

**The Torah Scroll**

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**I. Introduction[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In this [study](study.html) I would like to [study](study.html) the unusual letters found in the Tanach.

What is The Torah?

Torah literally means “instruction”. The Torah is THE central ‘[teaching](teacher.html)’ for [Jews](gen-jew.html). The Torah consists of the ‘[Five](five.html) Books of Moshe’s:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [**HEBREW**](hebrew.html) | **ENGLISH** |
| Bereshit | Genesis |
| Shemot | [Exodus](exodus.html) |
| Vayikra | Leviticus |
| Bamidbar | [Numbers](nchart.html) |
| Devarim | Deuteronomy |

A Torah scroll is a scroll that contains these [five](five.html) books of Moshe:



Sefardi Torah Scrolls

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| torah scroll |  |

Ashkenaz Torah Scroll

The Torah scrolls found in the [ark](ark.html) of the local [Jewish](gen-jew.html) [synagogue](synagog.html) are a powerfull testimony to the accuracy and integrity of The Word of [HaShem](hashem.html), as delivered to Moshe ( Moshe).



Torah [Ark](ark.html)

A Torah scroll is written on sco[red cow](heifer.html) hide with special black ink and quill. Each page is then sewn to the previous page using gut from a [kosher](eating.html) animal.

However, it is not the materials which are amazing, but the writing itself. This amazing text is easily the most accurate in the [world](worlds.html). It is also contains an amazing amount of coded information beyond the text itself.

The Script By Rabbi [Yitzchak](isaac.html) Hutner[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Sages [teach](teacher.html) in *Sanhedrin 21b* that, *“Ezra the Scribe, had he lived then, would have been worthy of receiving the Torah. Instead, he was responsible for changing the* [*Hebrew*](hebrew.html) *script."* Concerning this the *Maharal* wrote[[3]](#footnote-3) that, *“this is something of exalted wisdom, that the Torah script was changed specifically by Ezra the Scribe.”* This matter contains sublime Torah [secrets](sod.html).

We [know](daat.html) that at the [time](time.html) of Ezra, the style of [Hebrew](hebrew.html) script was changed from the **“Ivri script”** to the **“Ashuri script”.** Note: There are two types of [Hebrew](hebrew.html) script, the ancient Ivri script found on ancient coins and writings, or the “Ashuri script” which has been used since the [time](time.html) of Ezra in Sifrei Torah and sacred texts, and has become the standard format for all [Hebrew](hebrew.html) writing.

The *Maharal* writes[[4]](#footnote-4) that changing the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) script was not like a prohibition that was subsequently permitted, it is like [eating](eating.html) meat for pleasure which was at [first](one.html) prohibited, but for a limited [time](time.html) only. A similar approach was taken regarding the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) script. At the [time](time.html) of revelation, the Torah was written in the *“Ivri script”,* *but they were immediately informed that this script would eventually be changed. The Maharal explains that the origin of* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html) *(i.e.* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*) was on ‘the other side of the river’, which is the reason we are called Ivrim,* [*Hebrews*](bereans.html)*. So long as* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html) *was in the mode of being founded, it employed the “Ivri script”, however when they experienced* [*exile*](galuyot.html) *for the* [*first*](one.html)[*time*](time.html)*,* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html) *lost its status of being in a ‘beginning state’. It was then that the script was changed (this is explained in greater detail in Maharal’s Sefer HaTiferet.)*

This is the [place](place.html) where we can identify the relationship of shared destiny between [Israel](gen-jew.html) and the Torah even in their normal period of [ingathering](gather.html). So long as [Israel](gen-jew.html) lived on their land, the Holy Scriptures were continuously being written. The continued writing of the Holy Scriptures is referred to with the words, *“that I wrote” {Shemos 24:12)* as is explicitly stated in the Torah. This writing was in *“Ivri script”* which is associated with the *“beginning mode”,* the mode of [Israel](gen-jew.html) at that [time](time.html). Here we find a shared destiny between [Israel](gen-jew.html) and its Torah in that the script of Torah writing at the [time](time.html) they [first](one.html) lived in [*Eretz Israel*](gen-jew.html) was written in the style and form of the [time](time.html) of [Israel](gen-jew.html)’s founding.

The Letters

A Torah scroll contains numerous letters which are non-standard in terms of size, placement, and orientation. These unusual characters are exactly the same from [one](one.html) Torah croll to the next. These are not mistakes, but rather, they contain vast amounts of information that is fereted out by our Sages and used to convey The Word of [HaShem](hashem.html) to His treasured people.

The letters of the Torah come in [three](three.html) sizes: large, small, and the standard letters with which most of the Torah is written. A large *Alef* is [known](daat.html) as an *Alef Rabbasi*, a small *Alef* as an *Alef Zeira*. A medium-sized *Alef* is called an *Alef Regila* (a regular *Alef*).

There are about 100 abnormal **letters** in the Torah, as the [Talmud](orallaw.html) [teaches](teacher.html).

Men. 29b

Ber. 4a; Naz. 23a; Hot. 10b.

Meg. 16b

The Encyclopedia Judaica tells us that there are 17 places in the Torah where a letter is written extra-large or extra-small: the scribal terminology is majuscule and miniscule. There are [six](six.html) miniscules and [eleven](eleven.html) majuscules. For example, the [first](one.html) letter in the Torah, the beth in the word Bereshit, is a majuscule (this is probably the origin of the illuminated capital of medieval manuscripts). The most famous majuscules are certainly the ones from the [Shema](shema.html) in Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:4. In this case, the letters are large to avoid confusion: a large ayin in the word [shema](shema.html) to avoid confusion with aleph: ‘perhaps O [Israel](gen-jew.html).’ The large dalet to avoid confusion with resh: ‘the Lord is another’.

**Scripts**



*Vellish,* is the script generally used by Sephardi [Jews](gen-jew.html).



*Ari* is the script generally used by [Jews](gen-jew.html) of Chassidic descent or influence.



*Beit* [Yoseph](joseph.html) is the script generally used by Ashkenazi [Jews](gen-jew.html).

**Quills and Ink**

The scribe makes quills for writing a Sefer Torah. The feathers must come from a [kosher](eating.html) bird, and the goose is the bird of choice for many scribes. The scribe carefully and patiently carves a point in the end of the feather and uses many quills in the course of writing [one](one.html) Sefer Torah. The scribe also prepares ink for writing the Sefer Torah by combining powdered gall nuts, copper sulfate crystals, gum arabic, and water, preparing only a small amount at a [time](time.html), so that the ink will always be fresh. Fresh ink is a deep black, and only this is acceptable for writing a Sefer Torah.

**Letters in the Torah**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letters** |   | **Letters** |
| א | **27,057** |  | ל | **21,570** |
| ב | **16,344** |  | מ | **25,078** |
| ג | **2,109** |  | נ | **14,107** |
| ד | **7,032** |  | ס | **1,833** |
| ה | **28,052** |  | ע | **11,244** |
| ו | **30,509** |  | פ | **4,805** |
| ז | **2,198** |  | צ | **4,052** |
| ח | **7,187** |  | ק | **4,694** |
| ט | **1,802** |  | ר | **18,109** |
| י | **31,522** |  | ש | **15,592** |
| כ | **11,960** |  | ת | **17,949** |
| **Total** | **304,805** |

**Letters and Words in the Torah**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Words** | **Letters** |
| **Bereshit (Genesis)** | **20,512** | **78,064** |
| **Shemot (**[**Exodus**](exodus.html)**)** | **16,723** | **63,529** |
| **Vayikra (Leviticus)** | **11,950** | **44,790** |
| **Bamidbar (**[**Numbers**](nchart.html)**)** | **16,368** | **63,530** |
| **Devarim (Deuteronomy)** | **14,294** | **54,892** |
| **Total** | **79,847** | **304,805** |

**LARGE LETTERS**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Passage.** | [**Hebrew**](hebrew.html) **Word.** | **Translation.** | [**Hebrew**](hebrew.html) **Letter.** |
| Gen. 1:1 | ,hatrc | beginning | bet |
| Gen. 30:42 | **;**hygvcu | feeble | final pe |
| Gen. 34:31 | vbu**z**fv | harlot | zayin |
| Gen. 50:23 | **o**haka | [third](three.html) [generation](toldot.html) | final mem |
| Ex. 2:2 | cu**y**-hf | good | tet |
| Ex. 34:7 | rmb | keeping | nun |
| Ex. 34:14 | rjt | other | resh |
| Lev. 11:30 |  | lizard | lamed |
| Lev. 11:42 | iujd-kg | belly | vav |
| Lev. 13:33 |  | shaven | gimel |
| Num. 13:31 |  | stilled | samek |
| Num. 14:17 | tb-ksdh | be great | yod |
| Num. 24:5 |  | how | mem |
| Num. 27:5 |  | cause | final nun |
| Deut. 6:4 | gna | [hear](mashal.html) | ‘ayin |
| Deut. 6:4 | sjt | [one](one.html) | dalet |
| Deut. 18:13 |  | perfect | taw |
| Deut. 29:28 | ofkahu | cast them | lamed |
| Deut. 32:4 |  | [rock](rock.html) | tzade |
| Deut. 32:6 | vuvhk v | Lord | [first](one.html) he |
| Josh. 14:11 |  | strength | [first](one.html) kaf |
| Isa. 56:10 |  | watchman | tzade |
| Mal. 3:22 |  | remember | zayin |
| Ps. 77:8 |  | forever | he |
| Ps 80:15 |  | vineyard | kaf |
| Ps. 84:4 |  | nest | kof |
| Prov 1:1 |  | proverbs | mem |
| Job 9:34 |  | [rod](staff.html) | het |
| Song 1:1 |  | song | shin |
| [Ruth](ruth.html). 3:13 |  | tarry | nun |
| Eccl. 7:1 |  | good | het |
| Eccl. 7:13 |  | conclusion | samek |
| Esth 1:6 |  | white | het |
| Esth. 9:9 |  | Vajezatha | vav |
| Esth. 9:29 |  | wrote | [first](one.html) taw |
| Dan. 11:20 |  | dawn | second pe |
| I Chron. 1:1 |  | [Adam](adam.html) | alef |

The **large letters** are used mainly to call attention to certain [Talmudic](orallaw.html) and midrashic homilies and citations, or as guards against errors. References to them in Masseket Soferim is read substantially as follows:

The **letters** of the [first](one.html) word of Genesis, “Bereshit” (In the beginning), must be spaced (“stretched”; according to the [Masorah](mishna1.html), only the “bet” is **large**).

***Bereshit (Genesis) 1:1*** *In the beginning God* [*created*](bara.html) *the* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *and the earth.*

,tu ohnav ,t ohvkt trc ,hatrc

:.rtv

\* \* \*

***Bereshit (Genesis) 30:42*** *But when the cattle were feeble, he put [them] not in: so the feebler were Laban’s, and the stronger* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*’s.*

ohpygv vhvu ohah tk itmv **;**hygvcu

:ceghk ohraevu ickk

\* \* \*

***Bereshit (Genesis) 34:31*** *And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?*

 :ub,ujt-,t vagh vbu**z**fv rnthu

\* \* \*

***Bereshit (Genesis) 50:23*** *And* [*Joseph*](joseph.html) *saw Ephraim’s children of the* [*third*](three.html) *[*[*generation*](toldot.html)*]: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon* [*Joseph*](joseph.html)*’s knees.*

hbc od **o**haka hbc ohrptk ;xuh trhu

:;xuh hfrc-kg uskh vabn-ic rhfn

\* \* \*

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 2:2*** *And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he [was a] goodly [child], she hid him* [*three*](three.html) *months.*

u,t tr,u ic sk,u vatv rv,u

:ohjrh vaka uvbpm,u tuv cu**y**-hf

\* \* \*

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 34:7*** *Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and* [*sin*](sin.html)*, and that will by no means clear [the guilty]; visiting the iniquity of the* [*fathers*](fathers.html) *upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the* [*third*](three.html) *and to the* [*fourth*](four.html) *[*[*generation*](toldot.html)*].*

vtyju gapu iug tab ohpktk sxj rmb

ohbc’kg ,uct iug q sep vebh tk vebu

:ohgcr-kgu ohaka-kg ohbc hbc-kgu

\* \* \*

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 34:14*** *For thou shalt worship no other god: for* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, whose* [*name*](name.html) *[is] Jealous, [is] a jealous God:*

tbe vuvh hf rjt ktk vuj,a, tk hf

:tuv tbe kt una

\* \* \*

***Kiddushin 30a*** *The early [scholars] were called Soferim[[5]](#footnote-5) because they used to count all the* [*letters*](letters.html) *of the Torah.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus, they said, the waw in gahon[[7]](#footnote-7) marks half the* [*letters*](letters.html) *of the Torah; darosh darash,[[8]](#footnote-8) half the words; we-hithggalah,[[9]](#footnote-9) half the verses. The boar out of the wood [mi-ya’ar] doth ravage it:[[10]](#footnote-10) the ‘ayin of ya’ar marks half of the* [*Psalms*](psalms1.html)*.[[11]](#footnote-11) But he, being full of* [*compassion*](jonah.html)*, forgiveth their iniquity,[[12]](#footnote-12) half of the verses.*

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 11:30*** *And the ferret, and the chameleon, and the lizard, and the snail, and the mole.*

The u “vuv” in the word “gachon”, belly, must be raised because it is the middle central letter of the Torah. It is [one](one.html) of the [eleven](eleven.html) majuscules in the Torah.

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 11:42*** *Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon [all]* [*four*](four.html)*, or whatsoever hath more* [*feet*](heel.html) *among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not* [*eat*](eating.html)*; for they [are] an abomination.*

gcrt-kgLlkuv q|kfu iujd-kgLlkuv kf

.rav .rav-kfk ohkdr vcrn-kf sg

:ov .ea-hf oukft, tk .rtv-kg

A Torah scroll contains 304,805 letters, which means that the midpoint would be the 152,403rd letter; but there are 157,236 letters until the letter vav in the word gachon. In order for that to be the middle letter of the Torah, there would have to be an additional 9,667 letters in the Torah scroll!

There is a fascinating explanation, by Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef Zilber, of this cryptic statement of the Talmud. While most of the letters of the Torah are written in the standard script, he says, there are certain letters that are different. Some are written in an unusual fashion, while others are bigger or smaller than the standard letters of the Torah. If one were to count all the small and large letters in a standard Torah scroll, one would find that there are 16 or 17 of these letters (depending on whether we count the truncated vav in Numbers 25:12.3) Of these, the ninth, i.e., the middle one, is the vav of gachon. In other words, the Talmud was not referring to the vav of gachon as the middle of all the letters of the Torah scroll; rather, it was referring to it as the middle of all the unusually large and small letters in the Torah scroll.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The [Psalms](psalms1.html) also have a corresponding middle letter:[[14]](#footnote-14)

יְכַרְסְמֶנָּה חֲזִיר מִיָּ**עַ**ר;    וְזִיז שָׂדַי יִרְעֶנָּה **יד**

***Tehillim (***[***Psalms***](psalms1.html)***) 80:14****The boar out of the wood doth* ***ravage it****, that which moveth in the* [*field*](field.html) *feedeth on it.*

\* \* \*

The word “va-yishchat” (And he slew) must be spaced, as it is the beginning of the middle verse of the Torah (the [Masorah](mishna1.html) designates the dividing verse as in Vayikra 8:8, but does not indicate that any change is to be introduced in the form or spacing of the **letters**).

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 8:23*** *And he slew [it]; and Moshe took of the* [*blood*](body.html) *of it, and put [it] upon the tip of Aaron’s right ear, and upon the thumb of his right* [*hand*](mashal.html)*, and upon the great toe of his right* [*foot*](heel.html)*.*

i,hu unsn van jehu q|yjahu

ivc-kgu ,hbnhv irvt-iztLlub,’kg

:,hbnhv ukdr ivc-kgu ,hbnhv ush

\* \* \*

Bamidbar (Numbers) 25:12 **12** Wherefore say: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace;

יב לָכֵן, אֱמֹר: הִנְנִי נֹתֵן לוֹ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי, שָׁלוֹם.

The "small" vav in the word *shalom*, meaning "peace", in the verse, "Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace"[[15]](#footnote-15) alludes to another verse: "…and the truth and the peace they loved".[[16]](#footnote-16) The attribute which distinguishes Jacob is "emet/truth", whereas the attribute "habrit hashalom/the covenant of peace", is the one that distinguishes Joseph.

\* \* \*

“[Shema](shema.html)’” ([hear](mashal.html); Shemot 6:4) must be placed at the beginning of the line, and all its **letters** must be spaced; “echad” ([one](one.html)), the last word of the same verse, must be placed at the end of the line (the [Masorah](mishna1.html) has the “‘ayin” of “[Shema](shema.html)’” and the “dalet” of “echad” **large**).

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:4***[*Hear*](mashal.html)*, O* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html)*:* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *is our God,* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *is* [*One*](one.html)*:*

:sjt q vuvh ubhvkt vuvh ktrah gna

The letters sg Ayin Dalet can be read “ade” which means “to bear witness.” In reading the “[Shema](shema.html)” [one](one.html) is in effect testifying that God exists. Note that Ya’akov ([Jacob](israelja.html)) and [Esau](edom.html) make a treaty of peace near a mound of stones called “gal-ade”, literally a mound (gal) of testimony (ade). (Genesis 31:46-48)

Alternatively, the letters sg Ayin Dalet can be read “ahd”, which means “until”. In other words, no matter [one](one.html)’s belief in [HaShem](hashem.html), it can never be perfect, never absolutely absolute. [One](one.html) can come “until” the Lord, but never quite reach Him. Note the text describing repentance - “and you shall return until (ad) the Lord your [HaShem](hashem.html),” (Devarim 30:2) as no [one](one.html) can ever return fully to [HaShem](hashem.html).

Finally, the letter Ayin Dalet can be read ode, meaning “still.” This is perhaps to accentuate that against all odds, [Jews](gen-jew.html) throughout history in the darkest of times still declared belief in [HaShem](hashem.html). Note the use of the word “ode” when [Yosef](joseph.html) reveals himself to his brothers when he asked, “ha’ode avi hai, is my father still alive?” (Bereshit 45:3) In amazement [Yosef](joseph.html) rhetorically was saying, ‘having endured so much, is father still alive?’

The “lamed” in the word “wa-yashlikem” (and he cast them) must be **large** (“long” = “‘aruk”).

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 29:28*** *And* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and He cast them into another land, as [it is] this day.*

vnjcu ;tc o,nst kgn vuvh oa,hu

,rjt .rt-kt ofkahu kusd ;mecu

:vzv ouhf

The letter v in vuvhk v (“[HaShem](hashem.html)”) must be spaced more than any other “he,” as “ha” is here a separate word (comp. Yer. Meg. 1.: “The ‘he’ must be below the shoulder of the ‘lamed’”; also Ex. R. 24: “The ‘he’ is written below the ‘lamed.’” The [Masorah](mishna1.html) has a **large** “he” as indicating the beginning of a separate word).

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 32:6*** *Do ye thus requite* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, O foolish people and unwise? [is] not he thy father [that] hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?*

ofj tku kcb og ,tz-uknd, vuvhk v

:lbbfhuŠlag tuv lbe lhct tuv-tukv

[***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***3:13*** *Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman’s part; but if he be not willing to do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *liveth; lie down until the morning.’*

This righteous man’s words, הַלַּיְלָה ליני, “stay this night,” signify that only this night would [Ruth](ruth.html) stay alone, without a husband; the next morning she would be [redeemed](redemption.html). Similarly, many [generations](toldot.html) later, the children of [Israel](gen-jew.html) would endure the night of [exile](galuyot.html), when they would be like a woman separated from her husband, with whom she will be re­united in the morning of her [redemption](redemption.html). This is hinted at by rrt, which is composed of the end letters of the “[four](four.html) [exiles](galuyot.html)”; [Babylon](bavel.html) (בב״ל**),** Media **(מד״י),** Greece (יו״ן)**,** and Rome **(רומ״י).**

In this regard the letter *nun* (נ, numerically equivalent to 50), por­tends that the [future](future.html) [exile](galuyot.html) would begin in the fiftieth [generation](toldot.html), at the [time](time.html) of Nebuchadnezzar. Alternatively, the enlarged letter *nun* in certain texts alludes to the [Messiah](mashiach.html) (a scion of [Ruth](ruth.html)), [one](one.html) of whose names was Yenon, ינון. [Thus it says, “Yenon is his [name](name.html)” ([Psalms](psalms1.html) 72:17).][[17]](#footnote-17)

**SMALL LETTERS**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Passage.** | [**Hebrew**](hebrew.html) **Word.** | **Translation.** | [**Hebrew**](hebrew.html) **Letter.** |
| Gen. 2: 4 | בְּ**הִ**בָּרְאָם | [created](bara.html) | he |
| Gen 32:2 | v,fcku | [weep](mashal.html) | kaf |
| Gen. 27:46 |  | weary | kof |
| Ex. 32: 25 |  | enemies | kof |
| Lev. 1:1 | trehu | call | alef |
| Lev. 6:2 |  | burning | mem |
| Num. 25:11 |  | Phinehas | yed |
| Deut. 9:24 |  | rebelious | [first](one.html) mem |
| Deut. 32:18 | ha, | unmindful | yod |
| II Sam. 21:19 |  | Jaare | resh |
| II Kings 17:31 |  | Nibhaz | zayin |
| Isa. 44:14 |  | ash (tree) | final nun |
| Jer. 14:2 |  | [cry](mashal.html) | Tzade |
| Jer. 39:13 |  | Nebushazhan | final nun |
| Nah 1:3 |  | Whirlwind | samek |
| Ps. 24:5 |  | vain | vav |
| Prov. 16:28 |  | whisperer | final nun |
| Prov. 28:17 |  | man | dalet |
| Prov. 30:15 |  | give | bet |
| Job. 7:5 |  | clods | gimel |
| Job. 16:14 |  | breach | final tzade |
| Lam. 1:12 |  | nothing | lamed |
| Lam 2:9 |  | sunk | tet |
| Lam. 3:35 |  | subvert | ayin |
| Esth 9:7 |  | Parshandatha | taw |
| Esth. 9:7 |  | Parmashta | shin |
| Esth 9:9 |  | Vajezatha | zayin |
| Dan. 6:20 |  | very early | [first](one.html) pe |

The [name](name.html) [Abraham](avraham.html) is alluded to already in the Genesis account of [creation](bara.html). Genesis includes [two](two.html) accounts of [creation](bara.html). The [first](one.html) runs from chapter 1 verse 1 to chapter 2 verse 3 and the second begins with chapter 2 verse 4.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 2:4****These are the* [*generations*](toldot.html) *of the* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *and of the earth when they were* [*created*](bara.html)(ב**ה**בראם), *in the day that* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *God made earth and* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*.*

However, sometimes chapter 2 verse 4 is considered the final verse of the [first](one.html) account of [creation](bara.html). This verse reads: “These are the chronicles of the [heavens](heaven.html) and the earth when they were [created](bara.html), on the day that God made earth and [heavens](heaven.html).” In the original [Hebrew](hebrew.html), the words “when they were [created](bara.html),” are a single word: בהבראם . This is a very special word because it is the [first](one.html) [time](time.html) that a typographically minor letter appears in the text of the Torah: the second letter of this word, the hei (ה ) is this letter. Thus, in the Torah scroll this word is written something like this: ב**ה**בראם . But, this word is also special because when permuted it spells באברהם , which means “with [Abraham](avraham.html).” The sages learn from this that all of [creation](bara.html) was [created](bara.html) in the [merit](merit.html) of [Abraham](avraham.html).

The h of the word ha,, *teshi,* (thou art unmindful; Devarim 32:18) must be smaller than any other “yod “ in the Scriptures.

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 32:18*** *Of the* [*Rock*](rock.html) *[that] begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.*

lkkjn kt jfa,u ha, lskh rum jh

The h of ksdh, yigdal, (be great) must be **large**r than any other “yod” in the Torah (Yal., Num. 743, 945).

***Bamidbar (***[***Numbers***](nchart.html)***) 14:17*** *And now, I beseech thee, let the power of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,*

,rcs ratf hbst jf tb-ksdh v,gu

:rntk

The last word in the Torah, “[Israel](gen-jew.html),” must be spaced and the “lamed” made higher than in any other [place](place.html) where this letter occurs (the [Masorah](mishna1.html) has no changes).

\* \* \*

“And it was, the life of Sarah, 127 years, the years of the life of Sarah”. The end of the next verse says that [Avraham](avraham.html) Aveinu came to eulogize Sarah Imeinu, v’livkosah- and [cry](mashal.html) over losing her. V’livkosah is inscribed with a small letter kaf. The commentary Ba’al Haturim says the little letter is telling us [Avraham](avraham.html) cried only a little because Sarah was an elderly woman.

Hakham Shimshon Rafael Hirsch says that the word šv,fcku, *and to bewail her*, is written with a small f to suggest that although [Avraham](avraham.html)’s grief was infinite, the full measure of his pain was concealed in his [heart](body.html) and the privacy of his home.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 23:1-2*** *And Sarah was an hundred and* [*seven*](seven.html) *and* [*twenty*](twenty.html) *years old: [these were] the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same [is]* [*Hebron*](city.html) *in the land of Canaan: and* [*Abraham*](avraham.html) *came to* [*mourn*](mourning.html) *for Sarah, and to* [*weep*](mashal.html) *for her.*

iurcj tuv gcrt ,hrec vra ,n,u c

vrak spxk ovrct tchu igbf .rtc

:v,fcku

\* \* \*

The word “vayikar” (“Vayikra” without an “Alef”) means “casually calling.” The word “Vayikra” (“Vayikra” with a “Alef”) means “to call with love.”

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 1:1*** *And* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *called unto Moshe, and spake unto him out of the* [*tabernacle*](mikdash.html) *of the congregation, saying,*

uhkt vuvh rcshu van-kt trehu t

:rntk sgun kvtn

Look at the opening word of the Book of Leviticus and you will see that the final letter of this word is written smaller than all the rest. The word is Vayikrah, “and He called”. The letter in question is the Aleph, the [first](one.html) letter of the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) aleph-bet and kabbalistic symbol for the Ineffable God.

In the verse ‘*VaYikra el Moshe*,’ the *Alef* is small, alluding to Moshe Rabbeinu’s humility. Although Moshe was well aware of his extraordinary talents and abilities, he did not take pride in them or consider himself great. It states in the Torah, ‘And the man Moshe was very humble.’ According to Moshe’s way of thinking, had someone else been blessed with the same abilities, he would have certainly utilized them better.”

The Book of Leviticus opens with the verse “And the Lord summoned Moshe,” the [first](one.html) word being the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) “Vayikra,” which means, “and He summoned or “called out to;” it is fascinating that a small “aleph” is the masoretic, traditional way of writing the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) VYKRA, so that the text actually states “Vayiker, and He chanced upon, “ as if by accident. Rashi comments: “The word VaYiKRA precedes all (Divine) [commandments](cmds613.html) and statements, which is a term of endearment used by the heavenly [angels](angels.html)...; however, [HaShem](hashem.html) appeared to the prophets of the idolatrous [nations](nations.html) of the [world](worlds.html) with a temporary and impure expression, as it is written ‘And He chanced upon (Va Yiker) Balaam’”. Apparently, when Moshe was writing the Torah dictated by [HaShem](hashem.html), he was too humble to accept for himself the more exalted and even angelic Divine charge of VaYiKRA; therefore, he wrote the less complimentary VaYiker relating to himself, retaining his faithfulness to [HaShem](hashem.html)’s actual word VaYiKRA (“And He Summoned”) by appending a small aleph to the word VaYiKR.

The [midrash](orallaw.html) goes [one](one.html) step further. It poignantly, if albeit naively, pictures the heavenly scene of Moshe, having completed his writing of the [Five](five.html) Books, being left with a small portion of unused Divine ink; after all, the Almighty had dictated VaYiKRA and Moshe had only written VyiKR A, rendering the ink which should have been used for the regular size aleph as surplus. The [midrash](orallaw.html) concludes that the Almighty Himself, as it were, took that extra ink and lovingly placed it on Moshe’s [forehead](body.html); that is what gave rise to Moshe “rays of splendor.”

This is why it says, “And He called to Moshe” the word Vayikra (and He called) being written with a small letter Alef. This is to imply that [HaShem](hashem.html), who is the Aluf (commander) of the universe, is concealed within every [Jewish](gen-jew.html) soul, and calls out to it to return. These are the thoughts of teshuva that come to [one](one.html). However, he does not understand that this is [HaShem](hashem.html), blessed be He calling to him.

**The** [**Triennial**](shmita.html)[**Cycle**](cycles.html)

During [Temple](temple.html) times, the reading of the Torah was completed, by every congregation, in [three](three.html) and a half years. Today most congregations complete the reading of the Torah on [one](one.html) year.

In [Israel](gen-jew.html), during [Temple](temple.html) days, the reading of the Torah was completed once in [three](three.html) and a half years (see [Triennial](shmita.html) [Cycle](cycles.html)) and therefore the Torah was divided into 154 (or, according to another version, 167) weekly portions called *sedarim*. In Babylonia, during [Temple](temple.html) days, the full [cycle](cycles.html) of the reading of the Torah was completed in [one](one.html) year, so that the Torah was divided into 54 *parashiyot*, weekly portions and that division is followed today, in continuance of the [Babylonian](bavel.html) tradition.

The division of the [body](body.html) of the text into sections is an ancient [one](one.html), and unlike the above-mentioned division into *sedarim* and *parashiyot*, is connected with the very copying of the text whether in a scroll or a codex. These sections are of [two](two.html) kinds, with the [type](types.html) of [space](place.html) between them varying:

(1) A *parasha petuhah* (open *parasha*) which starts at the beginning of a line, the preceding line being left partly or wholly blank (in some printed editions this is indicated by p);

(2) A *parashah setumah* (closed *parasha*) which begins at a point other than the start of a line, whether the preceding *parasha* ended in the preceding line (at its end or not) or whether it ends in the same [one](one.html), in which case a [space](place.html) of approximately [nine](nine.html) letters is left between the [two](two.html) *parashiyot* (in some printed editions this is noted as s).

This ancient division is attested to in the [Babylonian](bavel.html) [Talmud](orallaw.html) (Shab. 103b): “a *parasha petuha* should not be made *setumah*, a *setumah* should not be made *petuhah*.” *Sifra* to Lev. 1:1; 1:9 asks: “And what purpose did the sections serve? To give Moshe an interval to reflect between *parashah* and *parasha* and between issue and issue.” Despite their antiquity different traditions developed even on the matter of the *parashiyot*, that is, different customs, as to the [place](place.html) and [number](nchart.html) of each [type](types.html). In printed editions today there is a great degree of uniformity in the Torah due mainly to the legal fixing of this issue and that of the form of the songs by Maimonides following Ben-Asher (Yad, Sefer Torah 8:4).

\* \* \*

Mem is the 13th letter of the alephbet. It appears in [two](two.html) forms. Anywhere in a word except at the end it is square shaped with an opening in the lower left corner and yod like appendage in the upper left corner - מ. At the end of a word it appears as a closed square shape with the same yod like appendage - ם called a mem sofit.

There is [one](one.html) exception in the Torah where the final mem (mem sofit) is used in the middle of a word. The word and verse are found in Isaiah 9:6. There it is written: “lemarbeh hamisrah, his rule will be increased”. The mem in *lemarbeh* is a final mem.

The [world](worlds.html) of [Mashiach](mashiach.html), when [HaShem](hashem.html) will “annihilate death forever” and “banish the spirit of [impurity](purity.html) from the [world](worlds.html)” is represented by the letter “final *mem*,” whose form is that of a closed square ם (as alluded to in the verse, “For the increase of the realm and for peace without end” (Isaiah 9:6), in which the letter *mem* uncharacteristically appears in its closed form in the middle of a word). In this [future](future.html) [world](worlds.html) of divine perfection, the gap between spirit and matter will be closed and the negative “[fourth](four.html) side” will be transformed into a positive force

**o -** The closed, *Final Mem*, represents the era of [Mashiach](mashiach.html) as explained in Kabbalah.

***Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 9:6*** *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his* [*name*](name.html) *shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

oukaku vranv[(vcrnk) vcrok u

u,fknn-kgu sus txf-kg .e-iht

vesmcu ypanc vsgxkušv,t ihfvk

 ,utcm vuvh ,tbe okug-sgu v,gn

:,tz-vag,

***Sanhedrin 94a*** *Of the increase[[18]](#footnote-18) of his government and peace there shall be no end.[[19]](#footnote-19) R. Tanchum said: Bar Kappara expounded in Sepphoris, Why is every mem in the middle of a word open, whilst this is closed?[[20]](#footnote-20) — The Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the* [*Messiah*](mashiach.html)*, and Sennacherib as Gog and Magog;[[21]](#footnote-21) whereupon the Attribute of Justice[[22]](#footnote-22) said before the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! If Thou didst not make* [*David*](fathers.html) *the* [*Messiah*](mashiach.html)*, who uttered so many hymns and* [*psalms*](psalms1.html) *before Thee, wilt Thou appoint Hezekiah as such, who did not hymn Thee in spite of all these miracles which Thou wroughtest for him?’ Therefore it [sc. the mem] was closed.[[23]](#footnote-23) Straightway the earth exclaimed: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! Let me utter song before Thee instead of this righteous man [Hezekiah], and make him the* [*Messiah*](mashiach.html)*.’ So it broke into song before Him, as it is written, From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous.[[24]](#footnote-24) Then the Prince of the Universe[[25]](#footnote-25) said to Him: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! It [the earth] hath fulfilled Thy* [*desire*](needs.html) *[for songs of praise] on behalf of this righteous man.’[[26]](#footnote-26) But a heavenly* [*Voice*](voice.html) *cried out, ‘It is my* [*secret*](sod.html)*, it is my* [*secret*](sod.html)*.’[[27]](#footnote-27) To which the prophet rejoined, ‘Woe is me, woe is me:[[28]](#footnote-28) how long [must we wait]?’ The heavenly* [*Voice*](voice.html) *[again] cried out, ‘The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously:[[29]](#footnote-29) which Raba — others say, R.* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *— interpreted: until there come spoilers, and spoilers of the spoilers.[[30]](#footnote-30)*

\* \* \*

We find that the intention of having a letter in the Torah appearing diminished is to also interpret the word without that letter, such as Bereshit 23:2, where the word “v’liv\*k\*osoh” appears with a small Kof and is interpreted as “u’l’vitoh,” - and for her daughter (See Rashi ad loc).

\* \* \*

“In the beginning of *Divrei HaYamim* [the Book of Chronicles] [Adam](adam.html) HaRishon’s [name](name.html) is written with a large *Alef*, because [Adam](adam.html) considered himself to be very important. After all, none other than [HaShem](hashem.html) Himself had [created](bara.html) him! [Adam](adam.html) HaRishon was aware of his own significance, which later led to the [sin](sin.html) of the *Eitz HaDaat* [Tree of [Knowledge](thetree.html)].

\* \* \*

The inverted “nun” () in [nine](nine.html) passages (Num. x. 35, 36; Ps. cvii. 23-28, 40).

The Book of [Numbers](nchart.html) is like the voyage of the S. S. Titanic: it begins with the people in a festive mood, neatly arranged by camps around their sacred center, the [Sanctuary](mikdash.html); there are a few darker hints, but these are so subtle as to go almost unnoticed. The travelers expect a calm and pleasant [journey](stages.html), and to arrive at their destination quickly; suddenly, in mid-voyage they strike an iceberg and everything changes. In the Torah, this iceberg takes the concrete form of a pair of inverted [Hebrew](hebrew.html) letters, the “nun”s framing Num 10:35-36, after which everything starts to go wrong. The ship may not sink, but an entire [generation](toldot.html) will die in the desert and fail to complete their [journey](stages.html); here, the catastrophes are not natural, but man-made: a collective failure of character In a very real sense, everything must start anew after these [events](feasts.html).

\* \* \*

There are about 100 abnormal letters in the Masoretic text of the Bible—many of them in the Pentateuch—which were always copied by the scribes, and appear also in the printed editions. Among these **letters** are: the ו; bisected vav, in the word ouka (“peace”; Num. xxv. 12); the final “mem” in the word vcrok (“increase”; Isa. ix. 6 [A. V. 7]); the inverted “nun” () in [nine](nine.html) passages (Num. x. 35, 36; Ps. cvii. 23-28, 40); and the Suspended **Letters**. The principal division of these abnormal **letters** is into small (“ze’ira”) and **large** (“rabbati”) **letters,** as indicated in the lists which are given below. The former appear to belong to an older [Masorah](mishna1.html) than that which provides for the **large letters**, and should be classed with the “kere” and “ketib.”

**References in** [**Talmud**](orallaw.html) **and** [**Midrash**](orallaw.html)**.**

The references in [Talmud](orallaw.html) and [Midrash](orallaw.html) which are probably the bases of these abnormalities are as follows: (1) Citing “For in Y H the Lord [created](bara.html) the [worlds](worlds.html)” (Isa. xxvi. 4, Hebr.), R. Judah b. Ila’i said: “By the **letters** ‘yod’ [Y] and ‘he’ [H] this [world](worlds.html) and the [world](futures.html) to come were [created](bara.html)—the former by the ‘he,’ as it is written otrcvc [“when they were [created](bara.html),” Gen. ii. 4]” (Men. 29b); hence the letter “he” is small here, indicating this [world](worlds.html). (2) Citing “And when she saw him that he was a goodly child” (cuy; Ex. ii. 2), R. Meïr said: “‘Ṭob’ [“good”] was his [name](name.html)” (Ex. R. i.; Yalḳ., Ex. 166). (3) “And the Lord called unto Moshe” (trehu; Lev. i. 1); “va-yikra” is written here with a small “alef,” to emphasize its contrast with “va-yikar” in the verse “God met Balaam” (rehu; Num. xxiii. 4); the former indicates a familiar call used by loved ones, but the latter refers to an accidental meeting, difference being thus expressed between the call of [HaShem](hashem.html) to a [Jewish](gen-jew.html) prophet ( Moshe) and His call to a non-[Jewish](gen-jew.html) prophet (Balaam; Lev. R. i.). (4) “And Caleb stilled the people” (xvhu; Num. xiii. 30). He used diplomacy in quieting them, as he feared they might not heed his advice (see [Sotah](hair.html) 35a; Yalk., Num. 743); and the use of the **large** טsymbolically denotes the way in which Caleb quieted the people. (5) “[Hear](mashal.html), O [Israel](gen-jew.html) . . . [one](one.html) God” (Deut. vi. 4). Whosoever prolongs the word “echad” [[one](one.html)] in reciting the “[Shema](shema.html)’” [prayer](prayer.html), his days and years shall be prolonged—especially if he prolongs the letter “dalet” (Ber. 13b). The emphasis on the “dalet” (ד) is intended to distinguish it from the “resh” (ר), which resembles it, and which would change the reading to “acher” (another)—in this case a blasphemous expression. Proverbs (hkan) begins with a **large** “mem”—which has the numerical value of [forty](forty.html)—because Solomon, like Moshe, fasted [forty](forty.html) days before penetrating to the [secret](sod.html) of the Torah. According to another explanation, the “mem” is the center of the alphabet, as the [heart](body.html) is the center of the [body](body.html), the fountain of all wisdom, as revealed in Solomon’s Proverbs (Yalk., Prov. 929). The **large** “vav” in “Vayezatha” (t,zhu; Esth.ix. 9) is accounted for by the fact that all of [Haman](esther.html)’s [ten](ten.html) children were hanged on [one](one.html) **large** cross resembling the “vav” (ו; Yalḳ., Prov. 1059). The “zayin” in the same [name](name.html) is small, probably to indicate that Vayezatha was the youngest son.

Other **large letters** were intended to guard against possible errors; for instance, in the passage “when the cattle were feeble” (;hygvcu; Gen. xxx. 42) final “pe” (;) is written **large** in order that it may not be mistaken for a final “nun” (ן) and the word be read ihygvcu (comp. uhbhng in Job xxi. 24). The Septuagint translation, based on the second version, is “whenever the cattle happened to bring forth.”

The **large letters** in the words “ha-ke-zonah” (Gen. xxxiv. 31), “ha-la-Yhwh” (Deut. xxxii. 6), and “ha-le-’olamim” (Ps. lxxvii. 8) are probably meant to divide the root from the [two](two.html) preformatives. Some books begin with **large letters**, *e.g.*, Genesis, Proverbs, and Chronicles; perhaps originally these were divided into separate compilations, each beginning with a **large** letter. The **large** “mem” in “ma chobu” (Num. xxiv. 5) is probably meant to mark the beginning of the column as designated by the [Masorah](mishna1.html).

[Jacob](israelja.html) b. Asher, author of the “Churim,” gives in his annotations to the Torah various reasons—some of them far-fetched—for the small **letters**. He says, for instance: “The small ‘kaf’ of v,fcku, in the verse ‘[Abraham](avraham.html) came to [mourn](mourning.html) for Sarah and to [weep](mashal.html) for her,’ indicates that [Abraham](avraham.html) really cried but little, since Sarah died in a ripe old age. The small ‘kof’ [=100] in h,me, in the verse ‘Rebekah said to [Isaac](isaac.html): I am weary of life’ [Gen. xxvii. 46], indicates the height of the [Temple](temple.html), 100 cubits. Rebekah in her prophetic vision saw that the [Temple](temple.html) would be destroyed, and therefore she became weary of life.”

**SUSPENDED LETTERS**

There are [four](four.html) suspended or elevated (“teluyah”) letters in the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) Bible: (1) the “nun” in vabn, in Judges xviii. 30; (2) the “‘ayin” in rghn, in Ps. lxxx. 13; (3) the “‘ayin” in ohgar, in Job xxxviii. 13; and (4) the “‘ayin” in ohgarn, *ib.* verse 15. This [masorah](mishna1.html) is mentioned in the [Talmud](orallaw.html), and appears to be earlier than that of the small and large letters.

The object in suspending the letters in question is not quite clear. The Rabbis proposed to eliminate the suspended “nun” and to read “Moshe” in [place](place.html) of “Manasseh,” as Gershom was the son of Moshe (I Chron. xxiii. 15); it is only, they said, for the reason that Jonathan (the son of Gershom) adopted the [wickedness](wicked.html) of Manasseh that he is called “the grandson of Manasseh” (B. B. 109b; comp. Yer. Ber. ix. 3). But the difficulty is that there is no record that Moshe’s son Gershom had a son named Jonathan, his only [known](daat.html) son being Shebuel (I Chron. xxvi. 24). On the other [hand](fourteen.html), Jonathan, the [priest](priests.html) of the Danites, was evidently a young Levite (Judges xviii. 3), and not the son of Manasseh.

Commenting on the suspended “‘ayin” in the word rghn, the [Midrash](orallaw.html) says that the word may also read (without the “‘ayin”) ruhn=ruthn= “from the river or the sea.” The boar or swine [coming](coming.html) from the sea is less (another version “more”) dangerous than that from the forest (Lev. R. xiii.). This refers to the Roman government, which is compared to the swine (Gen. R. lxviii.; see also Krochmal, “Moreh Nebuke ha-Zeman,” xiii.).

Regarding the suspended “‘ayin” in the word ohgar, occurring twice in Job, the [Talmud](orallaw.html) eliminates the letter and reads ohar, which word has a double meaning—”rulers” and “poor”—the tyrants below who are poor and powerless above. But, it is explained, out of respect to King [David](fathers.html) the rulers in this case were not identified with the [wicked](wicked.html); hence the spelling ohgar (Sanh. 23b; see Rashi *ad loc.*, and Geiger, “Urschrift,” p. 258).

A more plausible explanation is that the suspended letters are similar in origin to the “kere” and “ketib.” In this case the authorities, who could not decide between [two](two.html) readings, whether the letter in question preceded or followed the next letter, placed it above, so that it might be read either way. Thus the original reading in Judges was probably “Jonathan, the son of Gershom in Manasseh” = vabhfc (comp. Judges vi. 15), *i.e.*, in the land of Manasseh, whither the Danites emigrated. Another reading was “the son of Moshe” (van ic); and the suspended “nun” makes it possible to read the word either way (“ Moshe” or “Manasseh”). Another possible explanation is that the original reading was “Mosheh,” the “nun” being introduced to suggest “Manasseh,” so as to avoid the scandal of having a grandson of Moshe figure as the [priest](priests.html) of an idolatrous shrine. The suspended “‘ayin” of rghn makes the second reading rhgn, “of the [city](city.html),” referring to the capital Rome as alluded to in the [Midrash](orallaw.html). The word ohgar in Job, if the “shin” and “‘ayin” be transposed, reads ohagr, “storms” (the plural of agr); this change brings the verses into entire harmony with the context and in accord with the previous chapter (comp. Job xxxvii. 3, 4, 6, 11 with *ib.* xxxviii. 1, 9, 22, 28, 34, 35).

**TAGIM - CROWNS**

Decorative “crowns” which are sometimes placed on the letters of the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) alphabet. The taga is regularly composed of [three](three.html) flourishes or strokes, each of which resembles a small “zayin” and is called “ziyyun” ( = “armor,” *i.e.*, “dagger”). In the Nazarean Codicil the taga is called “tittle” (Matt. v. 18). The [seven](seven.html) letters צ, ג, ו, נ, ט ע, ש have the crowns on the points of the upper horizontal bars. The flourishes are placed on the tops of the letters, and they are found only in the Scroll of the [Law](law.html), not in the printed copies of the Torah. The tagin are a part of the [Masorah](mishna1.html). According to tradition, there existed a manual, [known](daat.html) as “Sefer ha-Tagin,” of the tagin as they appeared on the [twelve](twelve.html) stones that Joshua set up in the [Jordan](stages.html), and later erected in Gilgal (Josh. iv. 9, 20). On these stones were inscribed the books of Moshe, with the tagin in the required letters (Nachmanides on Deut. xxvii. 8). The baraita of “Sefer ha-Tagin” thus relates its history: “It was found by the [high priest](priests.html) Eli, who delivered it to the prophet Samuel, from whom it passed to Palti the son of Laish, to Ahithophel, to the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite, to Elijah, to Elisha, to Jehoiada the [priest](priests.html), and to the Prophets, who buried it under the threshold of the [Temple](temple.html). It was removed to [Babylon](bavel.html) in the [time](time.html) of King Jehoiachin by the prophet Ezekiel. Ezra brought it back to [Jerusalem](city.html) in the [time](time.html) of Cyrus. Then it came into the possession of Menahem, and from him was handed down to R. Nechunya ben ha-Hanah, through whom it went to R. Eleazar ben ‘Arak, R. Joshua, R. Akiba, R. Judah, R. Miyasha (), R. Nahum ha-Lablar, and Rab.”

**Referred to in the** [**Talmud**](orallaw.html)**.**

The Aramaic language and the Masoretic style of the “Sefer ha-Tagin” would fix the [time](time.html) of its author as the geonic period. But the frequent references in the [Talmud](orallaw.html) to the tagin suggest the probability of the existence of “Sefer ha-Tagin” at a much earlier period. Raba said the [seven](seven.html) letters צ, ג, ו, נ, y, g, ש must each have a taga of [three](three.html) daggers (Men. 29b). The letter ה likewise has a taga (*ib.*). The taga of the ד is also referred to ([Sotah](hair.html) 20a). The taga of the “kof” is turned toward the “resh” (Shab. 104a; ‘Er. 13a). R. Akiba was wont to interpret every point with halakic references (‘Er. 21b). The Haggadah calls the tagin “ketarim.” “When Moshe ascended to [heaven](heaven.html) he found the Holy [One](one.html) ‘crowning’ the letters” (Shab. 89a). In the [Midrash](orallaw.html), in the comment on Hezekiah’s reception of the ambassadors of Merodach-baladan, to whom he showed the “precious things” (Isa. xxxix. 2), R. Johanan says, “He showed them a dagger swallowing a dagger”; and R. Levi adds, “With these we fight our battles and conquer” (Cant. R. iii. 3; comp. Sanh. 104a; Pirke R. El. lii., end). Nachmanides (1194-1270) quotes this [midrash](orallaw.html) with the reading, “Hezekiah showed them the ‘Sefer ha-Tagin’” (comment on Gen. i. 1). Maimonides evidently quotes the formula of the tagin for the [phylacteries](tefillin.html) and the [mezuzah](mezuzah.html) scrolls from the “Sefer ha-Tagin” (see “Yad,” [Tefillin](tefillin.html), ii. 9; [Mezuzah](mezuzah.html), v. 3); in his responsa “Pe’er ha-Dor” (No. 68, p. 17b, ed. Amsterdam, 1765) he says, “The marking of the tagin in the Sefer Torah is not a later custom, for the tagin are mentioned by the Talmudists as ‘the crowns on the letters.’ . . . The Torah that Moshe wrote also contained tagin.”

The Vitry Machzor of R. Simchah (written in 1208), a disciple of Rashi, copied the “Sefer ha-Tagin” (pp. 674-683). Menahem b. Zerahiah (1365), in “Chedah la-Derek” (I. i., § 20), says, “The ‘Sefer ha-Tagin’ is veiled in mysticism.” Profiat Duran, in the introduction to “Ma’asch Efod” (ed. Friedländer, p. 12, Vienna, 1865), says of the “Sefer ha-Tagin,” “They were scrupulous in maintaining the form of the letters as revealed to Moshe, inasmuch as they feared that a change might affect the efficacy attached to them.” To R. Eleazar of Worms (1176-1238), the author of “Rokeach” and of several cabalistic works, also is asscribed a “Sefer ha-Tagin” (Neubauer, “Cat. Bodl. Hebr. MSS.” No. 1566), which was, perhaps, his commentary on the text of “Sefer ha-Tagin”; he was not the author of the original book, as Zunz erroneously thought (see Zunz, “Z. G.” p. 405, and note 2), since Nachmanides, who flourished about the same [time](time.html) as R. Eleazar of Worms, quotes the “Sefer ha-Tagin” from the [Midrash](orallaw.html).

**Kabalistic Significance.**

The significance of the tagin is veiled in the mysticism of the Kabbala. Every stroke or [sign](signs.html) is a symbol revealing, in [connection](connection.html) with the letters and words, the great [secrets](sod.html) and mysteries of the universe. The letters with the tagin are supposed, when combined, to form the divine names by which [heaven](heaven.html) and earth were [created](bara.html), and which still furnish the key to the creative power and the revelation of [future](future.html) [events](feasts.html). These combinations, like the Tetragrammaton, were sometimes misused by unscrupulous scholars, especially among the Essenes. Hence, perhaps, the injunction of Hillel: “He who makes a common use of the crown [taga] of the Torah shall waste away” (Ab. iv. 7); to which is added, “because [one](one.html) who uses the Shem ha-Meforash has no share in the [world](futures.html) to come” (Ab. R. N. xii., end); the words of Hillel, however, may be interpreted figuratively (Meg. 28b).

A plausible explanation of the tagin is that they are scribal flourishes, “‘ibbur soferim” (decoration of the scribes), the intention being to ornament the scroll of the [Law](law.html) with a “keter Torah” (crown of the [Law](law.html)), for which purpose the letters ו, ג, ט, ע, ש, צ, ג were chosen because they are the only letters that have the necessary bars on top to receive the tagin, excepting the letter “vav,” of which the top is very narrow, and the “yod,” whose [head](body.html) is turned aside and has a point (“choch”) on the bottom. The tagin of the other letters were intended probably to serve as diacritical points for distinguishing between ב and ב, ח and ח, ך and ך, ו and ו, ם and מ wherever a mistake was possible. Technically, as noted above, a taga is composed of [three](three.html) ziyyunin, or daggers. A line or stroke placed on a letter with a flat top is called “keren” (= “[horn](shofar.html)”), but as a rule authors are not careful to descriminate between the terms “[horn](shofar.html)” and “dagger.”

**List.**

The “Sefer ha-Tagin” gives a list of the unusual occurrences of the tagin and other flourishes in the Torah, as follows (the tops of the letters being called “heads” and the shafts “[legs](body.html)”):

(1) *alef*, 7 letters each with 7 tagin;

(2) *bet*, 4 letters with 3;

(3) *gimel*, 3 letters with 4;

(4) *dalet*, 6 letters with 4, and 1 letter with 1;

(5) *he*, 360 letters with 4 horns disjoined (not penetrating inside);

(6) *he*, 18 letters with 1 [horn](shofar.html) and joined (penetrating inside);

(7) *vav*, 38 letters with raised heads and [legs](body.html) coiled forward;

(8) *zayin*, 14 letters with only [one](one.html) taga in the center;

(9) *zayin*, 9 letters without tagin, but with coiled heads;

(10) *Chet*, 28 letters with 3 horns, 2 backward and 1 forward;

(11) *Chet*, 37 letters with [legs](body.html) astride;

(12) *Chet*, 67 letters with 4;

(13) *yod*. 83 letters coiled like a “kaf”;

(14) *kaf*, 58 letters with 3;

(15) final *kaf*, 74 letters with 4 horns;

(16) final *kaf*, 3 letters with their [legs](body.html) coiled forward;

(17) *lamed*, 44 letters with long necks, and tagin lowered from the top beside the [neck](body.html), forming something like a “yod” at the lower end;

(18) *mem*, 39 letters with 3;

(19) final *mem*, 130 letters with 3 tagin disjoined;

(20) *nun*, 50 letters with their hooks coiled backward;

(21) final *nun*, 16 letters with heads coiled, but without tagin;

(22) *samek*; 60 letters with 4 tagin disjoined;

(23) ‘*ayin*, 17 letters with hind heads suspended;

(24) ‘*ayin*, 8 letters with tails coiled backward;

(25) ‘*ayin*, 6 letters with heads coiled backward;

(26) *pe*, 83 letters with 3;

(27) *pe*, 191 letters without tagin, but with the [mouth](body.html) coiled inside;

(28) final *pe*, 11 letters with 3;

(29) final *pe*, 3 letters with [mouth](body.html) coiled inside;

(30) *Tzade*, 70 letters with 5;

(31) Tz*ade*, 2 letters without tagin (all the rest have 3 tagin);

(32) final *Tzade*, 8 letters with 5;

(33) *Kof*, 181 letters with 3 tagin disjoined;

(34) *Kof*, 2 letters without tagin, but with [legs](body.html) coiled backward;

(35) *resh*, 150 letters with 2 horns;

(36) *shin*, 52 letters with 7 horns;

(37) *taw*, 22 letters with higher heads than are usual.

**Variations.**

There are some variations of this list in the Vitry Machzor, in the “Badde ha-Aron” of R. Shem-Ṭob (13th cent.), and in Ginsburg’s “Massoretico-Critical Text of the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) Bible.” Maimonides (Responsa, No. 68) says, “The tagin vary in the [number](nchart.html) of daggers, some letters having [one](one.html), [two](two.html), [three](three.html), or as many as [seven](seven.html). . . . Owing to the lapse of [time](time.html) and the exilic troubles there were so many variations in this [Masorah](mishna1.html) that the authorities considered the advisability of excluding all tagin. But since the validity of the scroll does not depend on the tagin, the Rabbis did not disturb them.” This probably accounts for the fact that only the tagin on the letters צ, ג, ו, ג, ט, ע, ש have been retained; those on all the other letters have been omitted in the scrolls of the [Law](law.html) used during the last [three](three.html) or [four](four.html) centuries (see R. Judah Minz, Responsa, No. 15; Shulkan ‘Aruk, Orach Chayyim, 36, 3).

**ISOLATED LETTERS**

The isolated letters (Tvrzvnm  TvyTva) are the [nine](nine.html) [signs](signs.html) which appear between verses—in the Torah before and after the section of Nrah  Asnb  yhyv (Num. 10:35–36), and [seven](seven.html) in [Psalms](psalms1.html), chapter 107. (There are differences of opinion as to their exact [place](place.html) and [number](nchart.html).) Rather than being referred to by the [name](name.html) TvyTva (letters), they are already called Tvynmys ([signs](signs.html)) in a *baraita* (about the Torah—Shab. 115b: ARN 34, 4; about [Psalms](psalms1.html)-RH 17b). Their form was not fixed in the ancient sources and the scribes were quite liberal in the manner in which they noted them. There is early evidence that these *simaniyyot* were nothing but simple dots. This is the impression given by *Sifrei* [*Numbers*](nchart.html), ch. 84 (ed. Horovitz, p. 80), already in the [name](name.html) of R. Simeon (second century C.E.). As [time](time.html) passed, these [signs](signs.html) assumed various shapes and changed names accordingly. In tractate *Soferim* (prior to the [eighth](eight.html) century) 6: 1, it is called, according to the version of various manuscripts, rupha (“[horn](shofar.html)”)—perhaps the [sign](signs.html) really resembled a [*shofar*](shofar.html), “and it appears indeed in the section on travels ( gobc hvhu )”—or dvpyS (spit), which is reminiscent of the [sign](signs.html) of the abeloj (=spit). In *Dikdukei ha-Te’amim* (ch. 2) the term Tvrzvnm  TvyTva is found, and according to Dunash b. Labrat it is Myrznmh TvyTvah (*Teshuvot al Menahem*, ed. Filipowski, p. 6a). The term is neutral and does not indicate the shape of the [sign](signs.html), and according to the basic meaning its root indicates that it refers to letters which are separated from the consonantal text. In the manuscripts the [sign](signs.html) developed the shape of a reversed *nun*. It is not [known](daat.html) whether all of it was reversed (see *Okhlah we-Okhlah*, b179), or only its top or bottom, but there was much confusion about it in the commentaries (see *Minhat Shai* on Num. 10:35; *Nahalat* [*Yaakov*](israelja.html) on tractate *Soferim* 6:1). There were even those who wrote it into the text itself instead of regular *nuns* (see also Ginsburg, *The* [*Masorah*](mishna1.html), vol. 2, 259). Later the names of these [signs](signs.html) too were interchanged with the [name](name.html) for the regular reversed *nun* (see below). Hence the *otiyyot menuzzarot* became Tvrzvnm NynBn (see [*Masorah*](mishna1.html) *Magna* to Ps. 107:23), which was explained, following rvHa  Brzn ,”they turned backward” (Isa. 1:4), to mean reversed *nun* (*Minhat Shai* on Ps. 107:23), though there is no linguistic support for this interpretation. If the opinion already expressed in ancient sources regarding the [signs](signs.html) in the Torah is generally accepted, that is, that the purpose of these [signs](signs.html) is to separate the section “when the [ark](ark.html) set forward” as if it were a book itself, there is no similar consensus of opinion concerning the [signs](signs.html) in [Psalms](psalms1.html).

**Beha’alotcha**

[One](one.html) of the parshiyot (it’s a S’TUMA) is separated from the parshiyot before and after it by more than blank [space](place.html) (as is usual) - namely, backwards NUNs. Consequently, this parsha is the most isolated of all parshiyot.

***Bamidbar (***[***Numbers***](nchart.html)***) 10:35-36*** *And it came to pass, when the* [*ark*](ark.html) *set forward, that Moshe said, Rise up,* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return,* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, unto the many thousands of* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html)*.*

וַעֲנַן יְהוָה עֲלֵיהֶם, יוֹמָם, בְּנָסְעָם, מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה.  {ס}  ׆  {ס}

וַיְהִי בִּנְסֹעַ הָאָרֹן, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה:  קוּמָה יְהוָה, וְיָפֻצוּ אֹיְבֶיךָ, וְיָנֻסוּ

מְשַׂנְאֶיךָ, מִפָּנֶיךָ.

וּבְנֻחֹה, יֹאמַר:  שׁוּבָה יְהוָה, רִבְבוֹת אַלְפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.  {ס}  ׆ {פ}

Before and after these [two](two.html) psukim we find the letter “nun” written back to front. This is the only [place](place.html) in the Torah where such a phenomenon occurs, while in Tanach it appears in chapter 107 of Tehillim. What do these inverted “nuns” symbolize? Chazal [teach](teacher.html) us: “The Torah made [signs](signs.html) for this passage, in front of it and after, to say that this is not its [place](place.html). But why was it written here? In order to make an interruption between [one](one.html) trouble and another” (Rashi Bamidbar 10:35 citing the [Gemara](orallaw.html) in [Shabbat](sabbath.html) 116a). Preceding these psukim, is the section “They journeyed from the mountain of [HaShem](hashem.html)” (Bamidbar 10:33), while the subsequent pasuk relates: “The people took to seeking complaints” (Bamidbar 11:1). The rightful [place](place.html) of these psukim is in the section detailing the encampment of each [tribe](tribes.html). An appropriate [place](place.html) would have been immediately following the pasuk describing the [traveling](mashal.html) of the [Mishkan](mikdash.html): “the Tent of Meeting, the [camp](stages.html) of the Levites, shall [journey](stages.html) in the middle of the camps” (Bamidbar 2:17).

‘When the [Ark](ark.html) would [journey](stages.html)...’ This is to say that it is not in it’s [place](place.html). Not just this, but it is a [remez](remez.html) for the other [place](place.html). [Therefore] the Torah makes [signs](signs.html) with the reversed [Heb. hafchios] ‘nun.’ As the [Talmud](orallaw.html) says, ‘A bent over [Heb. kafifah] nun [means] forced [Heb. kofif] faith.’ This means when the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people will have all good in this [world](worlds.html) and they will be in submission to the service of [HaShem](hashem.html). However if they are forced due to their sufferings, that is the level of a reversed ‘nun.’ Then the [ark](ark.html) and the Torah are hidden from [Israel](gen-jew.html).

For this reason Moshe [prayed](prayer.html), ‘Arise [HaShem](hashem.html) And let your foes be scattered and your enemies from before you.’ These are the enemies of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people. Then the [Ark](ark.html) and the Torah are not hidden. The ‘nun’ is not reversed. Their service to [HaShem](hashem.html) is with joy. (p. 53 sefer Aish Kodesh teachings of Rebbe Kolonymus Kalman HY’D\* of Piasatzna, the son of Rebbe Elimeilech of Grodzisk)

**EXTRAORDINARY DOTS**

There are dots over 15 words in the Bible and sometimes also under them, [one](one.html) dot over each letter or over some of the letters. The words are distributed as follows: [ten](ten.html) places in the Torah (in the tenth [place](place.html) in the Torah, Deut. 29:28, the dots cover [eleven](eleven.html) letters of [three](three.html) words—all but the last letter— dA  vnynblv vnl), [four](four.html) places in the Prophets, the dots being above in each case, and [one](one.html) word in the Hagiographa (a@l@v@l@; (Ps. 27: 13), where there are dots also beneath the word. There are different traditions on the details. (See the full list in the [*Masorah*](mishna1.html) *Magna* for [Numbers](nchart.html) 3:39, and in *Okhlah we-Okhlah* (ed. S. Frensdorff, 1864, b96), with the additional bibliography there.) These dots are a very ancient tradition, the evidence concerning some of them going back to the second century C.E.; see, for example, R. Yose in the [Mishna](orallaw.html) (Pes. 9:2) concerning the *he* with a dot, in the word hcHr (Num. 9:10). A comprehensive list of the location of these dots in the Torah is already found in *Sifrei* [*Numbers*](nchart.html) chap. 69 (ed. Horovitz p. 64–65), R. Simeon bar Yohai being mentioned there; and further evidence is to be found in the [Talmud](orallaw.html) and in the Midrashim. (The references were noted in the *Arukh ha-Shalem* under *“naqad.”* and to these should be added Ber. 4a; Naz. 23a; Hot. 10b.) There have been various theories put forth concerning the origin and meaning of these dots (see L. Blau, *Masoretische Untersuchungen* (Strassburg, 1891), 6–40: *Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift* (Budapest, 1894), 113–20; R. Butin, *The* [*Ten*](ten.html) *Nequdoth of the Torah* (Baltimore, 1906, repr. [New](new.html) York, 1969)); however, they do not belong to the system of vocalization and they also appear in Torah scrolls which are fit for public recitation.

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 29:28*** *The* [*secret*](sod.html) *[things belong] unto* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *our God: but those [things which are] revealed [belong] unto us and to our children for ever, that [we] may do all the words of this* [*law*](law.html)*.*



***Bamidbar (***[***Numbers***](nchart.html)***) 3:39*** *All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moshe and Aaron numbered at the* [*commandment*](cmds613.html) *of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, [were]* [*twenty*](twenty.html) *and* [*two*](two.html) *thousand.*



\* \* \*

Every [One](one.html) to Possess a Sefer Torah.

The Torah, written on a scroll of parchment. The Rabbis count among the mandatory precepts incumbent upon every Israelite the obligation to write a copy of the Torah for his personal use. The passage “Now therefore write ye this song for you, and [teach](teacher.html) it the children of [Israel](gen-jew.html)” (Deut. xxxi. 19) is interpreted as referring to the whole Torah, wherein “this song” is included (Sanh. 21b). The king was required to possess a second copy, to be kept near his throne and carried into battle (Deut. xvii. 18; Maimonides, “Yad,” Sefer Torah, vii. 1, 2). [One](one.html) who is unable to write the scroll himself should hire a scribe to write it for him; or if he purchases a scroll he should have it examined by a competent Sofer. If a [Jew](gen-jew.html) inherits a scroll it is his duty to write or have written another. This scroll he must not sell, even in dire distress, except for the purpose of paying his [teacher](teacher.html)’s fee or of defraying his own [marriage](mashal.html) expenses (Meg. 27a).

Method of Preparation.

The Torah for reading in public must be written on the skin (parchment) of a [clean](purity.html) animal, beast or fowl (comp. Lev. xi. 2 *et seq.*), though not necessarily slaughtered according to the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) ritual; but the skin of a fish, even if [clean](purity.html), can not be used (Shab. 108a). The parchment must be prepared specially for use as a scroll, with gallnut and lime and other chemicals that help to render it durable (Meg. 19a). In olden times the rough hide was scraped on both sides, and thus a sort of parchment made which was [known](daat.html) as “gewil.” Later the hide was split, the outer part, of superior quality, called “chelaf,” being mostly used for making scrolls of the [Law](law.html), while the inner and inferior part, called “doksostos,” (= δύσχιστος), was not employed for this purpose. The writing was inscribed on the outer or [hair](hair.html) side of the gewil, and on the inner or flesh side of the elaf (Shab. 79b). Every page was squared, and the lines were ruled with a stylus. Only the best black ink might be used, colored ink or gilding not being permitted (Massek, Soferim i. 1). The writing was executed by means of a stick or quill; and the text was in square [Hebrew](hebrew.html) characters (*ib.*).

Size of the Scroll and Margin.

The width of the scroll was about [six](six.html) handbreadths (= 24 inches), the length equaling the circumference (B. B. 14a). The Baraita says half of the length shall equal the width of the scroll when rolled up (Soferim ii. 9). The length of the scroll in the [Ark](ark.html) was [six](six.html) handbreadths, equal to the height of the tablets (B. B. *l.c.*). Maimonides gives the size of the regular scroll as 17 [fingers](body.html) (= inches) long (see below), seventeen being considered a “good” [number](nchart.html) ( = 17). Every line should be long enough to contain [thirty](thirty.html) **letters** or [three](three.html) words equal in [space](place.html) to that occupied by the **letters** . The lines are to be neither too short, as in an epistle, nor too long, involving the shifting of the [body](body.html) when reading from beginning to end. The sheet (“yeri’ah”) must contain no less than [three](three.html) and no more than [eight](eight.html) columns. A sheet of [nine](nine.html) pages may be cut in [two](two.html) parts, of [four](four.html) and [five](five.html) columns respectively. The last column of the scroll may be narrower and must end in the middle of the bottom line with the words ktrah kf hbhgk (Men. 30a).

The margin at the bottom of each page must be 4 fingerbreadths; at the top, 3 fingerbreadths; between the columns, 2 [fingers](body.html)’ [space](place.html); an allowance being made of 1 fingerbreadth for sewing the sheets together. Maimonides gives the length of the page as 17 [fingers](body.html), allowing 4 fingerbreadths for the bottom and 3 fingerbreadths for the top margin, and 10 fingerbreadths for the length of the written column. In the scroll that Maimonides had written for himself each page measured 4 [fingers](body.html) in width and contained 51 lines. The total [number](nchart.html) of columns was266, and the length of the whole scroll was 1,366 [fingers](body.html) (= 37.34 yds.). Maimonides calculates a finger-measure as equal to the width of 7 grains or the length of 2 (“Yad,” *l.c.* ix. 5, 9, 10), which is about 1 inch. The [number](nchart.html) of lines on a page might not be less than 48 nor more than 60 (*ib.* vii. 10). The Baraita, however, gives the [numbers](nchart.html) 42, 60, 72, and 98, based respectively on the 42 travels (Num. xxxiii. 3-48), 60 score thousand Israelites (Num. xi. 21), 72 elders (*ib.* verse 25), and 98 admonitions in Deuteronomy (xxviii. 16-68), because in each of these passages is mentioned “writing” (Soferim ii. 6). (At the present day the [forty](forty.html)-[two](two.html)-lined column is the generally accepted style of the scroll, its length being about 24 inches.) The [space](place.html) between the lines should be equal to the size of the **letters** (B. B. 13a), which must be uniform, except in the case of certain special abnormalities the [space](place.html) between [one](one.html) of the Torahal books and the next should be [four](four.html) lines. Extra [space](place.html) must be left at the beginning and at the end of the scroll, where the rollers are fastened. Nothing may be written on the margin outside the ruled lines, except [one](one.html) or [two](two.html) **letters** required to finish a word containing more than twice as many **letters**.

Some scribes are careful to begin each column with initial **letters** forming together the words una vhc (“by his [name](name.html) YAH”; Ps. lxviii. 4), as follows: ,hatrc (Gen. i. 1), vsuvh (*ib.* xlix. 8), ohtcv (Ex. xiv. 28), rna (*ib.* xxxiv. 11), vn (Num. xxiv. 5), vshgtu (Deut. xxxi. 28). Other scribes begin all columns except the [first](one.html) with the letter “vav”; such columns are called “vave ha-’ammudim” = “the vav columns”.

It is the scribe’s duty to prepare himself by silent meditation for performing the holy work of writing the Torah in the [name](name.html) of God. He is obliged to have before him a correct copy; he may not write even a single word from memory; and he must pronounce every word before writing it. Every letter must have [space](place.html) around it and must be so formed that an ordinary schoolboy can distinguish it from similar **letters** (Shulkan ‘Aruk, Orach Chayyim, 32, 36; see Taggin). The scroll may contain no vowels or accents; otherwise it is unfit for public reading.

Verses.

The scroll is not divided into verses; but it has [two](two.html) kinds of divisions into chapters (“parashiyyot”), distinguished respectively as “petuchah” (open) and “setumah” (closed), the former being a larger division than the latter (Men. 32a). Maimonides describes the spaces to be left between successive chapters as follows: “The text preceding the Petuchah ends in the middle of the line, leaving a [space](place.html) of [nine](nine.html) **letters** at the end of the line, and the petuchah commences at the beginning of the second line. If a [space](place.html) of [nine](nine.html) **letters** can not be left in the preceding line, the petuchah commences at the beginning of the [third](three.html) line, the intervening line being left blank. The text preceding the setumah or closed parashah ends in the middle of the line, a [space](place.html) of [nine](nine.html) **letters** being left, and the setumah commencing at the end of the same line. If there is no such [space](place.html) on the same line, leave a **small** [space](place.html) at the beginning of the second line, making together a [space](place.html) equal to [nine](nine.html) **letters**, and then commence the setumah. In other words, always commence the petuchah at the beginning of a line and the setumah in the middle of a line” (“Yad,” *l.c.* viii. 1, 2). Maimonides gives a list of all the petuchah and setumah parashiyyot as copied by him from an old manuscript in Egypt written by Ben Asher (*ib.* viii., end). Asheri explains the petuchah and setumah differently, almost reversing the method. The general practise is a compromise: the petuchah is preceded by a line between the end of which and the left margin a [space](place.html) of [nine](nine.html) **letters** is left, and commences at the beginning of the followingline; the setumah is preceded by a line closing at the edge of the column and commences at the middle of the next line, an intervening [space](place.html) of [nine](nine.html) **letters** being left (Shulchan ‘Aruch).

The poetic verses of the song of the [Red Sea](stages.html) (“shirat ha-Yam”; Gen. xv. 1-18) are metrically arranged in [thirty](thirty.html) lines (Shab. 103b) like bricks in a wall, as illustrated below:

The [first](one.html) [six](six.html) lines are placed thus:



The verses of the song of “Ha’azinu” (Deut. xxxii. 1-43) are placed in [seventy](seventy.html) double rows, the [first](one.html) [four](four.html) lines as follows:



The scroll must be written in accordance with the Masoretic Ketib, the abnormalities of certain **letters** being reproduced (See Small and Large **Letters**). If the final **letters l;.io**are written in the middle of a word, or if their equivalents fpmbn are written at the end, the scroll is unfit for public reading (Soferim ii. 10).

[**Name**](name.html) **of God.**

Scrupulous care must be taken in writing the Names of God: before every [name](name.html) the scribe must say, “I intend to write the Holy [Name](name.html)”; otherwise the scroll would be unfit (“pasul”) for public reading. When the scribe has begun to write the [name](name.html) of God he must not be interrupted until he has finished it. No part of the [name](name.html) may, extend into the margin outside the rule. If an error occurs in the [name](name.html), it may not be erased like any other word, but the whole sheet must be replaced and the defective sheet put in the genizah. When the writing is set aside to dry it should be covered, with a cloth to protect it from [dust](rock.html). It is considered shameful to turn the writing downward (‘Er. 97a).

If an error is found in the scroll it must be corrected and reexamined by a competent person within [thirty](thirty.html) days; if [three](three.html) or [four](four.html) errors are found on [one](one.html) page the scroll must be placed in the genizah (Men. 29b).

The sheets are sewed together with threads made of dried tendons (“gidin”) of [clean](purity.html) beasts. The sewing is begun on the blank side of the sheets; the extreme ends at top and bottom are left open to allow stretching. The rollers are fastened to the ends of the scroll, a [space](place.html) of [two](two.html) fingerbreadths being left between them and the writing. Every sheet must be sewed to the next; even [one](one.html) loose sheet makes the scroll unfit. At least [three](three.html) stitches must remain intact to hold [two](two.html) sheets together (Meg. 19a; Git. 60a).

**Sewing the Sheets Together.**

If the scroll is torn to a depth of [two](two.html) lines, it may be sewed together with dried tendons or fine silk, or a patch may be pasted on the back; if the tear extends to [three](three.html) lines, the sheet must be replaced. If the margin or [space](place.html) between the lines is torn, it may be sewed together or otherwise repaired. Care must be taken that every letter is in its proper [place](place.html) and that the needle does not pierce the **letters**.

A scroll written by a non-[Jew](gen-jew.html) must be put aside in the genizah; [one](one.html) written by a heretic (“apikoros”) or sectarian [Jew](gen-jew.html) (“min”) must be burned, as it is to be apprehended that he has wilfully changed the text (Gittim. 45b).

Every [one](one.html) who passes a scroll must [kiss](mashal.html) its mantle. The scroll may not be kept in a bedroom (M. 25a). A scroll of the [Law](law.html) may lie on the top of another, but not under the scroll of the Prophets, which latter is considered inferior in holiness to the scroll of the Torah (Meg. 27a).

Decayed and worn-out scrolls are placed in the Genizah or in an earthen vessel in the coffin of a talmid-Hakam (Ber. 26b).

Appurtenances.

The reverence with which the scroll of the [Law](law.html) is regarded is shown by its costly accessories and ornaments, which include a beautiful [Ark](ark.html) as a receptacle, with a handsomely embroidered “paroket” (curtain) over it. The scroll itself is girded with a strip of silk and robed in a Mantle of the [Law](law.html), and is laid on a “mappah,” or desk-cover, when placed on the almemar for reading. The [two](two.html) rollers, “etz hayyim,” are of hard wood, with flat, round tops and bottoms to support and protect the edges of the parchment when rolled up. The projecting handles of the rollers on both sides, especially the upper ones, are usually of ivory. The gold and silver ornaments belonging to the scroll are [known](daat.html) as “kele chodesh” (sacred vessels), and somewhat resemble the ornaments of the [high priest](priests.html). The principal ornament is the Crown of the [Law](law.html), which is made to fit over the upper ends of the rollers when the scroll is closed. Some scrolls have [two](two.html) crowns, [one](one.html) for each upper end.

The Breastplate.

Suspended by a chain from the top of the rollers is the breastplate, to which, as in the case of the crowns, little bells are attached. Lions, eagles, flags, and the Magen Dawid either chased or embossed, or painted, are the principal decorations. The borders and [two](two.html) pillars of Boaz and Jachin on the sides of the breastplate are in open-work. In the center there is often a miniature [Ark](ark.html), the doors being in the form of the [two](two.html) tablets of the [Law](law.html), with the [commandments](cmds613.html) inscribed thereon. The lower part of the breastplate has a [place](place.html) for the insertion of a **small** plate, bearingthe dates of the [Sabbaths](sabbath.html) and holy days on which the scroll it distinguishes is used. Over the breastplate is suspended, by a chain from the [head](body.html) of the rollers, the Yad. In former times the crown was placed upon the [head](body.html) of the “Chatan Torah” when he concluded the reading of the Torah on the day of the Rejoicing of the [Law](law.html), but it was not permitted to be so used in the case of an ordinary nuptial ceremony (Shulchan ‘Aruk, Orach hayyim, 154, 10). The people used to donate, or loan, the silver ornaments used for the scroll on holy days (*ib.* 153, 18). When not in use these ornaments were hung up on the pillars inside the [synagogue](synagog.html) ([David](fathers.html) ibn Abi Zimra, Responsa, No. 174, ed. Leghorn, 1651). In modern times they are placed in a drawer or safe under the [Ark](ark.html) when not in use.

For domestic use, or during [travel](mashal.html), the scroll is kept in a separate case, which in the [East](east.html) is almost invariably of wood; when of **small** dimensions this is sometimes made of the precious metals and decorated with jewels.

Personal Copies of the Torah.

The history of the dissemination of the scrolls of the [Law](law.html) is [one](one.html) of vicissitudes. While they were few in [number](nchart.html) at the [time](time.html) of the Chronicler (II Chron. xvii. 7-9), their [number](nchart.html) increased enormously in the [Talmudic](orallaw.html) period as a result of a literal interpretation of the [command](cmds613.html) that each [Jew](gen-jew.html) should write a Torah for himself, and also in consequence of the custom of always carrying a copy ([magic](magic.html) influence being attributed thereto) on the person. In the later Middle Ages, on the contrary, the scrolls decreased in [number](nchart.html), especially in Christian Europe, on account of the persecutions and the impoverishment of the [Jews](gen-jew.html), even though for 2,000 years the [first](one.html) duty incumbent on each [community](community.html) was the possession of at least [one](one.html) copy (Blau, *l.c.* p. 88). While the ancient Oriental [communities](community.html) possessed scrolls of the Prophets and of the Hagiographa in addition to the scroll of the [Law](law.html), European [synagogues](synagog.html) have, since the Middle Ages, provided themselves only with Torah scrolls and, sometimes, with scrolls of [Esther](esther.html). [Six](six.html) or [nine](nine.html) pigeonholes, in which the rolls are lying (not [standing](mashal.html) as in modern times), appear in certain illustrations of bookcases (comp. Blau, *l.c.* p. 180; also illustrations in “Mittheilungen,” iii.-iv., fol. 4), these scrolls evidently representing [two](two.html) or [three](three.html) entire Bibles, each consisting of [three](three.html) parts, the Torah, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa. Curiously enough, the interior of the [Ark](ark.html) in the [synagogue](synagog.html) of Modena is likewise divided into [six](six.html) parts (comp. illustration in “Mittheilungen,” i. 14).

**SPACES IN THE TORAH**

“And it came to pass while [Israel](gen-jew.html) [dwelt](dwelling.html) in the land that Reuven went and [lay with](marriageact.html) Bilhah his father’s concubine and [Israel](gen-jew.html) heard of it.” (Genesis 35:22)

Rashi mitigates the circumstances, insisting, on the basis of the [Talmudic](orallaw.html) interpretation, that Reuven merely placed his father’s bed in Leah’s tent when - after [Rachel](rachel.html)’s death, [Jacob](israelja.html) had placed his bed in Bilhah’s tent. (B.T. [Shabbat](sabbath.html) 55b). Whatever the interpretation, and even if Reuven’s only [desire](needs.html) was to [save](salvation.html) his mother yet another mark of humiliation, it is never a son’s [place](place.html) to determine the private life of his father!

The final phrase in the verse, ‘And [Israel](gen-jew.html) heard of it,’ is followed by a blank white [space](place.html) in the Torah scroll; the Vilna Gaon suggests that wherever there is such a white [space](place.html), it indicates that the subject of the verse - [Jacob](israelja.html) - wept.

\* \* \*

There is usually a [space](place.html) in the Torah scroll separating [one](one.html) parashah from the next. As is well [known](daat.html), however, no such [space](place.html) exists in-between VaYigash and VaYechi. Rashi quotes the [Midrash](orallaw.html)’s explanation of this phenomenon: “Why is this parasha ‘closed’? ...Ya’akov wanted to reveal to his sons [the [time](time.html) of] the End [of Days], but it was ‘closed off’ from him.” That is, God prevented him from doing so.

\* \* \*



[PARASHAT](annual.html) TZAV 5762

**G-d** [**spoke**](mashal.html) **to Moshe saying, “**[**Speak**](mashal.html) **to the Israelites saying, ‘You may not** [**eat**](eating.html) **any cheilev (forbidden fat) from oxen, sheep, or goats… You may not** [**eat**](eating.html) **any** [**blood**](body.html)**… whether from birds or from animals’” (7:22-23,26).**

The section bringing these [two](two.html) [commandments](cmds613.html) is placed in the Torah towards the end of the [laws](law.html) of the offerings at the [Temple](temple.html). They have been part of the Israelite way of life ever since. They raise many points of interest, among which are:

1. What special qualities do cheilev and [blood](body.html) have, for which the Torah gives them the status of forbidden [foods](food.html)?

2. Cheilev and [blood](body.html) were both burnt on the Altar during [Tabernacle](mikdash.html) and later [Temple](temple.html) times. Yet the Torah explicitly states that the prohibition of [eating](eating.html) cheilev applies to oxen, sheep, and goats only. It does not include species of animal that are ineligible for [Temple](temple.html) offerings, such as the deer. In contrast, the Torah expressly forbids the consumption of [blood](body.html) from all animals and birds. Why does the Torah make that distinction?

3. These prohibitions of [eating](eating.html) cheilev and [blood](body.html) are placed in the section of the Torah that deals with peace offerings, thanksgiving offerings. Regarding such offerings, the [Talmud](orallaw.html) (Berachot 54b) brings the following tradition, based on [Psalm](psalms1.html) 107:

[Four](four.html) categories of people are required to bring a thanksgiving [offering](korbanot.html): those who survived a sea [journey](stages.html), those who survived a [journey](stages.html) in the desert, someone who recovered from a dangerous [illness](ilness.html), and someone who survived dangerous imprisonment.

What have the prohibitions of cheilev and [blood](body.html) got to do with specifically peace offerings? (The [connection](connection.html): “I gave ([blood](body.html)) to atone for you on the altar” (17:11) applies to other offerings as well, and anyway is in a later Parasha)

4. These [two](two.html) prohibitions are introduced with the frequently used sentences: ‘[HaShem](hashem.html) [spoke](mashal.html) to Moshe saying: “[Speak](mashal.html) to the Israelites…”‘ However in every other [place](place.html) in the Torah, these expressions are preceded by a mandatory [space](place.html) in the Torah Scroll, represented in the printed Torah with the letter ‘pay’ or ‘samech’. In this case, by contrast, they follow on directly from the previous subject, the [laws](law.html) surrounding peace offerings, without any pause between them. This suggests an unusually strong link between the various offerings and the general prohibition of [eating](eating.html) cheilev and [blood](body.html). What is that [connection](connection.html)?

Several commentaries tackle general issue of the prohibition of [eating](eating.html) cheilev and [blood](body.html). The Rambam (in the Guide for the Perplexed) distinguishes between the [two](two.html). He writes that the Torah forbade cheilev for health reasons. However, he links the consumption of [blood](body.html) with [idolatry](idolatry.html). “And I [know](daat.html)” he writes, “that [blood](body.html) was very unclean in the [eyes](body.html) of the Zaba (a [type](types.html) of [idolatry](idolatry.html) of those days). Yet they nevertheless [ate](eating.html) it, thinking that it is the [food](food.html) of the spirits… (and by partaking of [blood](body.html)) they would bring about love and friendship with the spirits, and they assumed that these spirits would come to them in a [dream](dreams.html) and would tell them the [future](future.html) and help them.” In other words, the prohibition of [blood](body.html) is to move the Israelites away from [idolatry](idolatry.html), which in those days was linked to [blood](body.html).

The Ramban brings a more mystical rationale. He develops the reason for the prohibition of [eating](eating.html) [blood](body.html) around the idea that the [blood](body.html) is the life force of an animal. (The [blood](body.html) circulates – bringing a constant supply of nutrients and removing waste from all parts of the [body](body.html).) All lives, says the Ramban, belong to the Almighty. From after the [flood](noach.html), the Torah permitted Mankind to [eat](eating.html) animal flesh (Gen. 9:3), for those creatures were [created](bara.html) for Man’s [needs](needs.html) and enjoyment. But the life-force is close to [HaShem](hashem.html) – and thus it performs the higher role of becoming part of [offering](korbanot.html), being consumed on the Altar and thus being returned to the Creator. As the Sifra (8:6) puts it, [blood](body.html) is the medium that goes upon the Altar for [atonement](atonemen.html), as if to say, “Let [one](one.html) life be offered to atone for another”, in harmony with the text, “I gave ([blood](body.html)) to atone for you on the altar” (17:11).

Developing this idea in a different direction, consider the following proverb: “Do not throw a stone into the well from which you drank.”

All animals benefit man in some way, if only because they form part of the [food](food.html)-chain from which he ultimately benefits. Thus man does not [eat](eating.html) worms, but fish do, and people in turn [eat](eating.html) the fish. However certain animal species give more to man than others. Fish live in the sea, an environment that man does not share. But birds live on the land and they do not only provide meat, but eggs as well. Permitted wild animals – such as the hart and the deer, also have additional uses. I do not have information about the uses of the deer in ancient history, but today, apart from venison, they contribute musk, [coming](coming.html) from a gland on the abdomen of the musk deer, used in medicines and perfumes. In addition, deerskin is used for shoes, boots, and gloves, and their antlers are made into buttons and knife handles. Thus the Torah respects the life-giving force of these creatures which give ‘greater’ service to man, and it requires us not to abuse their basic life-giving force. Instead, when they are slaughtered, their [blood](body.html) must be removed and disposed of, modestly, by covering it up (17:13).

However, the cattle, sheep, and goats – domesticated animals eligible for offerings in the [Temple](temple.html), serve man in greater ways and so man is more dependent on them. Cows [convert](aliens.html) grass into milk, sheep produce wool and, together with goats, they are milked in some societies even today. Goat’s milk compares favorably in nutritive value with cow’s milk and it is more easily digested by many people. It is used extensively in making cheese. And both cattle and goats still function as beasts of burden in many less advanced economies. So, because they are closer to man, not only is it forbidden to [eat](eating.html) their [blood](body.html) – their life-giving force. But their cheilev, their fat ‘reserve of life-giving force’ (broken and converted into nutrients and in turn carried by the [blood](body.html)) is given special respect, as in their lifetime they have been in the direct service of man. This takes us back to the proverb: “Do not throw a stone into the well from which you drank.”

This helps to [face](body.html) the final [two](two.html) questions: what is the [connection](connection.html) between peace offerings and the prohibition of [eating](eating.html) cheilev and [blood](body.html). The answer is that they both share the same underlying rationale (therefore the Torah does not put a break between them). That common factor is mankind’s [desire](needs.html) to show thanks for the services supplied to him from the [Creation](bara.html). That starts from the Creator Himself – when a person survives [illness](ilness.html), imprisonment, a sea or desert [journey](stages.html), he or she should recognize [HaShem](hashem.html)’s providence and show gratitude – thorough a peace / thanksgiving [offering](korbanot.html) in [Temple](temple.html) times, and through recognizing and thanking Him in [prayer](prayer.html) today. And this same idea applies to His creations, hence the juxtaposition the peace / thanksgiving [offering](korbanot.html), and the forbidding of [eating](eating.html) cheilev and [blood](body.html) even to this day. We benefited directly from those creatures in various degrees, and we are required to show our gratitude by correspondingly respecting the very forces inside them that gave us those benefits…

\* \* \*

Everything is susceptible to midrashic interpretation, including the [physical](physical.html) appearance of the Torah text. As you [know](daat.html) from aliyot to the Torah, the text of the Torah scroll is not divided onto chapters or verses, as it is in our printed edition of the Torah, but rather into units separated from each other by empty [space](place.html). When the Torah scroll is raised to be bound and the text is turned to the congregation for viewing, these breaks in the written script stand out conspicuously. The ancient text contains neither vowels nor punctuation, only words arranged in passages of different sizes defined by their context and set off by gaps in the writing.

These breaks are of [two](two.html) sorts: [one](one.html) occurs within the line and is enclosed on both sides by the final word of the passage that precedes and the [first](one.html) word of the passage that follows. The size of the [space](place.html) is the equivalent of [nine](nine.html) letters. The other break is unenclosed on the left side (remember [Hebrew](hebrew.html) goes from right to left), leaving the line open. That is, the next passage begins on the following line on the far right. The book of Genesis, for example, contains a total of 91 such breaks, 43 enclosed and 48 open on the left side.

The [first](one.html) of the Torah’s [two](two.html) [creation](bara.html) stories shows clearly how this method of demarcation works. Each of the [seven](seven.html) days of [creation](bara.html) is treated as a distinct literary unit set off by an open [space](place.html) that completes the line. According to this arrangement, [HaShem](hashem.html)’s resting on the [seventh](seven.html) day culminates the [creation](bara.html) of the cosmos, and together the [seven](seven.html) passages constitute a single narrative unit followed by an open [space](place.html) before the Torah shifts to the [Garden of Eden](eden.html), where the story unfolds without interruption until [HaShem](hashem.html) informs Eve and [Adam](adam.html) of their respective punishment.

Today, we reference biblical passages by chapter and verse. While the division of Scripture into verses is of [Jewish](gen-jew.html) provenance dating from the period of the [Talmud](orallaw.html), the breaking into chapters derives from the [Church](church.html). In the 13th century, manuscripts of the Vulgate, the accepted Latin translation of the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) Bible, edited by Jerome, began to appear divided into chapters. A century later, that division showed up in [Hebrew](hebrew.html) manuscripts and was adopted by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1516-17 in the [first](one.html) printed edition of the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) Bible with [Hebrew](hebrew.html) commentaries (*Mikraot Gedolot*).

Yet, despite its unwieldy nature, the ancient [Hebrew](hebrew.html) system of demarcation is often closer to the content of the text. Such is the case with the example cited above. For some unknown reason, those responsible for the division by chapter saw fit to sever the institution of the [Sabbath](sabbath.html) on the [seventh](seven.html) day from the other [six](six.html) days and make it the opening [three](three.html) verses of chapter [two](two.html), the Eden narrative (Genesis 2:1-3). By contrast, the division in our Torah scroll in this instance perfectly matches form with content. To their credit, standard printed editions of the Haumash in [Hebrew](hebrew.html) preserve the ancient format with spaces marked either by the letter “peh” signalizing an unenclosed [space](place.html) (*petuhah*- open) or the letter “samekh,” an enclosed [one](one.html) (*stumah*-closed).

[One](one.html) final comment before my [Midrash](orallaw.html). The Torah is organized not only into smaller units, either open or closed, totaling 669, but also into 54 longer portions to be read weekly in the [synagogue](synagog.html). On occasion, the [two](two.html) are coterminous, as in [parashat](annual.html) Miketz, which means the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) text is unbroken for the entire length of the parashah, a nightmare for Torah readers who need to find their spot after each aliyah.

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) turns on the anomaly that no [space](place.html) of any sort distances the end of the last week’s parashah, VaYiggash, from VaYehi. In fact, this is the only [time](time.html) in the Torah that [two](two.html) sequential portions are not set apart by intervening [space](place.html). The feature prompts the [Midrash](orallaw.html) unexpectedly to observe that [Jacob](israelja.html) on his deathbed intended to share with his sons a glimpse of things to come, but was denied the vision. The noteworthy absence of any defining [space](place.html) in the Torah scroll at the beginning of VaYehi suggests to the rabbinic imagination that the prophetic [insight](insights.html) granted [Jacob](israelja.html) momentarily near the end of his life quickly evaporated (*Bereshit Raba* 96:1). A close reading of the words supports this fanciful notion. The [first](one.html) [two](two.html) verses of the deathbed scene seem unduly repetitive: “And [Jacob](israelja.html) called his sons and said, ‘Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come. Assemble and hearken, O sons of [Jacob](israelja.html); Hearken to [Israel](gen-jew.html) your father (49:1-2).’” [Jacob](israelja.html) sounds tentative, almost stalling for [time](time.html). The illumination is darkening, the vision fading, and [Jacob](israelja.html) ends up talking about past hurts instead of [future](future.html) blessings: “Reuben, you are my [first](one.html) born ... unstable as water ... For when you mounted your father’s bed (Genesis 35:22), you brought disgrace (49:3-4).”

But what means this poignant all-too human episode? We too yearn for moments of light to illumine the unredeemed [world](worlds.html) in which we live. At times of terrifying transition, from life to death, from [one](one.html) [millennium](millenium.html) to another, we peer desperately ahead into a beclouded [future](future.html). This delicate [midrash](orallaw.html) strikes a sober note which is part of a larger rabbinic agenda, not to speculate about things far beyond our ken. Even a figure as close to [HaShem](hashem.html) as [Jacob](israelja.html) on the threshold of life eternal could not penetrate the veil that conceals what awaits us. We are better served by reflecting on the lessons of things past. And so [Jacob](israelja.html) slips into pondering the import of his family’s turbulent history.

In this spirit of emotional restraint, R. Yochanan ben Zakkai, who witnessed the destruction of the [Temple](temple.html) by the Romans, urged his countrymen not to [mourn](mourning.html) excessively. The doing of good deeds has the same [redemptive](redemption.html) power as the [offering](korbanot.html) of sacrifices (*Avot de R. Nathan*, ed. Schechter, p. 21). Similarly tempered, he opined that if you were about to plant a sapling and news came that the [messiah](mashiach.html) had arrived, finish your planting and then go out to greet him (same p 67). The failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 C.E. only intensified this anti-cataclysmic state of mind. In Babylonia, Samuel posited that the [one](one.html) difference between the present and the days of the [Mashiach](mashiach.html) will be the end of [Jewish](gen-jew.html) degradation (B.T. *Berakhot* 34b), while in Palestine his contemporary, R. Yonatan, generally excoriated those who wasted their days trying to figure out when the [Mashiach](mashiach.html) would come. Each miscalculation only adds to our despair (B.T. *Sanhedrin* 97b).

A note of sobriety on the eve of an inebriating passage of [time](time.html). Better to look backward than forward, on what is perfectly clear and not frustratingly obscure. If we could avoid the horrific crimes against humanity that overwhelm the achievements of the 20th century, our [future](future.html) in the [new](new.html) [millennium](millenium.html) would be immeasurably brighter.

\* \* \*

**GUIDE TO TEXTS**

*What is the Torah about?*

As a narrative, it starts with the story of [Creation](bara.html) and ends with the death of Moshe, just before the entry to the [Land of Israel](city.html). However, it is important straight away to say [two](two.html) things:

1. that the Torah doesn’t just contain narrative. Whole sections (especially in the book Vayikra) deal with [laws](law.html) and [commandments](cmds613.html);

2. that every single letter is considered important, and has meaning beyond the narrative.

Bereshit (Genesis) starts with [two](two.html) accounts of [Creation](bara.html), [Adam](adam.html) and Eve, and [Noah](noach.html). It then continues in chronological order through [Abraham](avraham.html), [Isaac](isaac.html), and [Jacob](israelja.html) (the Patriarchs). It then goes on to tell the story of [Jacob](israelja.html)’s sons and especially of [Joseph](joseph.html), his life in Egypt, and then concludes with [Joseph](joseph.html)’s death in Egypt.

Shemot ([Exodus](exodus.html)) describes the slavery of the [Jews](gen-jew.html) in Egypt, and of their [redemption](redemption.html) under Moshe. It describes the leaving of Egypt, and the Revelation at Mount [Sinai](stages.html). The [Ten](ten.html) [Commandments](cmds613.html) and many other [laws](law.html), and the details of the building of the [Sanctuary](mikdash.html) in the Wilderness are to be found in [Exodus](exodus.html).

Vayikra (Leviticus) contains [laws](law.html) and only a small amount of narrative. In Vayikra, [HaShem](hashem.html) tells Moshe to explain the [laws](law.html) on Priesthood, sacrifices, [purity](purity.html), and certain civil and criminal [laws](law.html).

Bamidbar ([Numbers](nchart.html)) describes how the [Jews](gen-jew.html) continued their [journey](stages.html) through the Wilderness. It tells of the [twelve](twelve.html) spies, and the subsequent wanderings of the [Jews](gen-jew.html). Bamidbar ends with the [Jews](gen-jew.html) at the borders of the Promised Land, [forty](forty.html) years after [leaving Egypt](thebirth.html).

Devarim (Deuteronomy) contains a review of the Torah, and Moshe’s parting words to the Children of [Israel](gen-jew.html) prior to his death. It also contains further [laws](law.html). The final chapter describes Moshe’s death.

*Where does it come from? Who wrote it down?*

There is obviously controversy amongst different streams of Judaism and [Jewish](gen-jew.html) thought about the origin of the Torah. The traditional view is that the Torah is the word of God, communicated to and written down by Moshe. This view holds that all of the Torah up until Revelation at Mount [Sinai](stages.html) (i.e. until the middle of Shemot) was written down by Moshe. There is then debate about when Moshe wrote the rest of the Torah. The issue is that if Moshe wrote it all down whilst on Mount [Sinai](stages.html) he would have [known](daat.html) what would happen next! Some think that Moshe wrote the rest of the Torah as it happened, in [stages](stages.html); some believe that Moshe did write it all on Mount [Sinai](stages.html). All agree that it had all been written by just after the death of Moshe. Joshua is thought by some to have written the last few verses of the Torah, dealing with Moshe’s death.

*What does it look like?*

The Torah text (as written meticulously by a scribe) is different from the Chumash (or Tanach) text.



The Torah scroll does not contain chapter divisions (e.g. [Numbers](nchart.html) 13:2). These were added later by Christian scholars, but are used in the Chumash printed editions as a universal reference tool. They don’t refer to anything fundamental in the text, from a [Jewish](gen-jew.html) point of view. Unlike the Chumash, The Torah scroll doesn’t contain vowels or cantillation (singing) marks. The cantillation marks are used to allow leining (singing) from the Torah in a prescribed manner.

I*in what language is it written?*

The Torah is written in [Hebrew](hebrew.html). This Biblical [Hebrew](hebrew.html) is a very old [Hebrew](hebrew.html), and is different from more recent dialects (eg. Mishnaic or modern [Hebrew](hebrew.html)). This difference is similar in kind and degree to Shakespearean and modern English. Hence Israelis can read and understand the Torah like English people can read and understand (or not) Shakespeare.

*What do we do with it?*

*in* [*synagogue*](synagog.html)*...*

*“For it was* [*taught*](teacher.html)*: ‘And they went* [*three*](three.html) *days in the wilderness and found no water (*[*Exodus*](exodus.html) *25:22)’. Upon which those who expound verses metaphorically said: Water means nothing but Torah, as it says: ‘Ho, everyone that thirsts should come for water (Isaiah 55:1)’. It thus means that as they went* [*three*](three.html) *days without Torah they immediately became exhausted.”* - [Babylonian](bavel.html) [Talmud](orallaw.html), Tractate Baba Kama 82a.

The Torah is read in public on [three](three.html) different days of each week. It is read on [Shabbat](sabbath.html) morning and afternoon (at the Shacharit and Minchah services), Monday morning (at the Shacharit service) and on Thursday morning (again at Shacharit). Thus there is never a gap of more than [three](three.html) days between public readings of the Torah.

The sages divided the Torah into 54 portions (in the [annual](annual.html) [cycle](cycles.html) – 154 for the [Triennial](shmita.html) [cycle](cycles.html)) to allow for a completion in an [annual](annual.html) public reading. These portions are called sidrot. Each week, a different sidra is read in [synagogue](synagog.html). (Because there are 54 sidrot, some weeks [two](two.html) sidrot are read.) On [festivals](festivals.html), [two](two.html) special selections from the Torah relevant to that day are read.

The word parasha is often used to mean sedra, but this is a misnomer. Technically a parasha is a paragraph marked by an indent on a midline blank [space](place.html) in the Torah scroll. Parashot can be as short as a sentence and as long as an entire sidra.

Each sidra is divided into [seven](seven.html) aliyot (points at which someone from the congregation makes a blessing on the Torah, commonly [known](daat.html) as “call ups”). These aliyot are decided by convention, based on natural spaces in the text. These can be seen in the Torah itself, although they are also made with reference to the content of the passages. On Saturday afternoon, Monday, and Thursday, the [first](one.html) aliyah (call up, or division of the sidra) for the following [Shabbat](sabbath.html) is read, but [three](three.html) people are given the honour of reading it. The [first](one.html) aliyah is therefore subdivided into smaller units for use on [three](three.html) days of the week (these smaller units are still called aliyot though!) [Four](four.html) people are called to the Torah on [Rosh Chodesh](chodesh.html) (the [New](new.html) Month), [five](five.html), for major [festivals](festivals.html) ([Pesach](passover.html), Shavout, [Succoth](succoth.html), [Yom Teruah](teruah.html)) and [six](six.html) are called to the Torah on Yom [HaKippurim](kippur.html).

On [Shabbat](sabbath.html), at least [seven](seven.html) people are called to the Torah. It is possible to divide the Torah reading into more parts to let more people share in the honour of being called to read it, but whatever happens, the entire Parasha must be read on [Shabbat](sabbath.html) morning.

*everyday use...*

The Torah is [studied](study.html) extensively, and is the basis for all [Jewish](gen-jew.html) learning. That is why the Torah is read in public, to make sure that [Jews](gen-jew.html) are learning it. Torah is [taught](teacher.html) in [Jewish](gen-jew.html) schools and [synagogues](synagog.html).

There is a custom of reading [one](one.html) division of the sidra each day of the week, so that each week the entire sidra is learnt. There are a [number](nchart.html) of different ways to learn the ‘Parashot HaShavua’ (which literally means ‘the weekly sidra’), by classes or reading. [Study](study.html) of Torah at home, on the way to work, during leisure [time](time.html) etc. is part of the lifestyle of many [Jews](gen-jew.html). The Torah is [one](one.html) of the most extensively [studied](study.html) [Jewish](gen-jew.html) texts.

*if I want to read it...*

Purchase or borrow a copy of the Torah, or Chumash. The best editions will have easy to read English and a lot of commentaries. The commentaries are the comments of scholars that make interesting points about the Torah text. Reading commentaries is easy and adds a lot of depth to your understanding. Just sit down, maybe start at Bereshit (the [first](one.html) book of Moshe), and start to read. Or perhaps try to read the weekly sidra each week (perhaps an aliya each day. The editions of the Chumash that [one](one.html) usually finds in [synagogue](synagog.html) (Hertz or Soncino) have some commentaries on the text included. The Art Scroll edition is also highly recommended.

If you want to understand the themes and appreciate the depths of the Torah, perhaps try to read some other book alongside your Chumash. This is the sort of thing [one](one.html) might need to do when studying Shakespeare or Descartes in an attempt to really appreciate the text. [One](one.html) wouldn’t just read Shakespeare, but a book about the play as well. You can subscribe to weekly newsletters or e-mails on the sidra. But remember, if you don’t read the actual text [first](one.html), your understanding will be limited (just like with Shakespeare).

\* \* \*

B’ne Gad and B’ne Reuben request Transjordanian territory. They begin by addressing Moshe, Elazar and the assembly chieftains (Num. 32:2), an unusually large group to direct a request to. Why did they not address Moshe? Apparently, they suspected their request will not find favor in his [eyes](body.html), so by including the others, perhaps having previously engaged in lobbying, they felt they would improve their chances. After all, if they take their possession in Transjordan, the other [tribes](tribes.html) will receive larger portions of land, a consideration that would not impress Moshe but might count with the chieftains.

Their [first](one.html) statement was merely an assertion of fact to the effect that the land [HaShem](hashem.html) conquered for [Israel](gen-jew.html) is cattle country and they have cattle (ib. v. 4). As the literary formulation of this statement reflects the passage’s opening narrative statement several verses prior (v. 1) to the same effect, it appears that their motive was as implied and not to evade military confrontation. However, understandably, they tried to avoid stating their request explicitly and hoped that the obvious conclusion would be drawn. At this point, however, there is a setumah [space](place.html) in the Torah text followed by a second “vayomeru”, this [time](time.html) [speaking](mashal.html) to Moshe, indicating their assertion did not elicit the desired result and that it was made clear to them that they must deal with Moshe.

When they explicitly ask to receive their land possession in Transjordan, Moshe forcefully chastises them. He recognizes their request is not based on [fear](fear.html) - he doesn’t try to strengthen their trust in G-d as was done in the spy narratives (Num. 14:8-9; Deut. 1:29-33) - but takes them to task for not recognizing the potential danger in their request, that it may be misinterpreted and may trigger a repeat of the [sin](sin.html) associated with the spies.

\* \* \*

The last portion of the Torah includes [one](one.html) of its more esoteric phrases -”eish [daat](daat.html), the fiery [law](law.html).” (Deuteronomy 33:2) The [Midrash](orallaw.html) concludes that this phrase is a description of the Torah. In its words: “eish shahor al gabei eish lavan.” The Torah is written “black [fire](fire.html) on white [fire](fire.html).” ([Midrash](orallaw.html) Tanhuma, Genesis 1) What exactly does this mean?

On the simplest level, black [fire](fire.html) refers to the letters of Torah, the actual words, which are written in the scroll. The white refers to the spaces between the letters. Together the black letters and white spaces between them constitute the “whole” of the Torah.

On another level, the black [fire](fire.html) represents the [pshat](remez.html), the literal meaning of the text. The Hakhamim point to the importance of [pshat](remez.html) when stating “the text cannot be taken out of its literal meaning.” The white [fire](fire.html), however, represents ideas that goes beyond the [pshat](remez.html). It refers to ideas that we bring into the text when we interact with it. This is called [drash](remez.html) interpretations, applications, and teachings that flow from the Torah. The [drash](remez.html) are the messages we read between the lines.

On yet another level, the black letters represent thoughts which are intellectual in nature, whether [pshat](remez.html) or [drash](remez.html). The white spaces, on the other [hand](fourteen.html), represent that which goes beyond the [world](worlds.html) of the intellect. The black letters are limited, limiting and fixed. The white spaces catapult us into the realm of the limitless and the ever-changing, ever-growing. They are the story, the song, the silence. Sometimes I wonder which speaks more powerfully, the black, rationalistic letters or the white, mystical spaces between them.

Most of the Torah is made up of prose, the narrative of the text. The large majority of our portion is not prose-it is rather poetry. The Hakhamim [speak](mashal.html) of Divine poetry as black letters resting on the frame of the white empty spaces. “Half bricks on whole bricks,” the [Talmud](orallaw.html) notes. (Rashi, Megillah 16b. sv. Ieveinah) It’s the white [fire](fire.html) that gives the black [fire](fire.html) its foundation. In fact the spaces in the Torah take up twice the amount of [place](place.html) as the actual letters, perhaps indicating that at times it is of greater importance.

Interestingly, water is the [first](one.html) element mentioned in the Torah; (Genesis 1:2) while [fire](fire.html), eish [daat](daat.html), is the last. There is a marked difference between them. Of course, Torah is often compared to water, both are crucial to life and have endless depth.

Still, water flows toward the lowest level, while [fire](fire.html) seeks a higher plateau. It reaches high, higher, and higher still, burning past our [eyes](body.html) and [ears](body.html) into our hearts and souls and memories. It soars heavenward, linking the finite human being with the infinite G-d.

Such is the power of eish [daat](daat.html), the fiery [law](law.html), the Torah.

\* \* \*

The Torah does something very strange towards the end of this week’s Torah portion. After a lengthy discussion of the melu’im service (the consecration of the [mishkan](mikdash.html)), the Torah immediately describes the karbantamid, the [sacrifice](korbanot.html) which was to be brought in the [mishkan](mikdash.html) (and in the subsequent Temples) twice a day for as long as it existed. The [two](two.html) sections are separated by only a few blank spaces in the Torah scroll, (this [type](types.html) of break being called a Stumah, represented by the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) letter Samech in the Chumash / Pentateuch) after [Exodus](exodus.html) 29:37. [One](one.html) can imagine Moshe and the Children of [Israel](gen-jew.html) saying to [HaShem](hashem.html), “Give us a break already. We just consecrated the [mishkan](mikdash.html) and You already want us to start serving You in it! How about giving us a [two](two.html) week vacation [first](one.html)?”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a leader of German Jewry in the 19th century, explains that the Torah’s decision to juxtapose the consecration service to the daily karbantamid was no accident. [HaShem](hashem.html) was [teaching](teacher.html) us a crucial lesson for all eternity. [HaShem](hashem.html) had promised the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people in last week’s Torah portion, “Make for me a [sanctuary](mikdash.html), and I will [dwell](dwelling.html) amongst you” ([Exodus](exodus.html) 25:8). Any [Jew](gen-jew.html) could have easily assumed that simply building the structure was the goal and ultimate accomplishment. [HaShem](hashem.html) had promised to [dwell](dwelling.html) amongst the Children of [Israel](gen-jew.html) if they built Him a [sanctuary](mikdash.html), end of story. After [one](one.html) had contributed to the building fund, helped collect the supplies, and maybe even hammered in some nails, he would think that he could go home, completely satisfied with what he had accomplished to the point that he had no [desire](needs.html) to participate any further. He had built [HaShem](hashem.html)’s [sanctuary](mikdash.html) as [HaShem](hashem.html) had requested.

To prevent people from making such a grave error, the Torah therefore places the [commandment](cmds613.html) to perform the daily karbantamid immediately following the initial consecration of the structure itself. [HaShem](hashem.html) was telling us that the construction of the [Mishkan](mikdash.html) was not the end, but rather the means to serve Him to our utmost capabilities. We can not go home, satisfied that the [Kohanim](priests.html) and Levites will perform our duties in the [sanctuary](mikdash.html), just as we cannot refrain from participating and attending services in our respective [synagogues](synagog.html), satisfied that the Hahamim will fulfill our requirement.

Judaism is a participatory religion with actions and [mitzvot](cmds613.html) designed to bring the morals and ethics alive, not a spectator sport. It is only after the [commandment](cmds613.html) of the karbantamid, when we begin to participate in [HaShem](hashem.html)’s service on a daily basis, that [HaShem](hashem.html) reiterates His promise to be our G-d, participating in our daily lives directly (see the commentary of the Sforno on the following verse). As [HaShem](hashem.html) says in [Exodus](exodus.html) 29:45 after describing the karbantamid, “I will [dwell](dwelling.html) amongst the Children of [Israel](gen-jew.html), and I will be for them a G-d.”

\* \* \*

[Jacob](israelja.html) wished to reveal the [End of Days](lastdays.html) and it was concealed from him. This is how Rashi describes the fact that the portion of Vayechi is not preceded by the usual empty spaces in the Torah that follow the end of a topic. What is meant by this?

The late Rabbi Moshe Besdin once explained that we are told that pauses in the narrative of the Torah provided Moshe with the [time](time.html) he needed to contemplate and review his lessons. The absence of such a pause indicates the need to continue learning without taking [time](time.html) for reflection. [Jacob](israelja.html) desired to reveal the course of [Jewish](gen-jew.html) history; a history replete with persecutions, annihilations, etc. Perhaps [Jacob](israelja.html) wished to reflect on the causes for all this suffering and catastrophe. Regarding this, [Jacob](israelja.html) was told to “move on”. For this reason, the traditional pause in the Torah is missing. We must go on even when there are no answers to our collective questions.

\* \* \*

The Torah text is [one](one.html) long sequence of 304,805 letters.

\* \* \*

5761 - Vayechi

 And [Yaakov](israelja.html) lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years. (Bereshit 47:28)

Commenting on this pasuk, Rashi notes that this parsha is stumah. Normally in the Torah, there is a blank [space](place.html) of [nine](nine.html) letters between the different sections of the Torah but here there is none. Rashi proceeds to give [two](two.html) separate homiletic reasons as to why this parsha is stumah. The [first](one.html) reason is because with [Yaakov](israelja.html)’s death the [galut](galuyot.html) commenced and due to the hardships of the [galut](galuyot.html), the [eyes](body.html) and hearts of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people closed. The second reason is because [Yaakov](israelja.html) wished to reveal the [time](time.html) when [Mashiach](mashiach.html) would arrive but was prevented from doing so with the sudden departure of the Divine Presence.

Upon analyzing Rashi’s [first](one.html) explanation that the hearts and [eyes](body.html) of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people were closed due to the onset of the [galut](galuyot.html)*,* we may ask, exactly how is this reflected in the lack of blank [space](place.html) between the [two](two.html) sections? In answer to this question the commentators (Or Gedalyaho) explain that generally the reason there is [space](place.html) between the different sections of the Torah is to [teach](teacher.html) us that [one](one.html) should not attempt to learn the entire Torah without interruption. [One](one.html) must stop between the sections in order to absorb and reflect upon its teachings and messages. In the words of chazal this is called “revach l’hisbonain bain inyan l’inyan*,”* which is loosely translated as, open [space](place.html) [is provided in order to give [one](one.html) a chance] to contemplate between [one](one.html) topic and the next. A tragic aspect of [galut](galuyot.html) is that due to our troubles and hardships we lack the presence of mind that would enable us to contemplate on our purpose in life and the significance of the [events](feasts.html) that occur around us. We lack “revach l’hisbonen” In parshat vayechi the [galut](galuyot.html) commenced and in order to highlight this, the opening pasuk lacks “revach l’hisbonen.”

With this in mind, let us suggest that Rashi’s [two](two.html) different explanations are really linked. They are [two](two.html) sides of the same coin.

The [redemption](redemption.html) of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people from the [exile](galuyot.html) of Egypt it was not a sudden occurence. The [redemption](redemption.html) occurred in [two](two.html) [stages](stages.html). Chazal tell us that on [Rosh HaShana](teruah.html)h we were freed from the hard labor, but it was not until [six](six.html) and a half months later, on the [fifteenth](fifteen.html) of [Nisan](feasts.html)*,* that we actually left Egypt. We may ask, what is the significance of these [two](two.html) [stages](stages.html)? Why didn’t [HaShem](hashem.html) just orchestrate the [redemption](redemption.html) so that we would leave Egypt suddenly? The answer is that [redemption](redemption.html) is not just the attainment of [freedom](freedom.html). In order for us to understand the significance of the [event](feasts.html), [HaShem](hashem.html) provided us with a [six](six.html) and a half month [grace](grace.html) period in which we were free to focus on what was about to occur. This period is what we refer to as “revach l’hisbonen.”

Rashi’s [first](one.html) reason was explained above. Now we may understand how the second reason immediately follows. A prerequisite for any [redemption](redemption.html) is the revach l’hisbonen period, as we have seen in our [redemption](redemption.html) [from Egypt](thebirth.html). Therefore, because the hearts and [eyes](body.html) of [Yaakov](israelja.html)’s children were closed with the onset of [galut](galuyot.html) ([exile](galuyot.html)) they lacked the revach l’hisbonainthat was necessary for an appreciation of geulah. Thus, [Yaakov](israelja.html)’s children could not appreciate the significance of the ultimate [redemption](redemption.html), and therefore [Yaakov](israelja.html) was prevented from revealing to them the details of the geulah*.* The [two](two.html) explanations of Rashi are closely related. In [galut](galuyot.html) there is no loss of “revach l’hisbonen*.*” Without revach l’hisbonen we cannot appreciate the significance of the ‘[end of days](lastdays.html)’ and are therefore prevented from knowing in advance when [Mashiach](mashiach.html) will come.

Let us bring a proof to the relationship of these [two](two.html) ideas from Megillat [Esther](esther.html). When Mordechai attempted to persuade [Esther](esther.html) to be instrumental in saving the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people he warned her that if she did not help, the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people would be [saved](salvation.html) without her and only she would be the [one](one.html) to suffer. A simple translation of his words are, “Revach*,* and help, will come for the [Jews](gen-jew.html) from another source.” We may ask, what did Mordechai add with the word “revach.” Why didn’t Mordechai simply say that, “help would come from another source?” The answer is that an integral aspect of [redemption](redemption.html) is the [grace](grace.html) period that comes before the actual [redemption](redemption.html). This [grace](grace.html) period allows [time](time.html) for introspection. Therefore, Mordechai [first](one.html) said revach and then “help.” We see here that the [two](two.html) ideas of Rashi are linked. The theme of Mordochai’s instructions is [redemption](redemption.html). This is similar to the second reason given by Rashi, a reference to the ultimate [redemption](redemption.html). Yet, the posuk refers to [redemption](redemption.html) with the word “revach” which is the word and concept that was used to explain Rashi’s [first](one.html) reason. The message is that without revach l’hisbonain there can be no [redemption](redemption.html).

In this vein, let us explain a [prayer](prayer.html) that we recite every Monday and Thursday in *ta’cha’nun*. We ask [HaShem](hashem.html) “to show us a [sign](signs.html) for good.” We may ask, what exactly are we [praying](prayer.html) for. Most of our [prayers](prayer.html) are filled with explicit requests for [salvation](salvation.html) and [redemption](redemption.html). However, this [prayer](prayer.html) implies that we are asking for something that comes before the actual [salvation](salvation.html). We seek a [sign](signs.html) that [salvation](salvation.html) is on the way even though it has not yet arrived. What exactly is the nature of this request?

The letter *tet* in the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) alphabet literally represents the [number](nchart.html) [nine](nine.html). However, it is also a symbol for the word *good*. This is because the [first](one.html) [time](time.html) the letter *tet* appears in the Torah, it is found in the [first](one.html) letter of the word *tov,* which is translated as good. The amount of [space](place.html) that is missing in the beginning of our *parsha* is the blank [space](place.html) of [nine](nine.html), i.e., *tet* letters. As explained, this blank [space](place.html) symbolizes our lack of “*revach* *lishbonain*.” Further, the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) word for [*sign*](signs.html) or *omen* is *oas* which also can be translated as a “letter of the alphabet.” If we now take this [prayer](prayer.html) more literally, it may be translated as a request that [HaShem](hashem.html) “show us a *letter* for *tov*.” As mentioned above, *tet* also represents the [number](nchart.html) [nine](nine.html). Now we may revise the translation as “show us a letter for [nine](nine.html).” Were do we find the concept of a hidden letter that also is related to the [number](nchart.html) [nine](nine.html) that we now yearn to *see*? The answer is the [nine](nine.html) blank spaces that are missing in between vayigash and vayechi. We ask [HaShem](hashem.html) to widen the gap between the [two](two.html) sections and show us the revach. We ask [HaShem](hashem.html) to fulfill the words of Mordechai “Revach and help will come.” We ask [HaShem](hashem.html) to grant us “revach l’hisbonain*,*” “a [sign](signs.html) for good,” the revach which is the precursor to the actual [salvation](salvation.html).

 May we [merit](merit.html) to *see* the *revach* between the sections and the ultimate *geulah*.

\* \* \*

(Vayikra 23:15). The Chinuch ([Mitzvah](cmds613.html) #273) explains that the we count the days to [Shavuot](shavuot.html) in order to demonstrate that from the moment we left Egypt with the [knowledge](knowledge.html) that we were on our way to receive the Torah, we eagerly counted the days until that moment arrived. Our [annual](annual.html) [Omer](omer.html)-count, too, is a [sign](signs.html) of our longing for the Torah. Consequently, the [Omer](omer.html)-count serves as an introduction to the [festival](festival.html) of [Shavuot](shavuot.html).

Shibbolei Haleket (3:236) explains that the Torah hints at this association between the [Omer](omer.html)-count and the Receiving of the Torah in the verse cited above. [HaShem](hashem.html) tells Moshe that the people “will worship (\*Ta’avdun\*) [HaShem](hashem.html) on this mountain” (i.e., they will receive the Torah). There is an extra letter “Nun” at the end of the word \*Ta’avdun\*. The letter “Nun,” which has a numerical value of fifty, was added to the word to show that \*fifty\* days after the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) People left Egypt, they would receive the Torah on Mount [Sinai](stages.html). These 50 days are the [forty](forty.html)-[nine](nine.html) days of the [Omer](omer.html)-count, and [Shavuot](shavuot.html).

\* \* \*

Originally, the Torah was so well preserved that every letter was counted (Kiddushin 30a), which is why the early scribes were given the title “Soferim” (“Counters/Scribes”). Thousands of traditions were handed down specifying orthographic details. [One](one.html) of the more well-[known](daat.html) is that the letter ‘Vav’ of the word ‘Gachon’ in this week’s Parasha (Vayikra 11:42) is the middle letter of the Torah (Kiddushin, ibid. -- refer to Rabbi Kornfeld’s “Torah from the Internet” p. 122 for an in-depth discussion of this and similar traditions.)

\* \* \*

The Tablets are [HaShem](hashem.html)’s handiwork and the script was [HaShem](hashem.html)’s writing engraved ( *charus*) on the Tablets. Do not read *charus* (engraved), but *cheirus* ([freedom](freedom.html)), for there is no freer man than [one](one.html) who engages in the [study](study.html) of Torah. (Pirke Avos 6:2)

\* \* \*



|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Sefardi** | **Ashkenazi** | **Meaning** | **Value** | **Rashi** | **Cursive** | **Phoenician** | **Paleo-**[**Hebrew**](hebrew.html) | **Aramaic** |  |
| א | alef | alef | oxen | 1 |  | א | Aleph | 43px-Paleo-Hebrew | 20px-Ialeph |  |
| ב | bet, vet | beis, veis | house | 2 |  | ב | Beth | 20px-Ibeth |  |
| ג | gimel | gimmel | camel | 3 |  | ג | Gimel | 20px-Igimel |  |
| ד | dalet | doles | door | 4 |  | ד | Daleth | 20px-Idaleth |  |
| ה | he | hei | window | 5 |  | ה | He | 20px-Ihe |  |
| ו | vav | vov/vof | hook | 6 |  | ו | Waw | 20px-Iwaw |  |
| ז | zayin | zayin | sword | 7 |  | ז | Zayin | 20px-Izayin |  |
| ח | khet | ches | Fence, hedge, chamber | 8 |  | ח | Heth | 20px-Iheth |  |
| ט | tet | tes | serpent | 9 |  | ט | Teth | 20px-Iteth |  |
| י | yod | yud | [hand](fourteen.html) | 10 |  | י | Yodh | 20px-Iyod |  |
| ך כ | kaf, khaf | kof, chof | palm | 20 |  | ך כ | Kaph | 20px-Ikaph |  |
| ל | lamed | lomed | cattle goad | 30 |  | ל | Lamedh | 20px-Ilamed |  |
| ם מ | mem | mem | water | 40 |  | םמ | Mem | 20px-Imem |  |
| ן נ | nun | nun | fish | 50 |  | ןנ | Nun | 20px-Inun |  |
| ס | samekh | somech | A prop | 60 |  | ס | Samekh | 20px-Isamekh |  |
| ע | ayin | ayin/oyin | eye | 70 |  | פ | Ayin | 20px-Iayin |  |
| ף פ | pe, fe | pei, fei | [mouth](body.html) | 80 |  | ץפ | Pe | 20px-Ipe |  |
| ץ צ | tsadi | tsodi/tsodik | fish hook | 90 |  | צץ | Sade | 20px-Isade, 20px-Isade2 |  |
| ק | kuf | kuf | [monkey](mashal.html) | 100 |  | ק | Qoph | 20px-Iqoph |  |
| ר | resh | reish | [head](body.html) | 200 |  | ר | Res | 20px-Iresh |  |
| ש | shin, [sin](sin.html) | shin, [sin](sin.html) | tooth | 300 |  | ש | Sin | 20px-Ishin |  |
| ת | tav | tov/tof, sov/sof | [sign](signs.html) | 400 |  | ת | Taw | 20px-Itaw |  |

[**Three**](three.html) **Mothers**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Aleph | Air (Uranus) |
| Mem | Water (Neptune) |
| Shin | [Fire](fire.html) (Pluto) |

**The** [**Seven**](seven.html) **Doubles**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Beth | Saturn |
| Gimel | Jupiter |
| Daleth | Mars |
| Kaph | [Sun](hachama.html) |
| Peh | Venus |
| Resh | Mercury |
| Tav | [Moon](chodesh.html) |

**The** [**Twelve**](twelve.html) **Simples**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Heh | Aries | [Nisan](feasts.html) |
| Vav | Taurus | [Iyar](feasts.html) |
| Zain | Gemini | [Sivan](feasts.html) |
| Heth | Cancer | [Tammuz](feasts.html) |
| Teth | Leo | [Av](feasts.html) |
| Yod | Virgo | [Elul](elul.html) |
| Lamed | Libra | [Tishri](feasts.html) |
| Nun | Scorpio | Cheshvan |
| Sameck | Sagittarius | [Kislev](feasts.html) |
| Ayin | Capricorn | Tevet |
| Tzaddie | Aquarius | [Shevat](feasts.html) |
| Qoph | Pisces | [Adar](feasts.html) |

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1. Much of this study was derived from materials in The Jewish Encyclopedia. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Chanukah In a New Light, by Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, page 115-116, Published by David Dov Foundation, 603 Twin Oaks Drive, Lakewood, NJ, 08701 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Tiferet Yisrael 64* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Tiferet Israel 64* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rashi quotes, and the families of scribes — Soferim — which dwelt at Jabez; I Chron. II, 55. The term is generally applied to the band of Scholars from the Babylonian exile, who propagated the knowledge of the Torah and interpreted it. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. To safeguard the correctness of the text. Soferim is taken in the original sense of its root safar, ‘to count’. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Whatsoever goeth upon the belly — Leviticus 11:42. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Leviticus 10:16: And Moses diligently enquired after — darosh darash — the goat of the sin-offering. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Leviticus 13:33: we-hithggalah, then he shall be shaven. [In M.T. the words ‘he placed on him’ (Lev. VIII, 8) is given as the middle verse.] [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Psalm 80:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It is not stated whether letters or words are meant: S. Strashun observes that he counted the words, and found that the first half exceeds the second by nearly 2,000; hence the reference is to letters, and there is such a reading too. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Psalm 78:38. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shmaatin, issue 43, cited by Rabbi Menachem Kasher in Torah Sheleimah, vol. 28, ch. 12. Rabbi Yosef Tov Elem (cited in Machzor Vitry, vol. 2, p. 683) has a different tradition of small and large letters. However, according to that tradition there are 32 such letters, and the 16th is the vav of gachon, making it still in the middle. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The list from Psalms is as follows: 1) yud, 24:4; 2) hei, 77:8; 3) zayin, 77:18; 4) ayin, 80:14; 5) kaf, 80:16; 6) kuf, 84:4; 7) hei, 107:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bamidbar (Numbers) 25:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Zachariah 8:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The Book of Ruth, Me’am Lo’ez, by Rabbi Shmuel Yerushalmi, translated by E.vanHandel, edited by Dr. Zvi Faier, page 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. לםרבה [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 9:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. There are two forms of mem: medial, which is open (מ) and final, which is closed (ם). In this sentence, however, the closed form occurs in the middle of a word (לםרבה). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Gog and Magog are, in Jewish eschatology, the tribes who shall lead all nations in a tremendous attack upon Israel; their final defeat ushers in the halcyon days of the Messiah, (Ezekiel 38, 39). It is not clear whom the prophet had in mind, the whole passage having the mystic form of apocalyptic prediction. The present passage is remarkable in that it shews that in the opinion of its author no particular nation was intended, but any great heathen power whose destruction, by the will of God, is to precede the millennium. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. [The attributes of Justice and Mercy are often hypostasized and represented as interceding with the Almighty.] [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Shewing that God's original intention was ‘closed’, i.e., revoked. Other interpretations: God wished to ‘close’ i.e., end the troubles of Israel by making Hezekiah the Messiah; or Hezekiah's mouth was closed, i.e., he sang no psalms to the Almighty.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 24:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This is a special angel set over the world, distinct from the guardian angels of the separate nations. He has been identified with Metatron; Tosaf. Yeb. 16b however rejects this identification. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. So translated by Maharsha. The passage might also mean: Fulfil the desire of this righteous man, i.e., appoint him the Messiah. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., i.e., the delay of Messiah's advent is God's secret. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. I.e., until Israel's enemies and their enemies’ enemies are destroyed. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)