It is not just that you can engage with other people’s content, but you can also share your own. You consume other people’s posts pictures, and articles, while also producing your own. Torah online must embrace the “prosumer” mentality. Ideas shared best online allow for user collaboration. The most commendable examples of this are the wealth of user-generated materials available on Sefaria, a website that allows users to translate and create source materials. A slightly more advanced illustration of the power of online collaboration, albeit outside the Torah world, is the website Genius.com, which allows users to provide commentary and history to song lyrics, historical speeches, and even other users’ self-generated content. Their mantra, “Annotate the Web,” offers amazing possibilities for educators looking to introduce the rich history of Jewish commentary to otherwise uninterested students. One need not use the actual Genius platform to demonstrate the power of collaboration — skillfully using the comments capability of GoogleDocs could allow an educator to present materials and empower students to present their voices, comments, and questions on the ideas.

**Interactivity:** Although they sound similar, collaboration and interactivity address two different issues related to online content. A basic example of online interactivity is the use of the hyperlink, by clicking on a certain word or image you are sent to another page. Interactivity, however, can be

used in incredible ways to impart information. The more technical term for one of the most common methods used to design web interactivity is parallax scrolling, which gives websites a three-dimensional immersive feeling. Parallax scrolling would allow, for instance, for the background images of your screen to change as you scroll down an article you are reading. Imagine reading Megillat Esther online and, as you scroll down the page, characters from the story emerge to act out the scenes you are reading. Online Torah, without thinking about the medium, just feels like a less organic version of holding a book; but, if we become more creative about the possibilities of the medium, engaging with online Torah can become its own unique immersive experience.

Some likely dismiss some of the more innovative possibilities that the internet offers for Torah dissemination. Leaving more sensitive issues related to the internet aside, our overall emphasis on embracing the opportunities of the medium can seem for many like an unnecessary exercise. Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, addressed a similar sentiment, when discussing the dreadful state of Torah writing. His commendable crusade for sophisticated Torah writing, as he recounts, was dismissed by many as allowing the medium to trump the message. Naysayers would ask him:<sup>9</sup> *So what? If it informs and occasionally even uplifts, then who cares if the phrasing is inelegant or the words inappropriate? What difference does it make as long as it does the job?*

In response, Rabbi Feldman artfully pointed out, “We don’t wrap our tefillin in brown paper bags, or bind our sifrei Torah with coarse, ugly

In response, Rabbi Feldman artfully pointed out, “We don’t wrap our tefillin in brown paper bags, or bind our sifrei Torah with coarse, ugly ropes” — the casing and medium of our Torah matters too.

ropes” — the casing and medium of our Torah matters too. Whether it is our choice of words or choice of web design — medium matters.

The integration of Torah and technology offers endless possibilities. But the revolution will only be fully realized when we pay closer attention to the opportunities of the medium instead of being solely occupied with the substance of the message. Particularly regarding distribution, collaboration, and interactivity there is still much unrealized potential for learners, but thankfully many organizations have already admirably begun creatively harnessing the power of the online medium.<sup>10</sup>

Have these developments changed the way people learn Torah? Those who are not digital natives particularly ask this question with some understandable measure of concern. While the answer to that question is a resounding yes, it still does not have to cause alarm for those who feel new presentations of Torah compromise the very substance of Torah. Every generation has their own path to access Torah.

The innovations of the Rambam’s organization of the corpus of Torah, the legal condensation of Rabbi Yosef Karo’s Shulchan Aruch and, yes, the NCSY Beit Medrash session are all part of one tradition that invites new minds of each successive generation to interact with Torah in new ways. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829-1908) compared the diverse range of opinions within Judaism’s legal tradition to the harmonies and melodies of a song.<sup>11</sup> Each opinion adds depth to the symphony of our tradition. If the diversity of the messages within Judaism is compared to the melodies of a song, perhaps the varying mediums can be compared to instruments. Whether it is text, speech, pictures, or online platforms, each is a new instrument within the ever-evolving orchestra of Torah.

Five years after Marshal McLuhan published his essay, a television show debuted that educationally embraced the notion that “the medium is the message.” It was called Sesame Street. Christopher Cerf, one of the original composers on Sesame Street, related that the program was created in response to a basic question: “Why does educational television have to have no creativity? Or, turned around, why does creative television have no education?”<sup>12</sup> The Torah community has begun to answer this question as it relates to the integration of Torah and online mediums. Our collective educational success, however, demands that we continue to explore new vistas of Torah expression. It’s not enough to listen to the message of Torah, we also have to pay attention to the mediums of Torah expression.

## Notes

1. Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: The New American Library (1964).
2. Regarding whether this prohibition is biblical or rabbinic in origin, see *Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim* 49:2 and *Sheilot U’Teshuvot Chikrei Lev, Mahadura Basra, Orach Chaim*, 15.
3. See Rambam’s introduction to his *Yad HaChazakah*.
4. See Talmud, *Megilah* 32a, Tosafos *ibid.* s.v. *V’hashoneh* as well as *Tiferes Yisroel, Arachin* 4:1.
5. For more on orality in the historical development of the Talmud, see my teacher, Dr. Yaakov Elman’s “Orality and the Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud.” *Oral Tradition* 14.1 (1999): 52-99.
6. See *Sdei Chemed*, Ma’arechet 4, no. 22. Rabbi Adler’s student, Rav Moshe Sofer, also had a more limited view of the allowance to write down the oral law. See his *She’ailot U’Teshuvot Chassam Sofer, Orach Chaim* #208, which prohibits writing down the oral law for one’s self-aggrandizement.
7. See Rav Ovadia Yosef’s *She’ailot U’Teshuvot Y’Chave Daat*, Vol. 3, *Yoreh Deah*, #74. See also, Rav Tzadok HaKohen’s *Machshavat Charutz* 15:6.
8. I am indebted to Phillip (Pinny) Stieglitz for pointing out these pictures.
9. Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, “Tefillin in a Brown Paper Bag,” *The Shul Without a Clock*, pp. 137-141.
10. I am hesitant to mention any specific organizations at the risk of leaving out others doing incredible work, though I realize I have already broken this rule by singling out Sefaria.
11. *Arukh Ha-Shulchan*, introduction to *Choshen Mishpat*.
12. See Michael Davis’s *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street*, p. 206.

# Learning Offline in an Online World

For members of a nation known as “The People of the Book,” living in the Information Age is a dream come true. We have unprecedented access to not only trillions of bytes of general information, but to seemingly endless entryways into our sacred Torah through numerous new and expanded mediums.

With apps on smartphones, we can hold libraries of *seforim* in the palm of our hand. Using YUTorah.org and other audio sites, we can endlessly stream diverse *shiurim* from world-famous roshai yeshiva and scholars wherever we are in the world. With the proliferation of Torah newsletters and email subscriptions, we have access to complex and sophisticated insights on parsha, holidays, business ethics, and Jewish law, all in our mother tongue. Comprehensive *seforim* on nearly every topic with extensive footnotes allow us to research nearly any area that may be of interest. Artscroll and Mesivta versions of the Talmud enable us to peruse generations of penetrating insights and analysis on each page of the Talmud, without having to open more than one book.

There can be no doubt that the Information Age has expanded our access to Torah and the frequency and ease with which it can be learned. Having the opportunities to learn so readily is an amazing blessing that



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we should take full advantage of and be proud when we do. However, the Information Age also poses numerous challenges to our sacred tradition of Torah study. I would like to briefly reference two of them, expand on a third, and offer some suggestions and solutions.

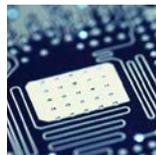
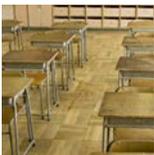
## Experiential Knowledge, Not Just Information

In another article on a similar subject,<sup>1</sup> I referenced a *Harvard Business Review* article, “The Internet Makes You Think You’re Smarter Than You Are,” and a recent book by David Weinberger called *Too Big to Know: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren’t the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room*, to show the danger of having endless information at our fingertips in the span of a millisecond. The Information Age leads to a false sense of confidence and to conclusions based on knowledge in a vacuum, not as part of a system or community.

Halacha and hashkafa have never

been formulated by analysis of stark information or knowledge alone. Our sacred *mesorah* (tradition) has always placed great emphasis on the accumulation of experiential knowledge and sensitivities, and placed a premium on guidance from those who have amassed the wisdom of life and serve as loyal conduits of the wisdom of prior generations. A brilliant scholar who is familiar with vast amounts of Torah but has never been *meshameish talmidei chachamim* (i.e., “apprenticed” with Torah scholars) is not qualified to issue opinions deserving of communal deference. The Talmud (*Berachos* 7b) tells us that, “*gedola shimusha yoser milimuda*,” being mentored by a talmid chacham is even greater than the learning of his Torah. According to the *beraisa* in the sixth chapter of *Pirkei Avos*, one of the 48 ways that wisdom is acquired is through *shimush chachamim*. The *ratzon Hashem*, the will of the Almighty, on any given issue cannot simply be Googled or searched on the Bar Ilan digital library.

With the proliferation of daf yomi learning online, more people are



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learning the daf, but fewer are attending daf shiurim in person.

Even after being written down, study of our sacred *Torah She'ba'al Peh*, the Oral Tradition, demands the fusion between content and personalities, between exposure to information and participating in a chain of transmission and the continuity of a *mesorah* community.

There is nothing wrong with listening to classes online, reading printouts and digests, or even learning *seforim* by oneself. Indeed, these are wonderful and virtuous fulfillments of learning Torah. They deserve to be lauded, encouraged, and promoted. However, we must be careful that these opportunities for *talmud Torah* complement the experience of sitting with a teacher, developing a relationship with a rebbe, and being part of a *mesorah* community, and that these impersonal methods of learning never replace them.

## Attention and Concentration Deficit

It is likely not coincidental that among the most popular classes on YUTorah are the “10 Minute Halacha” and “5 Minute Halacha” series. Not only are the speakers and their topics excellent, but the length is just right for a generation that struggles to concentrate for lengthy periods of time.

Technology and the internet have unintentionally waged war on our attention span. The new reality is posing a great challenge to teachers and educators across the spectrum, from public school<sup>2</sup> to the Chareidi community,<sup>3</sup> which recently held its first conference to address the problem of concentration in yeshivas.

A Washington Post article entitled “Serious Reading Takes a Hit from Online Scanning and Skimming” describes the newest research from neuroscientists.<sup>4</sup> These neuroscientists warn that: “humans seem to be developing digital brains with new circuits for skimming through the torrent of information online. This alternative way of reading is competing with traditional deep reading circuitry.” Andrew Dillon, a University of Texas professor who studies reading, notes that: “We’re spending so much time touching, pushing, linking, scrolling and jumping through text that when we sit down with a novel, your daily habits of jumping, clicking, linking is just ingrained in you. We’re in this new era of information behavior, and we’re beginning to see the consequences of that.”

Torah learning has always been about much more than just exposure to information. It aspires to leave one with the feeling that they have been in the presence of the Almighty. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes, “In prayer we find God by speaking; in study we find God in listening.”<sup>5</sup> Hearing His messages and feeling His influence, however, are predicated on our capacity to pay attention and concentrate.

אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה דִּבֶּר ה' אֶל-כָּל-קְהֵלְכֶם  
בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ הַעֲנָן וְהַעֲרָפֶל קוֹל גָּדוֹל וְלֹא  
יָסַף וַיְכַתְּבֵם עַל-שְׁנֵי לְחֹת אֲבָנִים וַיִּתֵּן אֵלָיו.  
*These words Hashem spoke to your assembly on the mountain out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a great voice, and it went on no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone, and gave them to me.*

### Devarim 5:19

The simple meaning of the words *v'lo yasaf*, as explained by the Ibn

Ezra, the Rashbam, and others, is that the voice and experience were “not to be repeated.” This was a onetime only event, an exceptional and transcendent moment in human history, never to be replicated. Onkelus, however, translates *v'lo yasaf* not as never repeated, but rather as *v'lo p'sak*, God’s voice never ended or ceased. The Ramban cites a few pesukim as evidence that *v'lo yasaf* can mean “never stops.” According to this interpretation, God spoke at Sinai thousands of years ago, and His voice and message continue to carry and echo until today. Which interpretation is correct? Has Hashem’s voice stopped carrying or can it still be heard today?

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְהִיָּה שָׁמָּה  
וְאֶתְנֵה לְךָ אֶת לְחֹת הָאֲבָנִים וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה  
אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתָם.

*Hashem said to Moshe, “Ascend to Me to the mountain and be there, and I shall give you the stone tablets and the teaching and the commandment that I have written, to teach them.”*

### Shemos 24:12

Commentators are bothered by the seemingly superfluous phrase in Hashem’s invitation to Moshe. After Moshe is directed to ascend the mountain, it surely was unnecessary for Moshe to also be directed “*veheyei sham*,” and “be there.” Obviously, once Moshe ascends the mountain he will necessarily be there.

*Veheyei sham*, be there, means be in the present. Don’t be distracted, interrupted or unfocused. Hashem is telling Moshe that He does not want to compete for attention, even for the most noble of distractions, such as caring for the Jewish people. “Put them aside when you are with Me, and be with Me.”

Perhaps the definition of *v'lo yasaf* is

ultimately up to us. If we are distracted and unfocused while we learn Torah, God's voice and message cannot resonate deeply or in a lasting way. But if, like Moshe, *v'heyey sham*, we are fully present and paying attention, we can continue to hear His voice and heed His message.

Preserving the ability to be fully present demands not only disconnecting at times from technology, but also maintaining and strengthening our ability to connect through traditional learning. Reading books and patiently studying full texts that are more than sound bites are instrumental to maintaining our attention span. Reward your children for reading and set goals for yourself, not just on Shabbos when technology is not an option, but throughout the week as well.

## Acquiring Torah Only Through Toil and Diligence

Perhaps the most insidious impact of the Information Age on Torah learning is how easy it has made it. No longer does acquiring Torah knowledge require great effort and exertion. Previously, one had to physically make their way to a shiur; now one can listen while driving, exercising, shopping or cooking. I vividly remember struggling to make my way through the Gemara often trying to understand each word or phrase based on context or the insight of a commentary or by looking it up painstakingly in the Jastrow dictionary. Today, Artscroll and Mesivta serve as crutches, spoon-feeding not only the explanation of all of Shas, but walking the student through Tosafos with ease. Technology and information have made Torah study easier and have removed much of the struggle, but

that is not necessarily a good thing.

Rashi, in the beginning of *Parshas Bechukosai*, quotes Chazal who say that "*Im b'chukosai teleichu*," if you walk in my statutes, means "*shetihiyu ameilim baTorah*," you should toil to learn Torah. Similarly, the Gemara *Berachos* 63b, teaches:

אמר ריש לקיש ... אין דברי תורה מתקיימין  
אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה.  
*Reish Lakish said: ... words of Torah  
only sustain with those who kill  
themselves over it.*

The Gemara in *Megilla* 6b, states:

אמר ר' יצחק אם יאמר לך אדם יגעתי ולא  
מצאתי אל תאמן לא יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמן  
יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן.  
*R' Yitzchok said: "If someone tells you  
I labored [in Torah study] but did not  
find it (i.e. I was not successful), do not  
believe him. If he tells you, I have not  
labored in Torah study, yet I did find  
it, do not believe him. If he says I have  
toiled and I have found it, believe him."*

The *Taz* (*Orach Chaim* 47:1) summarizes well the attitude of our rabbis to Torah study:

שהתורה אינה מתקיימת אלא במי שממית  
עצמו עליה דהיינו שעוסק בפלפול ומשא ומתן  
של תורה כמ"ש על בחקותי תלכו ע"מ שתהיו  
עמלים בתורה משא"כ באותם שלומדים  
ד"ת מתוך עונג ואינם יגעים בה אין התורה  
מתקיימת אצלם.

*The Torah is retained only by those  
that kill themselves over it, by toiling  
in it diligently and with great intensity,  
as our rabbis said, "shetihiyu ameilim  
baTorah," you should toil to learn Torah.  
Those who study Torah casually —  
amid comfort and without toil — will  
not retain it.*

Clearly, effort, toil, and diligence are prerequisites to authentic Torah study, but why?

כי אם בתורת ה', חפצו; ובתורתו יתנה, יומם  
ולילה.

*He desires the Torah of Hashem and in  
his Torah he meditates day and night.*

## Tehillim 1:2

Rashi notes:

בתחילה היא נקראת תורת השם ומשלמה  
וגרסה היא נקראת תורתו.

*In the beginning it is the Torah of  
Hashem, but after he toils in it, it  
becomes his Torah.*

## Rashi, Kiddushin 32b

There is a superficial encounter with Torah in which we passively hear a nice idea or even read a meaningful thought. Such learning is valuable, but likely fleeting and probably not transformative. We haven't worked for it and so it remains Hashem's. However, when we toil and struggle and exert great effort to understand and to review Torah, we acquire it. We have paid for it with our time, our energy and our effort. It becomes *Toras* — our Torah, part of who we are.

In the Information Age, it is easier than ever to learn Hashem's Torah, but it is becoming increasingly more difficult and unusual to find the resolve and tenacity to acquire Torah with the *ameilus*, effort, and *yegiah*, toil, it requires. Our generation has become accustomed to knowledge and information that come comfortably and easily. To satisfy our curiosity or complete a research paper, we need not make our way to the card catalogue at the library and proceed to find the book and look it up. We can speak to our smartphone, which spits back thousands of results in the blink of an eye. If we, or our children, struggle to understand a subject, there are countless websites with tutorials and educational videos to make it simple to understand.

These advances are wonderful, and embracing them undeniably enriches our lives. But while the modern Age of Information places a premium on the result and not the process, the pursuit of Torah demands an emphasis on the educational method, not just acquiring the knowledge.

At the completion of a significant portion of learning, in the *Hadran* we recite:

אנו עמלים והם עמלים. אנו עמלים ומקבלים  
שכר והם עמלים ואינם מקבלים שכר.  
*We toil and they toil — we toil and  
receive reward while they toil and do not  
receive reward.*

The Chafetz Chaim famously explains (*Chafetz Chaim Al Hatorah, Bechukosai*) that in all other disciplines and activities, the result is what matters. If you struggled to solve the math equation but came up with the wrong answer, the effort was a failure. In great contradistinction, however, when it comes to Torah, though we care passionately about a positive result and comprehension of the subject, even if it is unattained, the effort and exertion in its pursuit were not wasted time. They were transformative and impactful nonetheless.

The *beraisa* in *Pirkei Avos* tells us that when a person learns Torah for its own sake, *machsharto lihiyos tzadik*, it prepares one to be righteous. Rav Chaim Volozhener in his *Ruach Chaim* 6:1, explains that the word *machsharto*

comes from *machshir*, or to kasher. Just like we kasher a pot by purging it of the foreign tastes that have been absorbed in it, so too Torah study has the power to kasher us and purge foreign ideas and experiences that have previously been absorbed. This is accomplished just through the process of diligent study, even if we fail to ultimately retain what we learned.

Perhaps this is why the beracha we make is *la'asok b'divrei Torah*, to be occupied with Torah study and not *lilmod divrei Torah*, to learn and comprehend Torah. When it comes to Torah study, the process and the effort are critical.

While the term “edutainment” was first coined by Robert Heyman in 1973 while producing documentaries for the National Geographic Society, it has become the standard not only for teachers in school, but for educators of every age. Our overexposure to technology and multimedia has rewired our brains, and makes it difficult to learn without being stimulated and entertained in the process. We satisfy this new paradigm with PowerPoint presentations, smartboards, and fancy source sheets. These are all wonderful tools to help communicate and learn Torah, but they must not replace the traditional method of effort and toil.

If, in the Information Age, we lose the ability and the will to toil in study, we will have unprecedented access and

mediums for Torah learning that will remain superficial, fleeting and in the domain of Hashem. If we want Torah study to expand not only in its breadth but also in its depth, we must cultivate within our children and ourselves the strength to toil in Torah and appreciate the satisfaction of making it our own.

The capacity and will to toil are necessary ingredients for creativity and authenticity in Torah learning. Creativity and authenticity are the catalysts for finding joy in Torah learning not just for those aspiring to be scholars, but for all of those seeking to be uplifted and inspired by the encounter.

Toil and effort are integral to learning itself. Every Jew should have a taste of genuine scholarship and have the language and the tools to be an insider to learning, even though few will go on to be outstanding scholars. If you use secondary Torah resources, you can learn about Torah, but you can't be a student of Torah. Only through effort and exertion is learning turned into an encounter with Hashem.

Artsroll/Mesivta/YUTorah are wonderful resources for people who otherwise wouldn't have access to the information, for those using it as a gateway, or for those with limited time who are looking to enhance their learning. However, younger students, who are developing their skills to read and analyze Jewish texts, should embrace the struggle rather than looking for spoon-fed solutions. Even those who are no longer students (in the classical sense) should consider dedicating some of their learning time towards developing skills and learning with greater toil.

Certainly a community seeking to grow should create scholars-in-

If, in the Information Age, we lose the ability and the will to toil in study, we will have unprecedented access and mediums for Torah learning that will remain superficial, fleeting and in the domain of Hashem.

residence programs, speaker series, and diverse classes. But it must never neglect venues and opportunities for traditional textual study in chavrusa or small groups. Building a serious and vibrant beis medrash must be a priority for our communities. In addition to classes that have attractive source sheets that cull from diverse places, communities and their teachers should encourage and facilitate textual study with greater reading comprehension, improving vocabulary, and building analytical skills. Additionally, consider becoming a Dirshu site and giving monthly tests on text based materials with rewards and incentives that will motivate people to review diligently and find the satisfaction that can only come from toiling in Torah study.

## Conclusion

In some ways, the Information Age is the golden age of Torah learning. Our communities have been greatly enriched by the myriad of new learning opportunities and unprecedented access to Torah study. Those who are taking advantage of listening to classes online, reading Torah newsletters, and studying Gemara in any language or with any tool should be commended and celebrated for their commitment to Talmud Torah. If only more people would follow their example and access the unprecedented opportunities to learn. However, to remain part of the *mesorah* community, to preserve our capacity for focusing attention, and to experience the satisfaction and authenticity of genuine Torah study, we should challenge ourselves and our communities to be vigilant to preserve the traditional modes and methods as well.

## Notes

- 1 Efreim Goldberg, "Technology — Playing with Fire," *Klal Perspectives* (Fall, 2015): 34:46, available at: <http://klalperspectives.org/rabbi-efrem-goldberg-2>.
- 2 Matt Richtel, "Technology is Changing How Students Learn, Teachers Say," *The New York Times*, Nov. 1, 2012, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/education/technology-is-changing-how-students-learn-teachers-say.html>.
- 3 Moshe Weissberg, "The First Charedi Gathering for Issues of Attention and Concentration" (Hebrew), *B'Chadrei Charedim*, May 7, 2016, available at: <http://www.bhol.co.il/ArticlePrint.aspx?id=101324>.
- 4 Michael S. Rosenwald, "Serious Reading Takes a Hit from Online Scanning and Skimming," *Washington Post*, April 6, 2014, available at: <http://wpo.st/mfBa1>.
- 5 R. Jonathan Sacks, introduction to *Ten Days, Ten Ways: Paths to the Divine Presence* (2007), available at: <http://www.rabbisacks.org/ten-days-ten-ways-paths-to-the-divine-presence/>.



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# Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age

**W**e each carry a picture of school in our head. Children of the 1930's, 40's or 50's probably picture a room with similar-aged students seated in desks neatly in rows, a teacher directing the learning. Those schooled in the 60's—80's more likely have broader visions of the “classroom,” which may include modular furniture and perhaps creative lessons and student projects. Students learning at the turn of the millennium would likely describe classrooms as being well-equipped with various forms of technology, including computers and smartboards.

It is natural to believe that technology is radically rewriting education, drastically altering the teaching and learning we engage in. In fact, teaching and schools have undergone multiple significant changes over history, and none of the above snapshots of the “typical” learning environment would be an accurate representation of teaching and learning in a colonial American classroom, or an ancient Greek seminar. Jewish teaching and learning has also undergone monumental changes, from the approach in the days of the Gemara, to the European cheder, to modern yeshivot. Although Jewish learning is steeped in tradition, it is subject



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to the same forces and approaches that impact secular education. This article will focus on one such force: technology, and the ways in which it impacts Jewish education in the overlapping spheres of context, text, learner, and teacher, creating both challenges and opportunities for Jewish education.

## The Context

Educational revolutions significantly predate the advent of technology. Before the introduction of the written word, learning and scholarship demanded significant verbal memorization. Even after written language was introduced, it was generations before the invention of the printing press again revolutionized

learning, changing forever the role of memorization and reliance on oral skills in scholarship.

For today's learners, both children and adults, technology is ever-present in their lives. They engage with technology in the doctor's office, in the supermarket, in their cars and with their home appliances, and in their conversations with family and friends via cell phone or email. A 2013 report found that 44% of cell phone users have slept with their phone so that they didn't miss a notification (Hepburn, 2013). This highlights how connected we are to our devices and social media. To expect that learners would leave technology behind when they enter the classroom would be absurd. The issue, therefore, is not whether technology will play



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a role in learning, but rather which technology(ies) will apply and what role will they play.

On the one hand, the context of omnipresent technology may create great comfort in applying technology to learning. As we discuss the impact of technology on text, below, great advantages become apparent. However, given the rapid rate with which new technologies are introduced, teachers and learners may be constantly challenged to adapt to new devices, applications, and methods. This is a process that will be easier for some than others (Goode, 2010; Heemskerck, ten Dam, Volman, & Admiraal, 2009).

## The Text

Text has always been central in Jewish learning. In ancient times, with no mass printing available, the transmission of the holy Text was accomplished through verbal, communal means (e.g. *Hakhel*, weekly reading of the Torah). Even as the printed word allowed codification of the Oral traditions and distribution of texts, their use of ancient languages and archaic grammatical constructions resulted in limited access for “ordinary” learners. As a result, in order to allow learners to access text, a great deal of time and effort needed to be invested in developing language skills.

Technology can greatly increase a learner’s access to text, through translation programs or open-source archives (Sefaria.org, for example). Text previously available to scholars and in archives can be found with a few clicks on the internet. At the turn of the millennium, universities, archives, and other sources were

investing significant resources to make Judaica-related materials available digitally. Beyond allowing learners to obtain materials, technology provides additional access to individuals who might otherwise struggle with the text in its original presentation. Physical attributes of text can be manipulated by changing fonts, or color coding and highlighting segments. While all these changes were possible with the “old” technology of scissors and markers, their digital iterations can be accomplished with such ease that learners and teachers can readily personalize the texts they study.

This ability to alter text is no small issue, given that Talmud, a text that is the subject of study in *battei midrash* worldwide, is an example of “unfriendly” text. Text is considered unfriendly when it places extensive demands on the reader, failing to follow accepted rules of structure and language. Interestingly, a page of Talmud has been compared to an internet page, with central material surrounded by tangential distractions pulling at one’s attention. As Jonathan Rosen writes “. . . when I look at a page of Talmud and see all those texts tucked intimately and intrusively onto the same page, . . . I do think of the interrupting, jumbled culture of the Internet.” (Rosen, 2000)

Research over the past decades has explored the benefits and challenges of reading online as compared to on paper. The hypertext potential of online reading “fosters a flexible pattern of discovery which promotes greater cognitive effort on the part of readers, who must develop frameworks based on personally selected paths” (Uso-Juan & Ruiz-Madrid, 2002). These benefits are, however, balanced against findings

that on-screen reading correlates with information overload and distraction, and decreases in in-depth processing (Wieczorek, et al., 2014).

To date, the research has focused largely on considerations of reading comprehension, attention, and other cognitive phenomenon. Jewish learning aims to engage us affectively and spiritually as well. More sophisticated research is needed to explore how reading via technology *feels* and *inspires*. Our image and experience of a scholar’s *beit medrash* lined with *sefarim*, and our drive to acquire and learn from *sefarim*, certainly biases us toward supposing that others will feel the same way. In fact, Rashi comments on the Mishna in *Pirkei Avot*, *kenei l’cha chaver*, that the word *chaver*, or friend, should be understood as *sefer*, since books are the best companions. Will current and future generations of learners see computer-learned texts as their companions? Will they hold the same reverence for their Kindles, e-readers, and virtual text collections as earlier generations held for *sefarim*?

## The Learner

Nicholas Carr, in his landmark book *The Shallows*, argued that technology is changing how our brains process information. In the past, Carr explains, we were scuba divers, interested and able to dive deeply into complex areas. Now, however, we have become jet skiers, skimming the surface. Research on the introduction of “older” technologies such as television had already documented decreases in children’s attention and imaginative skills (Taylor, 2012). Psychologists worry about further declines, as with the internet, “distraction is the norm, consistent attention is impossible,

imagination is unnecessary, and memory is inhibited” (Taylor, 2012).

Another concern in this age of connectivity is the lack of self-awareness regarding one’s own attainment of knowledge. It appears that with internet availability, the difference between what people think they know and what they actually know is often blurred. In a series of studies at Yale University, participants who had access to internet searches repeatedly reported having acquired more knowledge than they actually did (Fisher, Goddu, & Kiel, 2015). This false sense of knowledge attainment surprised the researchers and highlights the need to assess learners’ attainment of knowledge that is core to any discipline, but that may be even more critical when learning is via online modalities.

The impact of technology in this area may not be completely negative. There is some evidence that frequent use of internet search engines, while decreasing the memory of details, increases memory for how to locate information. Additionally, it may be that as our brains are required to retain fewer facts, they may be developing greater higher-order processing skills, such as contemplation, critical thinking, and problem solving (Taylor, 2012). These higher-order skills are particularly relevant for Jewish learning, which has never considered simple memorization as the end-goal of study.

That today’s learners are, to a large degree, technologically comfortable and competent, presents enormous opportunities for enriched learning facilitated by technological advances. Current concerns regarding technology transience (Muilenburg & Berge, 2015), that is, the rapidity

with which new technologies are introduced, presents a challenge for learners, and to an even larger degree, for teachers.

## The Teacher

The internet age challenges us to reconsider the very nature and definition of teaching. What can we teach when a world of information is available to students without the teacher’s interference? What do students need to learn when apps, websites, and Google searches provide all the needed information? With this challenge comes an opportunity to envision knowledge attainment in a much deeper way. With such ready access to content, teaching can become more about guiding students in manipulating content, thinking critically about it, and exercising discernment of available data. The ability to reflect, extract, and criticize — traits characteristic of true learners and scholars — can become the student’s natural manner of demonstrating understanding. In this new reality, teachers are actually more important than ever, notes Dr. Michael Patrick Lynch, professor of philosophy at the University of Connecticut. It is flesh-and-blood teachers alone who can guide students in thinking critically and evaluating web-accessed information.

It is not a new challenge that teachers must master both the content area they teach *and* the pedagogy that allows that content to be communicated to learners. In the current environment, teachers must also develop comfort with, and skill in, the application of technology. Educational initiatives and funding often focus on providing technology (Bennett & Oliver, 2011). But

Jewish law obligates honoring one’s teachers. The Gemara, *Kiddushin* 33a, notes that while one must honor all of one’s teachers, one must show greater honor toward one’s primary teacher (*rebbe muvhak*). Traditionally, the teacher-student relationship was formed inside the classroom or the study hall (beit midrash). However, since the proliferation of Jewish books (*sefarim*), a number of halachic authorities have entertained a broader definition of a teacher that extends beyond the walls of the beit midrash. For example, R. Yaakov Etlinger, *Binyan Tziyon* no. 83, notes that nowadays, when most of knowledge comes from *sefarim*, the laws relating to a *rebbe muvhak* do not apply. In a similar vein, R. Yehonatan Woliner, *Margenita Tava* no. 35, writes that we must honor the authors of *sefarim* that we learn from as if they were our teachers. Both of these authorities do not require the teacher and the student to have a live interaction in order to establish a teacher-student relationship.

### Torah To Go Editors

without skillful use by competent and creative educators, technology will fail learners. As Christensen, Johnson & Horn (2012) argue, computers have not yet altered the standard means in which education is delivered.

Teachers cannot be expected to integrate technology in ways that improve learning without proper preparation. Simply demonstrating a technological tool is insufficient (Muilenburg & Berge, 2015); rather technology integration is a complex skill and process in which teachers

will need on-going support. Such support may be afforded through built-in professional development and preparation time in public schools. In Jewish day schools, where time is always in short supply and Jewish studies teachers are often tasked with creating their own curricular materials, this can present a challenge.

There are Jewish studies teachers who are rising to the challenge. Azrieli students and alumni often share with us their innovative use of blogs, simulations, 3D printers, classroom clickers, and other tools to engage their students and deepen the learning. Such innovations not only connect students to their learning, but narrow the gap between teacher and student — technically and technologically, a generation apart.

The Piaseczna Rebbe, Rabbi Kalonymus Shapira (2011), an educator, scholar, and Chassidic Rebbe, in his work *Chovat Hatalmidim*, cites the Gemara (*Shabbat* 30b) which records the practice of Rabbah, who would begin his shiur with a comment to make his students laugh. The Shechinah rests only on those who are happy and Rabbah creates this happiness in his learners:

את המילתא דבדיחותא אמר מקודם כדי שיהיו בשמחה כי אין השכינה שורה אלא מתוך שמחה ... ולדורנו מרמזת הגמרא עוד איזה דרך להרב והמלמד, שכדי לרפא את פצע ההתרחקות שנעשה בין התלמיד להמלמד, צריך המלמד להשתדל לקנות את לב התלמיד ולשוב לקרבהו אליו.

*This Gemara is also offering a hint to the educators of our generation. In order to bridge the chasm that has opened between our children and their teachers, it is incumbent upon the teacher to make an effort to win the hearts of his students*

*so that they will want to become close to him.*

### **The Students' Obligation pg. 51**

Teachers who integrate technology certainly create a bridge to their students' world.

### **Conclusion**

Technology has changed, and will no doubt continue to change, how we learn and how we teach. It will challenge us, even as it opens worlds of knowledge and resources. It is clear that 21st century Jewish learners benefit from wedding their traditional text skills with competence in newer fields such as computer annotation and search engines. As we consider Jewish education and Jewish learners in this time of technological advancement, parents and educators can focus on the challenges. Or we can work to develop a generation of sophisticated consumers and responsible users of technology who are masters of their own learning. The words of the Piaseczna Rebbe are both relevant and timeless:

העיקר הוא להכניס בלבו דעה זו, שידע שהוא, הנער בעצמו הוא עיקר המחנך, לא קטן ונער הוא, רק נצר מטע ד' בכרם ישראל הוא, ועליו הטיל ד' חוב זה לגדל ולחנך נצר זה, את עצמו לעץ גדול עץ החיים ולעשותו לעבד ד' צדיק וגדול בתורה.

*The most important thing is to teach them that they are their own educators. They are not small children; rather, they are the seedlings that Hashem has planted in the vineyard of Klal Yisrael, and they alone bear the responsibility for their development into towering atzei chayim, trees of life — righteous and deeply learned servants of Hashem.*

### **The Students' Obligation pg. 35**

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# Online Learning and Talmud Torah

Without a doubt, the proliferation of technology has had a profound impact on our lives. Virtually every aspect of life has been changed by the spread of technology. We vacation differently now than we did merely 15 years ago, and we obtain information more rapidly and share it with a wider audience than we did in the not too distant past. We can and do communicate with geographically distant friends and acquaintances in a way that would have been unimaginable just a short time ago. Technology has left virtually no aspect of our lives unchanged, and unsurprisingly, the way we study Torah and disseminate our learning has similarly changed.

There are some who are uneasy with the changes to the way Torah is studied and taught. Their traditional mindset views the changes brought by technology — the study on a screen or with an iPad or laptop rather than a traditional Gemara — as negative. They note how the traditional methods of study produced exemplary *talmidei chachamim*, and there is no reason to change that which works. Moreover, they contend that new methods of study and teaching are likely to dilute the intensity, reduce the subtlety, and shallow the depths of the *yam haTalmud* (the sea of Talmud).



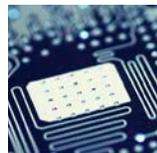
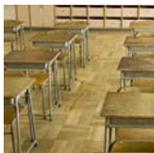
## Rabbi Ezra Y. Schwartz

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Of course technology is extremely broad, and to properly discuss its impact on *talmud Torah* (Torah study), one would have to chart technology in all of its forms. Such a discussion would certainly include the easy availability of some of the most unsavory materials that the internet provides, and the consequent damage both psychologically and spiritually that may come from this exposure. Some rightfully shy away from using technology to teach Torah out of concern that exposure to technology may lead to dangerous places. Others have taken a different approach. The internet is a reality that we must live with and not one that can be combated. The struggle for purity would exist whether or not Torah is placed online. Yeshiva University has supported the latter approach and consequently, a robust online home for Torah was created. In this vein, our focus will therefore not be on whether or not YUTorah.org and similar websites should exist, but on the impact that this sort of online audio and video learning has on the

way Torah is currently being studied and taught.

In assessing the impact of technology on the teaching of Torah, we must not ignore the potential shortcomings of this relatively new media. Even so, I am convinced that the positives far outweigh the negatives. The more I teach, the more I grow convinced that hindsight will judge technology as an overall advancement and enhancement of Torah. Technology has already exponentially increased both the quality and quantity of *talmud Torah*. I personally have *talmidim* (students) in far corners of the world, *talmidim* whom I am never likely to meet in person. A person can search any of a wide array of websites and locate thousands of *shiurim* on any given topic. He or she can be exposed to diverse teachers who present a multiplicity of perspectives. There are large numbers of women in particular who otherwise would not be exposed to high level *shiurim* and are now studying the depths of halacha because of YUTorah.



## TORAH STUDY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Special Symposium • Shavuot 5776



In describing Matan Torah, the verse (Shemot 20:15) states:

וְכָל הָעָם רָאוּ אֶת הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלְפִידִם  
וְאֶת קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר וְאֶת הַהָר עֹשֵׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם  
וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֵק.

*The whole nation saw the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the shofar and the mountain smoking. The nation saw and they trembled and stood from afar.*

How is it possible to see the sounds of the thunder? R. Chaim Tzanzer, *Divrei Chaim* to Yitro suggests that the reason why we normally can't see sounds is because there are too many other sensations we are feeling at the same time; we are distracted. At Matan Torah, the Jewish people reached the level of a prophet who is able to block everything else out and actually hear the sounds with the clarity as if actually seeing it. From this perspective, Matan Torah serves as the paradigm of distraction-free learning.

**Torah To Go Editors**

Additionally, beginners who may lack even the basic facility to navigate a text, any text, in any language, may still become proficient in intricate areas of halacha and philosophy. Students with learning disabilities, who are unable to process ordinary written texts, can grow into *lomdim* (advanced learners) based on technologically enhanced methods of transmission.

Of course, it is our responsibility to highlight a few of the challenges presented to us in dealing with online learning. We need to recognize where online learning falls short of the ideal set forth by Chazal and learn how to compensate for these shortfalls.

Too often, because of technology, live teachers are exchanged for virtual ones. Students may decide to skip class since the material is available online. Chazal (*Horiyos* 12a and *Eruvin* 13b) speak glowingly of the face-to-face interaction between teacher and student:

אמר להו רב משרשיא לבריה כי בעיתו מייעל ומיגמרי קמי רבייכו גרסו מתניתא ועלו לקמי רבייכו וכי יתביתו קמיה חזו לפומיה דכתיב והיו עיניך רואות את מוריך.

*R. Mesharshiya said to his son: when you want to study before your teachers, first prepare the teachings of the Mishna and then go to your teachers and when you sit, make sure you can see [the teacher's] mouth, as it states, your eyes should see your teachers.*

Too often our desire as rebbeim and teachers to post *shiurim* online and to meet the mandate of *he'emidu talmidim harbeh*, raise forth for yourself many students (*Avos* 1:1), comes at the cost of detracting from the face-to-face interaction that Chazal so clearly favor.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that the influence of technology has led

to a greater sense of distraction from the task at hand. We are all so worried about the email that just arrived or the ping we heard from our Facebook account that we do not completely focus on the text in front of us or even the person sitting next to us. This point is noted by Meiri in explaining why it is so important for the student to face the teacher:

ויהיה נותן עיניו ולבו לשמוע דברי הרב ולא יהיו עיניו ולבו תרים ומשוטטים הנה והנה.

*One should direct one's eyes and attention to listen to the words of the teacher. One's eyes should not be roaming here and there.*

Meiri notes that directly facing one's teacher helps avoid distraction.

Listening online, even when one is not multitasking, clearly provides greater opportunity for distraction. In this respect, *talmud Torah* presented online falls short of the ideal mentioned by Chazal.

Moreover, due to technology, halachic questions are answered not through direct conversation with a rav or posek, but through the sources provided by the Googler Rov. The sometimes unfortunate consequence of this is that nuances of difference between the case at hand and the case discussed in a particular shiur, or found in a particular online source, may go unnoticed. Additionally, the vast amount of information available online allows one to find a source that will confirm whatever position he or she is inclined to. This confirmation bias will undoubtedly lead to deciding every issue leniently (*lekula*) even when *kula* is not warranted.

Furthermore, the personal relationship that should bond teacher and student, rabbi and congregant, or even two peers grappling together to properly decipher a text can be lost.

This phenomenon is not unique to Torah. Interpersonal collaboration has decreased in all areas of life. However, it is of particular concern with respect to Torah. Arriving at the ultimate truth of *dvar Hashem* necessitates give and take, reworking and reformulating of an idea, to come to its correct understanding. On the positive side, however, the ready availability of halachic information online enables a questioner to approach a rav or posek armed with greater research and information. The depth of engagement with the sources and the genuine exchange of ideas can only lead to a genuine improvement in the quality of the psak issued.

The advent of technology has also meant that the pure study of text, the reading of material from beginning to end, is in too short supply. People can easily search for the quote they need and the passage they want to cite. The painstaking effort of deciphering an entire text, including the “boring parts,” is too rarely embarked upon. Technology has made finding sources all too easy. On the positive side, source sheets are much easier for teachers to put together and have a far more appealing look to them. The old-fashioned method of cutting with scissors and pasting with scotch tape is fortunately no longer needed. However, from the perspective of the learner, something is lost. The experience of plowing through material, even just reading through a large segment of text before arriving at the sought after source, is now in short supply. The older system helped in

acquiring the skill of how to read even that which does not interest him or her. It allowed for understanding the quote in its correct context. Although no one can deny the benefits of easy access to sources, nonetheless, something is lost. It is important to educate students to find a quote quickly, but then to spend the time to completely read the source in its entirety, understand its context, and decipher its true meaning.

There is another dimension of technology’s impact on *talmud Torah* that is worthy of our attention. The question we are dealing with is as much about technology as it is about the type of information that we digest. Because of technology, more and more audio and video information is processed. Even the written material available online is often significantly different from the written material found in books. The written word as found in books and journals (popular literature such as magazines are clearly in a different category) is most often carefully thought out. More often than not, the written word in books can be pregnant with meaning and convey subtlety and nuance in a way that is generally absent from the spoken venue. Even the written word online is very often not as precise and well-thought-out as the written word in books. Hence it can be somewhat troubling when online sources are cited in research and scholarly works. There is no real way to assess if the online source is a scholarly, well-thought-out exposition or a simple stream of consciousness. The

### The Scope of Online Torah

On any given month on the Marcos and Adina Katz YUTorah.org website there are:

- 140,000 visits to learn Torah, over a third on the go with mobile devices, to choose from over 115,000 shiurim and 10,000 articles from over 2,000 teachers and authors;
- Visitors from 128 countries around the world, from 6 continents;
- 1,500 shiurim and articles uploaded by over 500 volunteers;
- Shiurim being uploaded from multiple YU campuses, high schools, Yeshivot and Seminaries, and synagogues from across North America and Israel.

explosion of information, to a certain extent, equalizes all sources, but in reality they are not all equal.

When comparing the written word as found in books with the oral word found in online *shiurim*, the contrast is even more extreme. Of course, the spoken word can also be profoundly expressive and laden with content. In theory, the variations of tone can make the spoken word even more expressive than the written word. As Maharsha on the aforementioned Gemara in *Horiyos* notes, the ideal method of Torah study, sitting in front of one’s teacher, allows one to pick up on facial gestures and subtle cues



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that can convey much information. Audio and video *shiurim* found online fall miles short of the precision and subtlety presented in written Torah form. They do not allow the student to pick up on the subtleties of gesture that are found in direct face-to-face transmission and which can transmit so much meaning.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Online *shiurim* almost always contain off-the-cuff remarks, irrelevant comments and unnecessary verbiage. These are absent from the written word and most often they are not of particular consequence. However, occasionally there is a stray remark found in an online shiur that may be insensitive to others or downright hurtful. An insensitive comment may be due to the speaker struggling for the right way to express an idea and misspeaking, or it may be the function of an inside comment that is totally appropriate for the live audience but insensitive to the broader online audience. Furthermore, the spread of online learning not only creates new contexts for off-the-cuff comments

or inside jokes to become insensitive, it also helps disseminate them. In previous times, a local shiur given in one's shul or classroom may have been genuinely local. Today, however, when Torah is spread to the far corners of the world, the possibility exists for insensitive remarks to be spread far beyond the confines of the local classroom and thereby hurt others and potentially cause a massive chilul Hashem. The admonition of Chazal, *chachamim hizaharu bidivreichem* — scholars, be careful with your words (*Avos* 1:11), must be conscientiously heeded. Teachers and rebbeim must formulate ideas with proper nuance and subtlety and articulate them clearly so that there can be no misunderstanding on the part of the students. They must be concerned with mistakes in the interpretation of halacha as the simple understanding of the Mishna implies, or mistakes in ideology as the Rambam in *Peirush haMishna* to that Mishna notes. However, there must also be an awareness that the audience to whom one is speaking extends far beyond the confines of one's local classroom.

Inappropriate comments were never acceptable, even if they were at times uttered. In our global world we must be even more careful, since they can be all the more damaging.

Despite all the challenges that technology presents, our approach must in no way lead towards a Luddite philosophy. Technology's impact on Talmud Torah is already and will continue to be overall very positive and will ultimately prove to be a great force in *harbatzas haTorah*. Let us not make the same mistake as the medieval monks who opposed the printing press. With all of the shortcomings and all the areas of potential concern, we must not lose sight of the incredible potential of technology to enhance limud hatorah. Our challenge is to find the right balance where technology doesn't replace traditional models of learning, but rather enhances and complements them. By doing so, we can see technology as our tool in fulfilling the Messianic notion of *ki malah ha'aretz de'ah es Hashem*, the land will be filled with knowledge of God (*Yeshayahu* 11:9).



# Something and Nothing

On the first day of Shavuot, we read the description of Matan Torah where Hashem speaks to the entire nation of Bnei Yisrael and tells them of the *Aseres Hadibros*, the Ten Commandments. Rashi explains that the Ten Commandments include the entire Torah. The Jewish people accepted the whole Torah at Har Sinai, even though they only heard the Ten Commandments. The rest of the Torah was given to them during their 40 years in the desert. By accepting the Ten Commandments, Bnei Yisrael essentially accepted the entire Torah.

*Shem Mishmuel, Yisro 5671*, cites the Gemara, *Shabbos 86b*, that records a dispute as to the exact date of the giving of the Torah. All opinions agree, however, that Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people on the day of Shabbos. We mention in our Shabbos prayers that Moshe received the *luchos* on Shabbos. Apparently this was an important part of Matan Torah. Why was the Torah supposed to be given on Shabbos?

The verse (Shemos 19:20) tells us that Hashem came down (*vayered*) on Har Sinai to teach the Ten Commandments. *Vayered* can't be taken literally. God doesn't have



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Compiled by Rabbi Tani Prero

a body. Motion is foreign to Him. He is everywhere. Targum Onkelos translates *vayered* not as motion, but as a revelation, *v'isgeli*. According to the Targum, the Almighty appeared at Sinai. What does this mean?

## Inspiration from Above and Below

In truth, the world is filled with God's glory — *M'lo chol ha'aretz k'vodo* (Yeshayahu 6:3). Hashem is found everywhere. But there is a barrier in our perception of Him. We don't see Him everywhere. Our perception is weak. If a blind person is in a room with beautiful paintings, he won't see them because his perception is limited. A person who can see but is wearing a blindfold won't be able to see either. Hashem's presence is everywhere. We should be able to see it because we are spiritual beings. But there is something blocking our sensitivity to this perception. This is

why we think God is hidden. At Har Sinai, Hashem removed the blindfolds that stop the human spirit from seeing Him. God let Himself be perceived. This is what the Targum means — *v'isgeli* — God revealed Himself.

Chassidus teaches a basic rule of the spiritual world about the interplay between man and God. In the human experience, we oscillate between perception and revelation of Hashem. Surprisingly, Hashem does not control this. Rather it is controlled by people. He would reveal Himself, but we are the ones who don the blindfolds. The prophet said, "*Avonoseichem hayu mavdilim beineichem u'vein Elokeichem* — your sins separate you from your Lord" (Yeshayahu 59:2). Our own failings prevent us from seeing the glory of Hashem. He would allow Himself to be seen if only we would remove our masks.

This human influence on the spiritual world is called *isarusa d'l'tata*, the movement from below. Human beings create the beginning of the movement. Then Hashem responds with an *isarusa d'l'eila*, a movement from above.

This is like two spouses who had a fight. One of them will have to make the first move toward reconciliation, either the husband or the wife. According to Chassidus, in our

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relationship with Hashem, we the people have to make that first move. In halacha, the effectiveness of teshuva also begins from our side, from below. The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:2) describes this as if Hashem says to us: Open for me the tiniest crack in your iron armor, which is blinding you and blocking you from me, and I will widen this crack to be as wide as the grand entrance to a huge hall. People must make that first move, then Hashem responds with much more than what people can do themselves. The *isarusa d'l'tata* is the first move. It makes the first crack in the wall that separates us from our Father in Heaven. After we make the first move, Hashem will make the rest of the wall crumble.

מים עמקים עצה בלב איש ואיש תבונה  
ידלקנה.

*Deep waters are the thoughts of man's heart and a wise man will draw them out.*

#### **Mishlei 20:5**

*Chovos Halevavos*, in his introduction, explains that underground there is a lot of water, which can nurture many people as well as animals and plants. The only problem is that it's not easily accessible. We have to dig deep to find it. Many people have a feeling that they don't have a spiritual capability. This is a mistake. The human being has an amazingly deep reservoir of spirituality. Even if it is covered, it is still there under the surface. This is like an underground well, waiting to be tapped to release its voluminous waters. In the human soul there is a

deep *eitza b'lev ish*, a spiritual wisdom, waiting to be tapped. This is where the *isarusa d'l'tata* comes in. You crack open the passage for those deep waters, and Hashem will widen that crack for you, giving you access to a whole world of spirituality.

As a rebbe in a yeshiva, I see an amazing amount of spirituality sitting in the Jewish soul. We should not write off people as impossible to reach. *Mayim amukim, eitza b'lev ish*. The underground water is a tremendous reservoir below the surface. Once you crack that surface, it is revealed. Each person himself has the ability to uncover his latent spirituality. We must believe that we are able to do this.

I have seen people make such great changes in their lives. They did not discover something new. The power to change and grow already exists deep inside of us. The ability to connect to our Creator is a latent ability within us. *Isarusa d'l'tata* is the first step required to evoke the *isarusa d'leila* when Hashem comes down in response to us.

#### **Shabbos: The Best Day to Access Your Spiritual Reservoir**

The best day of the week to open our spiritual reservoir is Shabbos. Shabbos is a day dedicated completely to God. We completely abandon our weekday focus and burdens. On Shabbos we don't discuss our financial needs and plans. We don't

discuss *divrei chol*, sports, business, and recreation. It is a day dedicated to prayer and study of Torah. It is a day when families come together. It is a beautiful, holy day.

The day of Shabbos itself supports the *isarusa d'l'tata*. Even this movement from below has a secret guiding hand from above. Hashem gives us the day of Shabbos, a special day to rest from the wearisome, stale atmosphere of the six days of the week. We can find our refuge and true selves on the holy day of Shabbos. It gives us the ability to open up and make the first move toward the Almighty.

The day comes with so much revelation and holiness. The Jew begins the process with *isarusa d'l'tata* and Hashem continues with *isarusa d'leila*. Shabbos is the day of Matan Torah, because Shabbos is the day on which we are ready to make the first move toward Hashem. On Shabbos we connect to Him — and that's why He connects to us.

#### **Yesh and Ayin, To Be or Not To Be?**

*Shem Mishmuel* explains a great concept, the problem of *yesh* and *ayin*, existence and nonexistence. The question is, do I really exist, am I real, or is the only true existence Hashem? After all, what am I in contrast to Him? *Shem Mishmuel* explains the Chassidic understanding of the philosophical issue of man's worth in the shadow of God.



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Is Adam something, *yesh*, or nothing, *ayin*? Chassidus, and Torah in general, take a dialectical approach to address this issue. On the one hand, man is great. People are like angels, sometimes even greater than angels. The whole world is created for people. The heavens, sun, moon, and stars were all created for man to be able to serve God. God spent six days preparing a gorgeous hotel that we call earth. People are great, so Hashem wanted the world to be great for them. People are the goal and crown of all of creation.

On the other hand, our importance fades when contrasted with the Creator of it all. When faced with God, man seems to be practically worthless. As David wrote in Tehillim 8, “What is man that you pay attention to him?” Our planet Earth is not even a speck in the universe. The stars appear to us as mere specks of light in the skies, but we know how big they really are. Someone standing on a planet in another galaxy would barely see our sun, and certainly would never see Earth. The Milky Way itself is a relatively small galaxy compared to others. Our sun is a relatively small star, and our planet is relatively small in comparison to the rest of the solar system. On our planet, we humans are smaller than the oceans and the mountains, the elephants, whales and trees and many other beings. When compared to Hashem’s vastness and infinity, we are truly nothing.

On the one hand, Adam and Chava are direct creations of God and the whole world is created to serve them. On the other hand, they are meaningless and infinitesimal.

## Yesh and Ayin in Our Avodas Hashem

In Chassidus, there are two ways that we serve Hashem. One way is by being a *yesh*, being something with tremendous spiritual energy. We have great worth. We must serve Hashem with our powers and strengths. On the other hand, there is a service of the Almighty through *bitul hayesh*, by being an *ayin*, a nothing, and losing yourself in the vastness of Hashem’s infinite being. When we lose ourselves in Him, He then takes us as *ayin*.

This is a very high level of service of Hashem. This is the level of Avraham, who said (Bereishis 18:27) *anochi afar va’eifer*, “I am nothing but dust.” Hashem calls Avraham *ohavi*, my beloved (Yeshayahu 41:8). Moshe Rabbeinu also said (Shemos 16:7) *v’nachnu ma*, “Who are Aharon and I, we are nothing,” just part of God’s reality, which is everything in this world. According to Chassidus, this is a higher level of serving Hashem.

All of us live this dialectic. We know we have to do great things to observe Torah and mitzvos. We have to use our skills and abilities to achieve greatness. We must face challenges and overcome them. We are *yesh*. We have an identity; we have responsibility to use our power. We must be active, get up and conquer the world for God’s sake and the Torah’s sake and to make this world a better place. Each person has his unique responsibility that he must contribute to the world. This is all a function of *yesh*. We are more than anything else God created. *Vatchesreihu me’at me’elokim*, we are just a little lower than God (Tehillim 8:6). He charged us to make this world a better place. We must help the poor, make the

world a place of spirituality. We have tremendous power to achieve, and we have great responsibility that comes with the power.

There is a different way of serving Hashem, as *ayin*. The thought process of *ayin* is somewhat different. I will let Hashem take over, I am too weak. If I try too much it is audacious. I will give myself to the Master of the Universe and let Him take me wherever He wants. This is the *mida* of Avraham *ohavi*, who said “I am nothing but dust.” This is also the *mida* of Moshe, who said *v’nachnu ma*. This was also the *mida* of David Hamelech, who said *ani tola’as v’lo ish*, “I am [insignificant as a] worm.” (Tehillim 22:7) Hashem shelters me and protects me.

This is how Hashem treated Bnei Yisrael when He took us out of Mitzrayim. Hashem told us before He gave us the Torah:

אַתָּם רֵאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשֶׁא  
אַתְּכֶם עַל כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבֵא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי.

*You saw what I did in Egypt, I carried you on the wings of eagles and I brought you to Me.*

### Shemos 19:4

Hashem took Bnei Yisrael on clouds of glory to carry them to Sinai to receive the Torah. Still today, we are riding on His wings. We are nothing, like little children clinging on to our mother’s bosom, as the verse in Tehillim (131:2) says, *k’gamul alei imo*. Like a baby who completely identifies and clings to his mother, we cling to Hashem, our father and mother. From this perspective, the nothingness of a human being is his greatness because it means he has a complete connection with Hashem.

We are each involved in this paradox between *yesh* and *ayin*. We are powerful and yet we are helpless, we are mature adults and at the same time helpless babies. We confront this paradox all the time. There are things that we should do, and there are things that are beyond our ability to control. We live with this paradox all the time. We have to work to get our jobs done, and we must be willing to step back to let Hashem finish the work sometimes. We need to be humble at times.

## Torah and *Yesh* and *Ayin*

Within Torah as well there is a struggle between the *yesh* and *ayin*, between the me and the not me. Hashem gave us the Torah, and gave us the ability to study and understand it. He even gave us the power to make decisions about Torah, the power to implement the Torah. This starts with the *talmid chacham* who interprets *Torah lishma* as his mind sees it. It is as if He says, “My dear Jewish children, take the Torah and use it. It is yours.” The Gemara says *Torah dilei*, the Torah of a *talmid chacham* is his own (*Kiddushin* 32b). This is why he can forgive his *kavod* (honor) as a *talmid chacham*. He is a partner in Torah with Hashem Himself. The oral Torah was given to the scholars of Israel to interpret and to try to understand what God meant. The Gemara says that that Hashem said “*nitzchuni banai* — My children defeated me,” when the rabbis overruled a heavenly voice. “Now that My children have made a decision about halacha, I have to understand as My children have explained,” concedes Hashem.

On other hand, the midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:7) says that if someone wants to merit receiving

the Torah in its fullest sense, he must make himself like a desert. A desert has nothing, no trees nor flowers. A person who wants to gain Torah must not be interested in a fat bank account, not interested in luxuries. He is like a desert, which doesn't even have rain. There's nothing there but sand and dust. Hashem gave it to us and gave us power to explain and develop it. As special and great as we are, to receive Hashem's special incredible Torah, we must understand still that a person is nothing. Moshe was the most humble of all people. This is why he was *zoche* to Torah. Humble people are the greatest Torah scholars, and the greatest of the Jews.

My *rebbe* Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l was so humble. My *rebbe muvhak* Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l was also exceedingly humble. These two great giants always had time to answer even the most elementary questions of a young student. They made themselves like a midbar. They were able to say “I don't know. I spent 75 years studying Torah, I'm a genius and I still say I don't know.” This is the greatness of *gedolei Yisrael*. They know the secret of being like a desert and of losing oneself in the vastness of the Torah. The Torah is the *daas* of Hashem, expressed in this way. A person must make his ego null and void to truly merit Torah knowledge.

We don't learn the Torah with close up personal interest. We must approach it with the question: What is Hashem teaching me? We lose ourselves in His values, goals and teachings.

## Conclusion

Someone who wants to be a great student in Torah must recognize his

own abilities. He cannot say I have limited skills or abilities. *Mayim amukim eitza b'lev ish*. We don't know the extent of our abilities. I am always surprised as a teacher to see how many students become great in Torah. Their abilities lie untapped under the surface. Once tapped they gush forth like fountains of water. These are the abilities planted deep within every Jewish person

Today in Israel we see Jewish children gushing with Torah. Children age 7 or 8 know whole *sforim* of *chumash* by heart, and *mishnayos* too. It is *mayim amukim eitza b'lev ish*. Now this potential is being tapped in front of our very eyes.

At the same time, we must realize that we are dust at the feet of our Torah teachers. It is important to let the Torah teacher take you on his wings up to the Torah. It is important to be humble and not a *baal gaavah*. The Torah does not like haughtiness. Like water, the Torah goes down to the lowest point. Torah seeks those who are humble.

We Jews are privileged to have received the Torah from God. We received this lesson of being at the same time both something and nothing, *isarusa d'l'tata*, our actions when we act as a *yesh*, and *isarusa d'l'eila*, Hashem's actions, and we are *ayin*. God responds to us from Infinity to take away the mask that we ourselves have put over our own eyes.

Let us hope and pray that on Shavuot, we study, learn, live and receive the Torah. May we be *zoche* to know when we are something and when we are nothing, how to be humble and great at the same time!

# Shavuot: The God-Given and the Man-Made

Sometimes we can find the big ideas in small details. One such detail is that Shavuot is not assigned a specific calendar day by the Torah. Its calendrical date in Sivan is not determined by when Rosh Chodesh Sivan is declared, but simply by counting 50 days from the second night of Pesach. Therefore, the Talmud (*Rosh HaShanah* 6b) notes that if both Nisan and Iyyar are 29 days long, Shavuot will fall on the seventh of the month of Sivan. If both are 30 days, Shavuot will fall on the fifth, and if one month is 29 and the other 30, Shavuot will fall on the sixth (as it does according to our current calendar). Shavuot's unfixed date is not merely a calendrical quirk, however, but a function of a big idea: the essence of the holiday of Shavuot as the day when we received both the *Torah she-be-ketav* (Written Torah) and the *Torah she-be-al peh* (Oral Torah).

## Shabbat and Mo'ed

At the end of *Parashat Emor*, there is a special section known as *Parashat Ha-Mo'adot* (*Megilah* 30b), which introduces the cycle of the festivals of the year. Before discussing the festivals, however, the Torah begins with a short review of the commandment to observe Shabbat:

א וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ

## Rabbi Moshe Schapiro

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אַתֶּם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲלֵהֶם הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי: ג שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ כָּל מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שַׁבָּת הוּא לָהּ בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֵי־כֵם:

*Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals — that you are to designate as holy convocations — these are My appointed festivals. For six days, labor may be done, and the seventh is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your dwelling places.*

### Vayikra 23:1-3

Rashi asks why Shabbat appears here in conjunction with the *Parashat Ha-Mo'adot* and he answers:

ללמדך שכל המחלל את המועדות מעלין עליו כאלו חלל את השבתות וכל המקיים את המועדות מעלין עליו כאלו קיים את השבתות. *Anyone who violates the festivals, we consider it as if he violated the Sabbath, and anyone who upholds the festivals, we consider it as if he upheld the Sabbath.*

Rashi's answer is perplexing. The punishment for the violation of Shabbat is far more severe than the punishment for violating any of

the festivals. Shabbat and *mo'ed* are not equivalent and, at least on the surface, appear to be unconnected. Why should the violation of a festival interfere in any way with a person's observance of Shabbat?

The Talmud (*Beitzah* 17a) articulates a fundamental distinction between Shabbat and the *yamim tovim*. Shabbat is "*mikdesha ve-kayyama*" — "sanctified and confirmed," meaning it is a reality set by God. Mankind does not determine when Shabbat falls out. However, *yom tov* is dependent on us. The *beit din* determines and declares when Rosh Chodesh is (*kiddush ha-chodesh*), thereby establishing when *yom tov* will fall that month. [Even today, our current, fixed calendar represents the formalization of the *kiddush beit din* process]. This distinction expresses itself in the liturgy. The middle blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei* for Shabbat ends with the words "*mekadesh ha-Shabbat*" — "He who sanctifies the Sabbath" — because it is God alone who establishes the Sabbath. However, on *yom tov* we conclude the blessing "*mekadesh Yisrael ve-ha-*

*zemanim*” — “He who sanctifies Israel and the festivals” — because it is through Israel that the festivals come to be sanctified. The *Ohr Ha-Chaim* (Vayikra 23:2) points out that the opening verses of *Parashat Ha-Mo’adot* hint at this distinction. Regarding Shabbat, the Torah says, “Hashem’s appointed festivals, that you are to designate as holy convocations — these are My appointed festivals.” The Torah repeats “these are My appointed festivals” to emphasize that it is God alone who establishes the Sabbath, and we cannot choose to make the day of rest on any other day. However, after speaking about Shabbat and before listing off each individual yom tov, the Torah repeats: “These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, the holy convocations which you shall designate in their appropriate time” (23:4), to emphasize that it is Klal Yisrael who establishes the festivals.

### **The Shabbat/Yom Tov Analogy to Torah**

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook, in his commentary to the siddur (*Olat Reiyah, Kiddush Leil Shabbat*), draws a fascinating analogy between Shabbat and yom tov on the one hand, and the Torah on the other. Just as Shabbat is established by God, fixed and unchangeable, so

too the *Torah she-be-ketav* was given to Klal Yisrael by Hashem in fixed form, and we cannot change one single letter or verse. However, just as yom tov depends upon the Jewish people’s input — namely, that it is only through an act of *beit din* that the *yamim tovim* take effect — so too Hashem gave to Klal Yisrael a second Torah — the *Torah she-be-al peh*, which allows for, requires, and indeed only attains its purpose through human input and endeavor.<sup>1</sup> Each generation’s Torah sages must debate and discuss, decide, interpret, and formulate new laws, understandings, and concepts that become an intrinsic part of the Torah itself. This analogy also leads us to an important conclusion about the relationship between Shabbat and yom tov. Just as the Written Torah serves as the source and basis of the Oral Torah, and the Oral Torah interprets and applies the laws of the Written Torah, so, too, the Sabbath is the origin and source of the *yamim tovim*, and they in turn develop the themes of the Sabbath itself. When we proclaim, in the *kiddush* for Friday night, that Shabbat is *yom techilah le-mikra’ei kodesh* — the first of the holy convocations — we do not mean merely that it appears in the beginning of the text of *Parashat Ha-Mo’adot*. Rather, we mean that the *mo’adot* draw their holiness from Shabbat and in turn develop and

mold the sanctity of Shabbat, much the same way in which the Oral Torah draws its significance from and interprets the Written Torah.

We may understand Rav Kook’s terse comments in light of a fascinating observation by Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (commentary to Vayikra 23:3):

*The commandment of the Sabbath is mentioned repeatedly in the Torah, each time with reference to a different aspect of Jewish life, of which the Sabbath is the principal foundation... the Sabbath is the starting point and the climax of all the holy days; the Sabbath is their basis and should find its realization in them.*

The Torah speaks about Shabbat in many contexts, each with a different emphasis. Leaving aside Shavuot, which will be addressed at greater length in the next section, we can quickly illustrate Rav Hirsch’s assertion. Shabbat’s most fundamental message, found in both the second chapter of Bereshit and the Ten Commandments (Shemot 20:11), that God is the Creator and King of the universe, is highlighted on Rosh HaShanah. Shabbat as a sign of the covenant between Hashem and Klal Yisrael (Shemot 31:12-18) is reflected on Yom Kippur, a day that celebrates the unique, intimate relationship between God and the Jewish people. Shabbat is connected to the idea of faith in God’s role as provider and protector

One who violates yom tov is cutting short the impact of Shabbat, denigrating its spiritual message and rendering it irrelevant and impotent. In that sense the yom tov violator is violating the Sabbath itself.



in the context of the story of the Manna (Shemot 16), and the holiday of Sukkot underscores this theme. Finally, Shabbat is associated with the events of the Exodus (Devarim 5:15), and underscores the themes of human freedom and compassion (Shemot 23:12), which are central to the celebration of Pesach. Shabbat encompasses many different themes and motifs, each of which should inform our weekly experience of the Sabbath. However, it is impossible to give each theme its due every week when there are so many competing, equally important ideas. While the holidays themselves are also multihued and complex, they each emphasize a particular aspect of the Sabbath.

The relationship between the festivals and the Sabbath, understood through the analogy to the Written and Oral Torah, sheds light on Rashi's startling assertion in Vayikra 23 that one who violates the festivals is considered in violation of the Sabbath. The yamim tovim serve to deepen and expand the lessons and messages of the Sabbath just as the Oral Torah deepens and expands the laws and principles of the Written Torah. If one rejects the Oral Torah, he renders the Written Torah a "dead" document, one that cannot be applied to ever-changing circumstances and cannot be relevant to the complexities of real life. So too, one who violates yom tov is cutting short the impact of Shabbat, denigrating its spiritual message and rendering it irrelevant and impotent. In that sense the yom tov violator is violating the Sabbath itself.

## Shabbat and Shavuot

The holiday of Shavuot also addresses a particular theme of Shabbat, namely, Matan Torah. However,

this connection needs explication as Matan Torah is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah with regard to either Shabbat or Shavuot. There is no direct scriptural evidence that the Torah was given on Shabbat, and yet the Talmud (*Shabbat* 86b) makes this an axiom: "And everyone agrees that on Shabbat, the Torah was given to Israel." Chazal formulated the text of the liturgy for Shabbat morning to stress the connection between the Sabbath and the giving of the Torah:

ישמח משה במתנת חלקו. כי עבד נאמן  
קראת לו. כליל תפארת בראשו נתת. בעמוד  
לפניך על הר סיני. ושני לחות אבנים הוריד  
בידו. וכתוב בהם שמירת שבת.

*Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion; that you called him a faithful servant. You placed a crown of splendor upon his head when he stood before You on Mount Sinai. He brought down two stone tablets in his hand, on which was inscribed the observance of the Sabbath.*

Similarly, in the Written Torah, Shavuot is called "the Festival of the Harvest" (Shemot 23:16) and "the Festival of Weeks" (Shemot 34:22 and Devarim 16:10), but no mention is made of Shavuot as a celebration of the giving of the Torah. Of course, a simple calculation based on the chronological information given in the nineteenth chapter of Shemot, which introduces the revelation at Sinai, puts the date of Matan Torah approximately around Shavuot. But ultimately, it is only through the Oral Tradition, stated clearly in the Talmud (*Pesachim* 68b), that we know that Shavuot is "the day upon which the Torah was given." Once again, the Sages fixed this association in the liturgy, in which Shavuot is called *zeman Matan Toratenu*.<sup>2</sup> Just as each of the other holidays comes to emphasize a different feature of Shabbat, Shavuot

focuses on the aspect of Shabbat that relates to Matan Torah.

As faithful bearers of the tradition, we believe that the Torah that was given on that Shabbat-Shavuot many thousands of years ago was a two-part Torah comprised of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.<sup>3</sup> Incorporating Rav Kook's analogy that Shabbat is likened to *Torah she-be-ketav* and yom tov to *Torah she-be-al peh*, two further fascinating points emerge. First, while Shabbat is fundamentally sanctified by God, just as the complete text of the Written Torah was given by God, there is also an aspect of Shabbat that reflects the human input associated with *Torah she-be-al peh*. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (*Shiurim Le-Zecher Abba Mari z"l*, v.2 *Kiddush Ke-Mekadesh Ha-Shabbat*) writes that the fact that Shabbat was included with the rest of the festivals in *Parashat Ha-Mo'adot* means, not only that

A number of reasons are given as to why Megillat Rut is read on Shavuot. One suggestion (see R. Yehuda Leib Maimon's *Chagim UMoadim* pp. 271-272) is that Megillat Rut is a symbol of the Oral Tradition. While the Torah (Devarim 23:4) prohibits Moabites from marrying into the Jewish people, our rabbis (*Yevamot* 77a) teach us that this is only true of Moabite men, not Moabite women. By reading the megillah on Shavuot, including the last few verses, that state explicitly that King David was a product of the marriage of Boaz and Rut, we are affirming our belief in the Oral Tradition. The Oral Tradition that allowed Boaz to marry Rut, against the simple meaning of the text, is an equal partner with the Torah text and both were given together at Matan Torah.

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the festivals draw their sanctity from Shabbat, but that Shabbat itself can be likened to the sanctity of the festivals. The mitzvah of kiddush on Shabbat, based on the verse “*Zachor et yom ha-Shabbat le-kadesh*” — “Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it” — instructs us that by making kiddush on Friday night we are not merely acknowledging the sanctity of the Sabbath, but superimposing an additional layer of holiness onto the God-given Sabbath. Ramban (Shemot 20:8) compares making kiddush on Shabbat to the act of *beit din* in sanctifying the new moon or the Yovel year. It is for this reason, for instance, that the Talmud (*Pesachim* 105b) conceptualizes kiddush and *havdalah* as “bringing in the day” and “bringing out the day” respectively, because while the beginning and end of Shabbat are ostensibly simply a function of when it gets dark, there is an aspect of the Sabbath’s sanctity that we create and dissolve through kiddush and *havdalah*.<sup>4</sup>

The holiday of Shavuot also contains within it these two forms of sanctity: the God-given and the man-made. R. Mordechai Yehudah Leib Zaks (*Milei de-Mordechai, Ve-Zot Ha-Berachah*) observes that while Shavuot is a *yom tov* and therefore can be considered to be established by the *beit din*, unlike Shabbat which is a fact of the creation as God established it, Shavuot can also be seen from the perspective of a Shabbat-like, God-given day. We began with the observation that Shavuot can fall either on the fifth, sixth or seventh of the month of Sivan depending on the lengths of the months of Nisan and Iyyar. Usually, a holiday can fall only on two possible days depending on when the *beit din* declares the new moon for that month. However, Shavuot’s calendrical date in Sivan

does not directly relate to when Rosh Chodesh Sivan is declared. Shavuot is always 50 days from the second night of Pesach. Its observance is fixed like the Sabbath; its calendar day in Sivan is incidental. Like most festivals, Shavuot does depend in an indirect, removed sense upon the *beit din*’s determination of the month of Nisan and the holiday of Pesach, but it is also a fixed day like the Sabbath. R. Zaks speculates that this dual aspect of Shavuot corresponds to the fact that both the Written and Oral Torah were given on Shavuot and, therefore, the holiday’s sanctity reflects both elements: the God-given and the man-made.

## The Greatest Gift

The holiday of Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah, which comprises both the God-given Written Torah and man-developed Oral Torah. As such, it exhibits two forms of sanctity: one God-given and Shabbat-like and the other man-made and *yom tov*-like. Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap (*Mei Marom, Terumah* 66) utilizes the God-given/man-made dichotomy to instruct us on how to better ourselves. The world was created by Hashem; its laws of nature set at the time of creation by God’s will, but humanity was commanded to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Bereshit 1:28). This exhortation is a challenge to develop the physical world, but more importantly to perfect it spiritually. We must respect and protect God’s world and God’s Torah, but at the same time it is the will of God that we also develop and transform them. Similarly, we must recognize and appreciate the God-given talents and strengths that we possess, but we must utilize them to perfect ourselves by setting and

attaining ascending spiritual goals. The message that we must take with us from the *yom tov* of Shavuot is that we have been given great gifts and we must make them even greater. It is the permission and challenge to do so that is the greatest gift of all.

## Notes

1. Obviously, the Oral Torah is God-given, just as, ultimately, the *yamim tovim* only exist because of God’s commandment, but both are determined and controlled by human involvement.
2. See *Magen Avraham* in his opening comments to *Orach Chaim* 494, who questions why we refer to Shavuot as *zeman Matan Toratenu* in the liturgy, since in our fixed calendar Shavuot always falls on the sixth of Sivan, but the halakhah follows the opinion in *Shabbat* 86b that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan. R. Yosef Dov Ha-Levi Soloveitchik (*Beit Ha-Levi, Yitro*) suggests a profound answer. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 87a) explains that the rabbi who says that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan maintains that it should have been given on the sixth, but that Moshe added an extra day of preparation of his own accord and Hashem subsequently concurred. In essence, we celebrate Shavuot on the sixth of Sivan, the day when the power of *Torah she-be-al peh* was confirmed by God in the hands of the Jewish people. While the official day of *Matan Torah* may have been the seventh, the confirmation of the power of Torah was already accomplished on the sixth by God’s acquiescence to Moshe’s addition, and so we can confidently refer to it as *zeman Matan Toratenu*.
3. See the beginning of Rambam’s introduction to his *Perush Ha-Mishnah*.
4. See Rav Herschel Schachter, *Ginat Egoz* 4, who fine-tunes the distinction between *beit din*’s power to create the fundamental sanctity of the *yamim tovim* and the power of individuals to superimpose sanctity onto an already existing holy day. We could suggest that these two powers may reflect two aspects of *Torah she-be-al peh*. The Sages have the power both to create new rules that are fundamentally rabbinic in nature (*gezerot* and *takkanot*), as well as to interpret and formulate preexisting laws that are fundamentally biblical in nature (*middot she-ha-Torah nidreshet ba-hen*).



# A Shavuot Night Learning Activity

Potluck learning is a fun, interactive way for everyone to have a voice in group learning. Each participant is able to contribute by bringing and teaching sources that they have chosen.

There are two ways for this activity to take place:

1. Decide on a theme and share it with all the group members prior to the group's gathering to learn together. Each person then prepares one piece of learning; a section of Torah, a passage of Gemara, a story, a quote, or any other idea, and teaches it to the rest of the group. The group then discusses the theme in the context of the sources that were brought.

2. Decide on a theme and prepare a collection of different sources relating to the theme. Each person in the group chooses a source (or they can be assigned at random) to read privately and then teaches it to the group.

For this program, we chose option 2, and have also included questions to help facilitate the conversation. The theme of the learning is Matan Torah. For this broad theme, we purposely chose different types of sources. This enables participants to interpret the topic however they wish, and then bring in sources that they feel relate. These sources do not need to be presented in any particular order.

This activity is a great way to actively participate in learning on Shavuot night or for a family to have a meaningful conversation at the yom tov table.

Enjoy your learning!



Aliza Abrams Konig

Director of Student Life and Jewish Service Learning, Beren Campus



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## 1) Beit HaLevi, Parashat Yitro

והנה המלאכים ביקשו שיתנו להם התורה ... ומשה רבינו נצחם ועיקר הנצחון היה במה שהמלאכים אינם יכולים לקיים מצות שבגוף ומש"ה בעצרת צריך לקיים המצוה דלכם מה שאין המלאכים יכולים לקיימה ... וזהו הענין שנוהגין בעצרת לאכול מאכל חלב, ועיקר הכוונה בזה דביו"ט מצוה לאכול בשר ... ובעצרת אוכלין גם חלב מקודם כדי לקיים ההבדל והזריזות שיש בין אוכל חלב לבשר והוא הקינוח והדחת הפה כדי לקיים מצוה שבאכילה, ועיין במדרש תהלים (מזמור ח) על פסוק מפי עוללים ויונקים יסדת עוז וע"ש שמסדר הויכוח של המלאכים על נתינת התורה ולבסוף אמר וז"ל אמר הקב"ה והלא אתם כשירדתם אצל אברהם אכלתם בשר בחלב ... ותינוק שלהם כשבא מבית הסופר ואמו נותנת לו פת ובשר וחלב ואומר היום לימדני רבי לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו ... ומכאן יצא המנהג לאכול חלב כדי להראות הזריזות וההרחקה שבין אכילה זו לאכילת הבשר ולא כמו שעשו המלאכים שאכלו תיכף זה אחר זה.

*The angels requested to receive the Torah ... and Moshe Rabbeinu defeated them (i.e. their claims), and his defeat was based on the fact that angels cannot fulfill commandments that require physical activity. For this reason, on Shavuot, the emphasis is on the physical, the aspects of Judaism that*

the angels cannot fulfill ... This is the idea behind eating dairy products on Shavuot. On the holidays, there is a mitzvah to eat meat ... but on Shavuot, we eat dairy products beforehand in order to fulfill the requirements between eating dairy and meat — wiping one's hands and rinsing one's mouth. The midrash states, regarding the dispute between the angels and God about God giving the Torah to humans, that God said to them: "When you went down to visit Avraham, you ate meat and milk ... but even a young child of theirs knows that when he comes home from school and his mother gives him meat and milk, that he won't eat it." ... From here developed the practice to eat dairy to show the care and caution between eating milk and meat, not like the angels who ate one right after the other.

ובודאי שניהם יש להם שכר בשוה ... מי שישן הרבה כדי שיחזק מוחו בתורה נותן לו הקב"ה חלקו בתורה כמו אותו שממעט בשינה ומצטער עצמו כי הכל הולך אחר המחשבה

There are Torah scholars who deprive themselves of sleep and spend a lot of time learning Torah, and there are other Torah scholars who get sufficient sleep so that they have enough energy and alacrity to properly learn Torah. [This second group] can study in one hour what it takes [the first group] two hours to study, and they both receive equal reward ... one who sleeps so that he can concentrate on his learning, God gives him the same portion as the one who deprives himself of sleep because everything follows one's intent.

### Questions for Discussion:

- When the angels came down as humans, they failed to keep the physical aspects of the Torah. Why should we commemorate such an event?
- Can you think of examples of mitzvot that show the importance of the physical aspects of Judaism?

### Questions for Discussion:

- Can we learn more between 1am and 5am on no sleep or between 3pm and 4pm on a full night's sleep? If the latter, why do we spend the whole night of Shavuot studying?
- Sir James Mackintosh once commented, "The powers of a man's mind are directly proportioned to the quantity of coffee he drinks." How do you think R. Segal might respond to this comment?

## 2) Ruth 1:16-17

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל-תִּפְגַּעֵיבִי לְעֻזָּבֹד לְשׁוּב מֵאֶחְרָיִךָ כִּי אֶל-אִשְׁרַת תִּלְכִּי אֶלֶךְ וּבְאִשְׁרַת תִּלְיִנִי אֶלֶיךָ עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֶל-קִינֹה אֶלְקִי: בְּאִשְׁרַת תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת וְשֵׁם אֶקְבֹּר בָּהּ יַעֲשֶׂה ה' לִי וְכֹה יִסִּיף כִּי הִמָּוֶת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ:

Ruth said: Don't urge me to abandon you, to turn away from you. Where you go, I will go and where you sleep, I will sleep. Your nation is my nation and your God is my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. This is what God will do for me and may He do more because only death will separate me from you.

### Questions for Discussion:

- This statement of Ruth's is her acceptance of Judaism. What allusions can you find to some of the foundations of Judaism?
- How does Ruth's commitment to Naomi and to Judaism impact how we celebrate Shavuot?

## 4) Story about R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv)

When the Netziv completed his work *Ha'amek She'eilah*, he gathered his students together and held a party. One of his students asked: why are you making a party for the completion of a book? The Netziv responded:

*This isn't an ordinary party. Before my bar mitzvah, I wasn't such a good student. One night, I overheard my parents discussing taking me out of school and sending me to become an apprentice to learn a trade. I immediately ran into the kitchen and pleaded with them to give me another chance at becoming a Torah scholar. If not for that moment, I would have become a tailor or learned some other profession, and I would have been a good Jew. Yet after my death, I would have gone up to the Heavenly Court and they would have asked me, "Where is the Ha'amek She'eilah?" I wouldn't have known what they were talking about. However, that moment changed everything and this party is a celebration of that moment.*

## 3) R. David HaLevi Segal, Taz, Even HaEzer 25:1

שיש ת"ח מנדדין שינה מעיניהם ועוסקים בתורה הרבה ויש ת"ח שישינים הרבה כדי שיהיה להם כח החזק וזריות לב לעסוק בתורה ובאמת יכול ללמוד בשעה אחת מה שזו מצטער ועוסק בשני שעות

### Questions for Discussion:

- What does this story teach us about achieving our potential?
- For those of us who are not as brilliant as the Netziv, how do we know if we are achieving our potential?

### 5) Pesachim 68b

רב יוסף ביומא דעצרתא אמר עבדי לי עגלא תלתא אמר אי לא  
האי יומא דקא גרים כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא.

*On Shavuot, Rav Yosef would say, "Prepare for me a fattened calf ... if not for this day, I would just be another Yosef in the marketplace."*

### Questions for Discussion:

- Even if Rav Yosef were just an "ordinary Joe," wouldn't it still be worthwhile to celebrate the giving of the Torah? What do you think Rav Yosef meant by highlighting his personal connection to the giving of the Torah?
- Rav Yosef was known for his humility (*Sotah* 49b). Does Rav Yosef's statement about Shavuot reflect humility?

### 6) Mishna Berurah 47:28

ואם היה ניעור כל הלילה י"א דא"צ לברך בבוקר וי"א דצריך לברך  
כי קבעו חכמים ברכה זו בכל יום דומיא דשאר ברכות השחר וספק  
ברכות להקל אך אם אפשר לו יראה לשמוע בה"ת מאחר ... ואם  
היה ישן ביום שינת קבע על מטתו ובלילה שלאחריו היה ניעור כל  
הלילה פסק הגאון רע"א דבזה לכו"ע צריך לברך בבוקר בה"ת.

*If one was awake the whole night, there are those who are of the opinion that one does not have to recite the blessing [on learning Torah] and there are those who are of the opinion that one should recite the blessing because the rabbis instituted this blessing on a daily basis, similar to the other blessings of the morning. [In general,] when it comes to blessings, when there is a doubt, one does not recite a blessing. However, if possible, one should try to listen to the blessing on learning Torah from someone else ... If one slept during the day in a significant way in one's bed and then stayed up the whole night, R. Akiva Eger ruled that everyone agrees that one recites the blessing on learning Torah in the morning.*



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Meet Shlomo Anapolle of Edison, New Jersey. When it comes to a love of Israel, few college students can match the Sabra passion of this Yeshiva University junior. A pre-med, biology major with plans to attend an Israeli medical school, Shlomo balances his time between neo-natal diagnostic research, intensive shiurim and a commitment to Israel advocacy.

Whether it's planning lobbying missions to Washington, D.C. with YUPAC or teaching English to teens in the Negev through Counterpoint Israel, Shlomo brings to bear his leadership skills for the sake of the Jewish people and homeland. He is proud to invite Israeli diplomats to YU to help his peers contextualize current events. Shlomo chose YU because, to him, Torah Umadda isn't merely the convergence of science and our mesorah—at Yeshiva University, it is the formula for a values-driven preparation for life. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

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### Questions for Discussion:

- a) Explain the logic of both opinions regarding one who stays up the whole night. Why does sleeping during the previous day solve the problem?
- b) If someone was learning on Shavuot night and fell asleep in a class for a significant amount of time, does that warrant reciting the blessing in the morning?

### 7) R. David Tzvi Hoffman, Commentary to Vayikra (Vol. II pp. 164-165)

לחג הפסח ולחג הסוכות נודעת מלבד החשיבות מבחינת הטבע גם חשיבות היסטורית, הראשון מזכיר את יציאת מצרים והאחרון את השגחת ה' על העם בלכתו במדבר (ויקרא כג, מג); וודאי שגם לחג השבועות נודע ערך היסטורי: ואין זה אלא זכרון קבלת התורה בסיני. לא הותקן לחג השבועות כל טקס סמלי, להזכיר את חזיונות סיני. ויש טעם לדבר; חזיון סיני אינו עשוי להתגשם בסמל גשמי, ... אלא יזכרו את המראות הגדולות, ויחוגו ביום מתן תורה את סיום הקציר, למען יודו לה' על ברכת האדמה בהביאם את הביכורים אל המקדש, וכיירו כי ה' הוא האדון השליט על הכול, אשר לו יעבדו ואל מצוותיו ישמעו, ובוזה יחזרו שנית על הבטחתם שניתנה בסיני: "נעשה ונשמע."

*Passover and Sukkot are known for their significance both from an agricultural perspective and from a historical perspective; the first commemorates the exodus from Egypt, and the second commemorates God's providence over the nation while it traversed through the desert. Shavuot certainly has historical significance: it commemorates the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. [Nevertheless,] Shavuot wasn't given [by the Torah] any rituals to commemorate the events at Sinai. The reason is that the vision of Sinai cannot be embodied by a physical symbol ... Rather, we simply remember the great visions and we celebrate the harvest on the day of the giving of the Torah, so that we could show gratitude to God for the blessings of the land when we bring the first fruit to the Temple. We recognize that God is the master of everything, whom we serve and whose mitzvot we observe and by doing so, we repeat the message of Sinai: We will do and we will listen.*



## The future is in your hands.

Meet Rachel Mirsky from White Plains, New York. A biology major on a pre-med track, and captain of the YU softball and basketball teams, Rachel chose YU to allow her to explore and develop her unique talents and interests.

Rachel loves YU because it enables her to engage in her extracurricular passions and prepare for her career while remaining true to her religious commitments. An exceptional athlete, Rachel was recently named to the Capital One Academic All-District team. Whether in an Israeli laboratory conducting research on the properties of red blood cells, or authoring a medical ethics paper on eating disorders and the Biblical matriarchs, Rachel can find the perfect balance at YU. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

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### Questions for Discussion:

- How does R. Hoffman explain why the Torah does not emphasize Shavuot as the day of Matan Torah?
- Why is it so difficult to symbolize Matan Torah?

### 8) Moed Katan 25a and Ramban

רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר העומד על המת בשעת יציאת נשמה חייב לקרוע למה זה דומה לספר תורה שנשרף שחייב לקרוע.

*R. Shimon ben Elazar states: If someone is present when a person dies, he is obligated to tear (his garments). What is this similar to? It is similar to a Sefer Torah that tore, where there is (also) an obligation to tear (one's garments).*

רמב"ן: ולי נראה שהנפש בגוף כאזכרות בגילין, ומשל בעלמא הוא לומר שהוא הפסד גדול וחרדה רבה וחייב אדם לקרוע עליה כאילו נשרף ס"ת לפניו.

*Ramban: It seems to me that the soul in the body is like the names of G-d (written) on the parchment. It is merely a parable to convey the message that it is a great loss and cause for alarm, and a person must tear his garments as if a sefer Torah was burned before him.*

### Questions for Discussion:

- Why do you think a person is comparable to a sefer Torah?
- What lessons can we learn about how we should act from the comparison of a person to a sefer Torah?



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<b>Cong. Torah Ohr</b> Boca Raton, FL	<b>Hoshen Modiin</b> Modiin, Israel	<b>Magen David Sephardic</b> Wykagyl, NY	<b>Rambam Shul</b> Be'er Sheva, Israel	<b>The Roslyn Synagogue</b> Roslyn Heights, NY
<b>Cong. Torat Emet</b> Phoenix, AZ	<b>The Jewish Educational Center</b> Elizabeth, NJ	<b>Margolin Hebrew Academy</b> Memphis, TN	<b>Riverdale Jewish Center</b> Riverdale, NY	<b>The Village Shul</b> Toronto, ON
<b>Cong. Zichron Yisroel</b> Thornhill, ON	<b>JLI - The Johns Hopkins</b> <b>University</b> Baltimore, MD	<b>Marlee Shul</b> Toronto, ON	<b>SAR High School</b> Riverdale, NY	<b>Thornhill Community Shul</b> Thornhill, ON
<b>Darchoi Noam Cong.</b> St Louis Park, MN	<b>JLIC at Queens College Hillel</b> Queens, NY	<b>Meitar Merkazi</b> Be'er Sheva, Israel	<b>SCY High</b> San Diego, CA	<b>Tiferet Israel</b> Toronto, ON
<b>Darchoi Noam of Glenbrook</b> Northbrook, IL	<b>Joint Distribution Committee</b> Jerusalem, Israel	<b>Menorat Hamaor</b> Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel	<b>Sephardic Bikur Holim</b> Seattle, WA	<b>Torat Emet</b> Columbus, OH
<b>Darchoi Zion</b> Modiin, Israel	<b>Kehilat Zichron Yosef</b> Jerusalem, Israel	<b>Merkaz Modiin</b> Modiin, Israel	<b>Sephardic Institute Synagogue</b> Brooklyn, NY	<b>Touro Synagogue</b> Newport, RI
<b>DAT Minyan</b> Denver, CO	<b>Kehillas Bais Yehudah Tzvi</b> Cedarhurst, NY	<b>Mishkan Shilo</b> Beit Shemesh, Israel	<b>Sephardic Kehila Centre</b> <b>Synagogue</b> Thornhill, ON	<b>Ulpanat Orot</b> Downsview, ON
<b>Daughters of Israel</b> West Orange, NJ	<b>Kehillat Ahavat Tzion</b> Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel	<b>Mizrachi Bayit</b> Toronto, ON	<b>Shaare Zedek Cong.</b> Winnipeg, MB	<b>United Orthodox Synagogues</b> Houston, TX
<b>DRS High School for Boys</b> Woodmere, NY	<b>Kehilat Chovevei Tzion</b> Skokie, IL	<b>MJE</b> New York, NY	<b>Shaarei Shomayim Cong.</b> Toronto, ON	<b>University of Massachuset</b> <b>JLIC Hillel</b> Amherst, MA
<b>EDOS</b> Denver, CO	<b>Kehillat New Hemsptead</b> Spring Valley, NY	<b>Moledet</b> Be'er Sheva, Israel	<b>Shaarei Tefilla</b> Las Vegas, NV	<b>University of Pennsylvania</b> <b>Hillel</b> Philadelphia, PA
<b>Eitz Chayim of Dogwood Park</b> West Hempstead, NY	<b>Kehillat Ohel Ephraim</b> Ariel, Israel	<b>Moriah Shul</b> Ra'anana, Israel	<b>Shaarei Tefillah Cong.</b> Toronto, ON	
<b>Elmora Hills Minyan</b> Union, NJ	<b>Kehillat Shaareei Torah Of</b> <b>Toronto</b> Toronto, ON		<b>Shaarei Torah Orthodox Cong.</b> <b>of Syracuse</b> Dewitt, NY	
<b>Eretz Chemda</b> Katamon, Israel				

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Toronto, ON
- West Coast Torah Center**  
Los Angeles, CA
- Westville Synagogue**  
New Haven, CT
- Woodside Synagogue Ahavas Torah**  
Silver Spring, MD
- Yagdil Torah**  
Boca Raton, FL
- Yavneh Academy**  
Paramus, NJ
- JLIC at Yale University Hillel**  
New Haven, CT
- Yeshiva of Flatbush**  
Brooklyn, NY
- Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago**
- Young Israel Of Baychester Traditional Synagogue**  
Bronx, NY
- Young Israel of Brookline**  
Brookline, MA
- Young Israel of Canarsie**  
Brooklyn, NY
- Young Israel of Century City**  
Los Angeles, CA
- Young Israel Of Chomedy**  
Chomedy, QC
- Young Israel of Deerfield Beach**  
Deerfield Beach, FL
- Young Israel of Flatbush**  
Brooklyn, NY
- Young Israel of Forest Hills**  
Forest Hills, NY
- Young Israel of Fort Lee**  
Fort Lee, NJ
- Young Israel of Hewlett**  
Hewlett, NY
- Young Israel of Hillcrest**  
Flushing, NY
- Young Israel of Holliswood**  
Jamaica, NY
- Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale**  
Fort Lauderdale, FL
- Young Israel of Houston**  
Houston, TX
- Young Israel of Jamaica Estates**  
Jamaica, NY
- Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst**  
Cedarhurst, NY
- Young Israel of Long Beach**  
Long Beach, NY
- Young Israel of Memphis**  
Memphis, TN
- Young Israel Of Montreal**  
Montréal, QC
- Young Israel of Neve Aliza**  
Karnei Shomron, Israel
- Young Israel of New Hyde Park**  
New Hyde Park, NY
- Young Israel of New Rochelle**  
New Rochelle, NY
- Young Israel of North Woodmere**  
North Woodmere, NY
- Young Israel of Northridge**  
Northridge, CA
- Young Israel of Oak Park**  
Oak Park, MI
- Young Israel of Oceanside**  
Oceanside, NY
- Young Israel Of Orange County**  
Irvine, CA
- Young Israel Of Ottawa**  
Ottawa, ON
- Young Israel Of Passaic-Clifton**  
Passaic, NJ
- Young Israel of Plainview**  
Plainview, NY
- Young Israel of Queens Valley**  
Flushing, NY
- Young Israel of Riverdale**  
Bronx, NY
- Young Israel of Scarsdale**  
Scarsdale, NY
- Young Israel of Sharon**  
Sharon, MA
- Young Israel of Skokie**  
Skokie, IL
- Young Israel of Southfield**  
Southfield, MI
- Young Israel of St. Louis**  
St Louis, MO
- Young Israel of Staten Island**  
Staten Island, NY
- Young Israel of Toco Hills**  
Atlanta, GA
- Young Israel of West Hartford**  
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- Young Israel of West Hempstead**  
West Hempstead, NY
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PARSHA  
**Shemini**

Daf Yomi  
**Kidushin 16**

Mishna Yomi  
**Ukzin 3:7-8**

Nach Yomi  
**Melachim 2**

### Editor's Picks

 **Inyanei Hilchos Tefillah**  
Rabbi Avishai David |   
Venue: Yeshivat Torat Shraga  
**Halacha: Tefillah**

 **Legal Ethics: Competing for Clients**  
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner |   
Venue: YU Torah MITzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov  
**Machshava: Business Ethics, Ethics**  
**Halacha: Choshen Mishpat**

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