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from: Torah in Motion [info@torahinmotion.org](mailto:info@torahinmotion.org) via [auth.ccsend.com](mailto:auth.ccsend.com)  
date: Thu, Aug 2, 2012 at 9:02 PM subject: Reflections on Daf Yomi:  
Going for Gold

### **Some Thoughts on Daf Yomi: Going for the Real Gold** **Rabbi Jay Kelman**

"Mei'emati korin et hashema b'arvit, from what time may one begin reciting the evening shema?" So begins the Talmud Bavli, the first volume of the Gemara and the page that will be studied by hundreds of thousands of Jews around the globe as they begin the 13th cycle of Daf Yomi on Friday. The hundreds of thousands who celebrated the completion of the 12th cycle highlight the enduring relevance of this ancient text, and its crucial role in Jewish continuity.

(As many of you already know, the Talmud is made up of the short legal statements of the Mishna edited circa 220, and the much longer and more expansive discussion of Gemara edited circa 499.)

The Bible without the Talmud is--pardon the bluntness--not much of a Jewish book. Living a Jewish life without the Talmud would mean (to

give just one example) that one could eat on Yom Kippur; the Torah itself does not proscribe eating on that day. Christianity accepts the Bible without the Talmud, and hence, they are Christians, not Jews. The Bible is the basis for our people, and the word of G-d. But Jews live according to the Talmud and its myriad commentaries.

It is noteworthy that the Talmud begins with the mitzvah of the shema. Coincidentally (not that we Jews believe in coincidences), the mitzvah of the recital of the shema is to be found in this upcoming week's parsha. But more importantly, the shema is, in the words of the Talmud, "the acceptance of the yoke of heaven". And when we open up the Talmud, we must be cognizant--even if, at times, it is only subconsciously--that we are attempting to understand the word of G-d, enabling us to live under "the yoke of commandments".

The Talmud records a most startling view: The reason we were exiled from our land, the reason we just observed Tisha B'Av, was because when Jews studied Torah, "they did not make a blessing first" (Nedarim 81a). The Talmud is, first and foremost, a religious text; and to study it only with a detached, academic perspective risks corrupting its very essence.

The shema is also the first mitzvah a bar or bat mitzvah can perform on a biblical level. So when we open the Talmud, we are reminding ourselves of our duty to transmit our wonderful heritage to the next generation.

Each of the tractates of the Talmud begins on page 2, teaching that there really is no beginning or end to the sea of Talmud. This idea is further expressed in the first word of Talmud. Mei'emati presupposes an obligation in the first place, yet such an obligation has yet to be mentioned; it is assumed that the "beginner" already knows this. The source of this assumption serves as the opening line, and hence the first question of, the Gemara as to the source of the obligation to recite the shema.

By beginning with a question both in the Mishna and the Gemara, we establish the truism that, in Judaism, it is questions more than answers that are important. Only one who has the curiosity to ask will ever truly learn. We can--and have had to--survive as a people without answers; but without questions, there is no future for the Jewish people.

The opening word of the Talmud, "from when," also reminds us of the importance of time. Of course the Talmud, as is its practice, derives this notion from the Bible itself, where we begin with "in the beginning, Breisheet."

The Jewish people sanctify time. The first mitzvah given to us as a people was a requirement to establish a calendar. The initial redemption of the Jewish people took place at exactly midnight. Each week we sanctify time as we recite Kiddush, and the blessing we say on Yom Tov notes the sanctity of the Jewish people and its seasons. Time is our most valuable resource, and to waste it is to waste life itself.

The Talmud (Shabbat 31a) notes that the second question we will be asked at the end of our time on earth is, "Kavata itim leTorah? Did we set aside fixed times for Torah study?" I can think of no greater demonstration of kevata itim than Daf Yomi. Two thousand, seven hundred and eleven double-sided pages, seven and one-half years, day in and day out, no breaks, and no vacation, not Yom Kippur nor erev Pesach nor the day of your daughter's wedding. It is an unbreakable commitment to the study of our most important and influential text.

The dedication, perseverance, and commitment required by the study of Daf Yomi is worthy of many gold medals. While the world at large celebrates physical prowess--something that does have its place in Judaism--the Jewish people focus our celebrations on our spiritual vitality. Unlike physical power, spiritual strength does not wane over time; it actually can become greater and greater as we age. The tremendous interest of even the secular press in the phenomenon of hundreds of thousands of people around the world studying the same ancient Hebrew-Aramaic text is piqued by the fact that it is something at

which they can only marvel. It is most difficult to understand for those far removed from a God-centred morality.

Again, coincidentally (and again, not that we Jews believe in coincidences), the beginning of the 13th cycle corresponds to Tu B'Av; this is the day that the Talmud declares the happiest day of the year, along with Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, G-d renewed the covenant with the Jewish people; and the Torah, the written word of G-d, was given anew.

On this Tu B'Av, we celebrate the beginning of a new cycle of the study of the Oral Law, bringing great joy to our nation. Twelve and thirteen are the ages of bat and bar mitzvah, respectively; of maturity, of taking on the divine commandments as we enter a new phase in our lives. As we begin our bar mitzvah cycle, may we accept with joy the commitment to increase our own Torah learning, day in and day out; and join with Jews around the world in the noblest of tasks, the study of Torah.

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### Some Helpful Daf Yomi Resources

If you're starting (or continuing) the daf yomi cycle tomorrow, here are a few helpful resources (please send me corrections at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com))

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<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TeaneckDaf/> - TeaneckDaf yahogroups email list  
<http://www.hebrewbooks.org/shas> - Scan of Shas - New Typeface with Mosaf Rashi  
<http://www.e-daf.com/> - Scan of Vilna Shas  
<http://www.dafyomi.org/> - Rabbi Dovid Grossman audio in English  
<http://www.yutorah.org/daf.cfm> (audio English and printed shiurim in Hebrew & English)  
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<http://www.ustream.tv/channel/siyum-hashes-live> 12th Siyum Hashas See many more links and resources at <http://www.teaneckshuls.org/daf/>

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from: Shabbat Shalom [shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org) date: Thu, Aug 2, 2012 at 9:47 PM Parshat Va'etchana?n - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

### Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Why is the Jewish People So Small?

Near the end of Va'etchanan, so inconspicuously that we can sometimes miss it, is a statement with such far reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah, giving an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel:

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples. (Deut. 7: 7)

This is not what we have heard thus far. In Bereishit God promises the patriarchs that their descendants will be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the sea shore, the dust of the earth, uncountable. Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were "fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1: 7).

Three times in the book of Deuteronomy Moses describes the Israelites as being "as many as the stars of the sky" (1: 10, 10: 22, 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as set among "the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number" (1 Kings 3: 8). The prophet Hosea says that "The Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted" (Hos. 2: 1).

In all these texts and others it is the size, the numerical greatness, of the people that is emphasized. What then are we to make of Moses' words that speak of its smallness? Targum Yonatan interprets it not to be about numbers at all but about self-image. He translates it not as "the fewest of peoples" but as "the most lowly and humble of peoples." Rashi gives a similar reading, citing Abraham's words "I am but dust and ashes," and Moses and Aaron's, "Who are we?"

Rashbam and Chizkuni give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants.

Rabbenu Bachya quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His people, since "The glory of the king is in the multitude of people" (Prov. 14: 28). God did not do so. Thus Israel should count itself extraordinarily blessed that God chose it, despite its smallness, to be His am segulah, His special treasure.

Rabbenu Bachya finds himself forced to give a more complex reading to resolve the contradiction of Moses, in Deuteronomy, saying both that Israel is the smallest of peoples and "as many as the stars of the sky." He turns it into a hypothetical subjunctive, meaning: God would still have chosen you, even if you had been the smallest of the peoples.

Sforno gives a simple and straightforward reading: God did not choose a nation for the sake of His honour. Had He done so He would undoubtedly have chosen a mighty and numerous people. His choice had nothing to do with honour and everything to do with love. He loved the patriarchs for their willingness to heed His voice; therefore He loves their children.

Yet there is something in this verse that resonates throughout much of Jewish history. Historically Jews were and are a small people: today less than a fifth of one per cent of the population of the world. There were two reasons for this. First is the heavy toll taken through the ages by exile and persecution, directly by Jews killed in massacres and pogroms, indirectly by those who converted – in fifteenth century Spain and nineteenth century Europe – in order to avoid persecution (tragically, even conversion did not work; racial antisemitism persisted in both cases). The Jewish population is a mere fraction of what it might have been had there been no Hadrian, no crusades and no antisemitism.

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.2 billion) or Islam (1.3 billion). In fact Malbim reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites are about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with them, not for racial but for religious reasons: "they

will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods.” Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites, Don’t justify outmarriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews. God is not interested in numbers.

There was a moment when Jews might have sought to convert others (to be sure, there was one instance when they did. The Hasmonean priest-king John Hyrcanus I forcibly converted the Edomites, known as the Idumeans. Herod was one of their number). The period in question was the Roman Empire in the first century. Jews numbered some 10 per cent of the empire, and there were many Romans who admired aspects of their faith and way of life. The pagan deities of the Hellenistic world were losing their appeal and plausibility, and throughout the centres of the Mediterranean, individuals were adopting Jewish practices. Two aspects of Judaism stood in their way: the commandments and circumcision. In the end, Jews chose not to compromise their way of life for the sake of making converts. The Hellenistic people who sympathized with Judaism mostly adopted Pauline Christianity instead. Consistently throughout history, Jews have chosen to be true to themselves and to stay small rather than make concessions for the sake of increasing numbers.

Why have Divine providence or human choice or both, eventuated in the sheer smallness of the Jewish people? Could it be, quite simply, that through the Jewish people God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous to be great. Nations are not judged by their size but by their contribution to the human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halakhists, aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rebbes and roshei yeshivot; that they could also yield some of the world’s greatest writers, artists, musicians, film-makers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, and teachers fighting ignorance.

You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each of us feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition, and a willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world, unswayed by disappointments and defeats.

Nowhere is this more in evidence today than among the people of Israel in the state of Israel: traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, yet still, year after year, producing human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, the arts, as if the word “impossible” did not exist in the Hebrew language. When, therefore, we feel fearful and depressed about Israel’s plight, it is worth returning to Moses’ words: “The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples.”

Small? Yes. Still surrounded, as the Israelites were then, by “nations larger and stronger than you.” But that small people, defying the laws of history, outlived all the world’s great empires, and still has a message of hope for humanity. You don’t have to be large to be great. If you are open to a power greater than yourself, you will become greater than yourself. Israel today still carries that message to the world.

To read more writings and teachings from the Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, please visit [www.chief Rabbi.org](http://www.chief Rabbi.org).

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Parshas Va’eschanan

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#### The Jealousy Antidote

"And you shall not covet your fellow's wife, you shall not desire your fellow's house, his field, his slave, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your fellow" (5:18)

Perhaps one of the hardest commandments to understand — let alone fulfill — is *Lo Sachmod*, not to be jealous.

As Ibn Ezra asks (Shemos 20:14), how can the Torah command us not to feel an emotion that comes naturally when someone has something that we would like to have? When the neighbor redoes his house and builds a pool, how can a person be expected not to want to have a pool as well?

Ibn Ezra answers this question through a parable.

Imagine a commoner who visits the royal palace. As he is viewing the beautiful grounds, he sees the princess step outside in her royal garments. Though struck by her beauty, does he think for a moment, I want to marry her?

Most people wouldn't entertain that thought for a second. They realize that the king's daughter is out of their league. People desire something that they can conceivably have, not something that is totally out of reach.

The same should hold true for someone else's possessions, says Ibn Ezra. We should train ourselves to realize that since Hashem gave the pool to the neighbor, it is something that He wants the neighbor to have, not us. As such, it should not be within the realm of our desires.

The Ibn Ezra's approach has become the classical answer to this question, but Rav Simchah Zissel Brodie derives another explanation from a Ramban.

The Ramban cites the following Midrash: The Ten Commandments are all repeated in Parshas Kedoshim in some form or another. For instance, the verse, "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" (Vayikra 19:3) corresponds to the first commandment, and "Veilokei masei chah lo sa'asu lachem — and molten gods shall you not make for yourself" (ibid. v. 4) corresponds to the second commandment.

The parallel to *Lo Sachmod*, says Ramban cryptically, is "Ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocho — Love your fellow as yourself" (ibid. v. 18).

Rav Simchah Zissel explains the correlation between the two.

Did you ever hear a father or mother wish that their children would have less material possessions just because they had less when they were at the same stage in life? No. Parents are thrilled when their children have more than they did. Why? Because they love their children as much as they love themselves — if not more — so they are happy when their children can afford anything they want.

If we would truly fulfill *ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocho* and love every Jew as we love ourselves, says Rav Simchah Zissel, we wouldn't feel jealous of them for owning possessions that we cannot afford. We would be happy for them, just as we are happy when our own children have more than we do.

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eschanan  
**Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>  
Thu, Aug 2, 2012 at 10:05 AM

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From: Aish.com newsletterserver@aish.com via madmimi.com date:

Tue, Jul 31, 2012 at 9:10 AM

Subject: **Tu B'av**

Six events occurred on Tu B'Av, the 15th of Av, making it a festive day in the Jewish calendar.

**by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau**

The Mishnah tells us that: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur." (Tractate Ta'anit) What is Tu B'Av, the 15th of the Hebrew month of Av? In which way is it equivalent to Yom Kippur? Our Sages explain: Yom Kippur symbolizes God's forgiving Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf in the desert, for it was on that day that He finally accepted Moses' plea for forgiveness of the nation, and on that same day Moses came down from the mountain with the new set of tablets. Just as Yom Kippur symbolizes the atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, Tu B'Av signifies the atonement for the sin of the Spies, where ten came bearing such negative reports which reduced the entire nation to panic. As a result of that sin, it was decreed by God that the nation would remain in the desert for 40 years, and that no person 20 or older would be allowed to enter Israel. On each Tisha B'Av of those 40 years, those who had reached the age of 60 that year died -- 15,000 each Tisha B'Av. This plague finally ended on Tu B'Av. Six positive events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Event #1) As noted above, the plague that had accompanied the Jews in the desert for 40 years ended. That last year, the last 15,000 people got ready to die. God, in His mercy, decided not to have that last group die, considering all the troubles they had gone through. Now, when the ninth of Av approached, all the members of the group got ready to die, but nothing happened. They then decided that they might have been wrong about the date, so they waited another day, and another... Finally on the 15th of Av, when the full moon appeared, they realized definitely that the ninth of Av had come and gone, and that they were still alive. Then it was clear to them that God's decree was over, and that He had finally forgiven the people for the sin of the Spies. This is what was meant by our Sages when they said: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur," for there is no greater joy than having one's sins forgiven -- on Yom Kippur for the sin of the Golden Calf and on Tu B'Av for the sin of the spies. In the Book of Judges, Tu B'Av is referred to as a holiday (Judges 21:19). In addition to this noteworthy event, five other events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Events #2) and 3) Following the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (see Numbers, chapter 36), daughters who inherited from their father when there were no sons were forbidden to marry someone from a different tribe, so that land would not pass from one tribe to another. Generations later, after the story of the "Concubine of Giv'ah" (see Judges, chapters 19-21), the Children of Israel swore not to allow their

daughters to marry anyone from the tribe of Benjamin. This posed a threat of annihilation to the tribe of Benjamin. Each of these prohibitions were lifted on Tu B'Av. The people realized that if they kept to their prohibition, one of the 12 tribes might totally disappear. As to the oath that had been sworn, they pointed out that it only affected the generation that had taken the oath, and not subsequent generations. The same was applied to the prohibition of heiresses marrying outside their own tribe: this rule was applied only to the generation that had conquered and divided up the land under Joshua, but not future generations. This was the first expression of the merging of all the tribes, and was a cause for rejoicing. In the Book of Judges it is referred to as "a festival to the Lord." Over the generations, this day was described in Tractate Ta'anit as a day devoted to betrothals, so that new Jewish families would emerge.

Event #4) After Jeroboam split off the kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes from the kingdom of Judea, he posted guards along all the roads leading to Jerusalem, to prevent his people from going up to the Holy City for the pilgrimage festivals, for he feared that such pilgrimages might undermine his authority. As a "substitute," he set up places of worship which were purely idolatrous, in Dan and Beth-el. Thus the division between the two kingdoms became a fait accompli and lasted for generations. The last king of the kingdom of Israel, Hosea ben Elah, wished to heal the breach, and removed all the guards from the roads leading to Jerusalem, thus allowing his people to make the pilgrimage again. This act took place on Tu B'Av.

Event #5) At the beginning of the Second Temple period, the Land of Israel lay almost totally waste, and the wood needed to burn the sacrifices and for the eternal flame that had to burn on the altar was almost impossible to obtain. Each year a number of brave people volunteered to bring the wood needed from afar -- a trip which was dangerous in the extreme. Now, not just every wood could be brought. Wood which was wormy was not permitted. And dampness and cold are ideal conditions for the breeding of worms in wood. As a result, all the wood that would be needed until the following summer had to be collected before the cold set in. The last day that wood was brought in for storage over the winter months was Tu B'Av, and it was a festive occasion each year when the quota needed was filled by that day.

Event #6) Long after the event, the Romans finally permitted the bodies of those who had been killed in the defense of Betar (in the Bar Kochba revolt) to be buried. This was a double miracle, in that, first, the Romans finally gave permission for the burial, and, second, in spite of the long period of time that had elapsed, the bodies had not decomposed. The permission was granted on Tu B'Av. In gratitude for this double miracle, the fourth and last blessing of the Grace After Meals was added, which thanks God as "He Who is good and does good." "He is good" -- in that the bodies had not decomposed, "and does good" -- in that permission was given for the burial. To this day, we celebrate Tu B'Av as a minor festival. We do not say Tahanun on that day, nor are eulogies rendered. By the same token, if a couple are getting married on that day (and, as we will see below, it is the custom for the bride and groom to fast on their wedding day), neither fasts.

Beginning with Tu B'Av, we start preparing ourselves spiritually for the month of Elul, the prologue to the coming Days of Awe. The days begin to get shorter, the nights get longer. The weather, too, helps us to take spiritual stock: the hectic days of the harvest are over for the farmer, and the pace has slowed down considerably. Even on a physical level, the heat of the summer makes it hard to sit down and think things out, and now that the days and nights are cooler, it is easier to examine one's actions. In earlier times, it was the custom already from Tu B'Av to use as one's greeting "May your inscription and seal be for good" (ketiva vahatima tova), the same blessing that we today use on Rosh Hashana. Those who work out the gematria values of different expressions found

that phrase adds up to 928 -- and so does the words for "15th of Av."  
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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Do as I Do

TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

Wed, Aug 1, 2012 at 10:22 PM

To: weeklydt@torahweb2.org

### **Rabbi Benjamin Yudin**

#### **Do as I Do**

Parshas Va'eschanan enlightens us with a dozen mitzvos. We are met with the Aseres Hadibros (Ten Commandments), the mitzvah of Shema Yisrael, yichud Hashem (the oneness of G-D), the mitzvah of talmud Torah, the mitzvahs of tefillin, the mitzvah of mezuzah, the prohibition of intermarriage, etc. What a special parsha! The parsha itself, I believe, consoles the Jewish People. Let us consider the first paragraph of the Shema (Devarim 6:4-9). The verse begins, "ve'shinantam l'banecha," and you are to teach them to your children. The Talmud teaches that in this verse "banecha," literally your children, refers to "talmidecha - your students." The effective teacher is the one who looks at his students as if they are his children. There is an incredible love that a father and mother have for their children, and that is the love that a teacher has to have for his students. The very next verse is, "U'kshartam l'os al yadecha ve'hayu le'totafos bein einecha - and you are to bind them for a sign on your hand and they are to be a remembrance between your eyes", a reference to tefillin. Thus, in the first paragraph of the Shema the mitzvah of talmud Torah precedes the mitzvah of tefillin. Interestingly, in the second paragraph of the Shema these two mitzvos appear in the exact opposite order. First the Torah states (ibid. 11:18), "u'kshartem osam le'os al yedchem - and you are to bind them for a sign on your hand", i.e. you are to first put on tefillin, and then the very next verse proclaims, "ve'leamad'tem osam es bneichem - and you are to teach them to your children", referring to the teaching of one's biological children. Why is it that in the first paragraph, when discussing the teacher-student relationship, the mitzvah of talmud Torah precedes that of tefillin whereas in the second paragraph when we are talking about the obligation of a parent to his own children, the order of these two mitzvos is reversed? The teacher has to teach - that is his profession. He prepares lesson plans in advance on a variety of topics, including the mitzvah of tefillin, and the instruction precedes action. A parent also has to teach, however a parent teaches, first and foremost, by example. The parent is the role model for his child. Therefore, a parent teaches about tefillin by making sure the child sees his father putting on tefillin. A certain gentleman who davened in the same beis medrash as the late Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l would bring his child to the beis medrash and would spend a lot of time shushing the child to make sure that he behaved properly. Rav Moshe asked the man, "What are you doing?" The man responded, "I am teaching him how to daven." Rav Moshe replied, "Don't shush, JUST DAVEN, and he will learn to daven from you." There is a delicious teaching brought down in Maseches Kallah (3) that when Aharon haKohen died, no less than eighty thousand children named Aharon walked after his coffin. The reason behind this interesting behavior is that there were many among am Yisrael who wanted to get divorced. It was Aharon who caused them to change their minds. Accordingly, there were eighty thousand young men named Aharon. Are we meant to imagine that Aharon haKohen met with each one of their parents? Of course not! Rather, it comes to demonstrate for us that Aharon's very nature influenced people; he was a role model. Everyone should have one, and everyone should be one. Tu B'Av generally falls during the week following parshas Va'eschanan. The last mishna in Maseches Taanis teaches that Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av were among the happiest days in the Jewish year. This is understandably said about Yom Kippur, the day on which we received the second set of

luchot (tablets), which showed us that Hashem had forgiven us for the sin of the Golden Calf. However, what is it about Tu B'Av that is so special? The gemara (Ta'anis 30b) lists many special things which occurred on Tu B'Av. Let us focus on one of those events. When Shlomo Hamelech died, his son Rechavam assumed the kingship. Shlomo was a most popular king due to his tremendous wisdom and incredible international relations. As such, while he taxed the people heavily, they accepted it from him. After he died, his son Rechavam had to decide if he would listen to his father's elder advisors and lower taxes, or listen to his younger advisors and tax them more heavily. He made the wrong decision and listened to his younger advisors, which ultimately resulted in the secession of ten of the tribes as well as the elevation of Yeravam ben Nevat, a righteous individual at the time, to the position of king over those tribes (Melachim I 12). Yeravam changed while on the throne, and thought, "If I allow the Jewish People in my jurisdiction to go three times a year (Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkos) to the Beis Hamikdash, they will leave me and go to Rechavam." In order to maximize control over his kingdom, he placed roadblocks and forbade the Jewish people in his constituency from going up to Yerushalayim for the three pilgrimage festivals. Instead, he positioned two golden calves, one in the north in Dan and another in the south in Bet El, thereby providing his constituents with the opportunity to worship closer to home. Years later, Hoshea ben Ela, a king of Israel, removed these roadblocks. However, he did not tell people to go up to Yerushalayim and instead let them choose between it and the idolatry in the north. He is therefore considered a wicked king (see Rashi on Taanis 31a). Despite the fact that he certainly improved upon the situation left to him, that does not suffice for a role model such as a king of Israel. A true role model is supposed to lead the people, show them, teach them, and take the initiative. They would have followed him. As such, Hoshea ben Ela failed. This is an important lesson for all of us. The gemara in Maseches Brachos summarizes this message saying, "gadol shimusho yoser milimudo" - not only is it significant to study Torah from a qualified teacher, but it is even more significant to spend personal time with such a teacher in order to observe how he acts and learn from his behavior. Please God, his behavior should rub off on you and uplift your way of life as well. May this Shabbos Nachamu be a meaningful one for us all, first and foremost in fulfilling the command of ve'shinantam l'banecha together with ve'leamad'tem osam es bneichem, being ideal role models for our children who act in a way which is worthy of duplicating. In addition, even as adults, may our eyes be open, always looking always for that person whom we are to follow, and may we have the resolve to emulate that person.

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Aug 2, 2012 at 9:47 PM Parshat Va'etchana'n - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

#### **Rabbi Eliyahu Safran**

Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran serves as OU Kosher's vice president of communications & marketing.

#### **Ve'Shinantam Le'Vanecha: Can We Do Any Better?**

What does it mean to really teach, not merely stand in front of a classroom filled with students? To make a world come alive for your students and not simply transfer information; to fully engage a student so that his life, and yours, are enlarged? To be a true teacher is to establish a relationship of respect and trust between you and your student. Too often, teachers firmly believe that respect is a one-way street that it is incumbent upon the student to come to the relationship with respect and the teacher's to receive respect. But it is the teacher's responsibility to establish and nurture that respectful relationship. Rambam suggests as much in Hilchos Talmud Torah: K'shem shehatalmidim chayavim

l'chabed ha'rav, kach ha'rav tzarich l'chabed es talmidav u'lkarvan – “Just as the students are obligated to honor the rebbe, so must the rebbe honor his students and draw them near.” Even more than honor, Rambam adds that the teacher need be careful with his students and love them, since they are the children who give him pleasure in this world, as well as the next. The keys to successful teaching are kavod (honor), kiruv (drawing them near), zehirus (care and concern) and ahavah (love).

Too often, our teachers teach as though their students are obligated to them rather than they being obligated to their students. At best, they treat their students as passive vessels to be badgered as they are filled with information. And should they fall short...? They treat them as being unworthy of their time and attention. But I ask, can a young man fail at being a Jew? Is a student any less a Jew if he performs poorly in his studies or if he behaves incorrigibly? Is his soul worth any less to G-d? Is he any less dear to his mother and father? Is he to be banished for his failings? Or should ways be found to hold on to him, knowing that each and every soul is worth the whole of creation? Sadly, these are not theoretical questions. Too often, yeshivot (Jewish schools) administrators and teachers lash out at students in anger and rigidity rather than showing them the devotion and concern Rambam counseled. Sometimes, to tragic ends. According to an account, reported exclusively by Kikar Shabbat, a young man had attended a respected school five years ago. While the young man was studying at the yeshiva, his father fell seriously ill and was hospitalized for a period of time. The young man, who was not a model student before his father's hospitalization, struggled more after this increased emotional stress in his family.

Did the young man's teachers and yeshiva administrators reach out to him or to his family? Did they show needed sensitivity or compassion? By all accounts, no, which, in turn, only served to worsen his emotional state. This is when things truly began to unravel in this young man's life. Rather than show its student rachmanut, compassion, as his emotional stress was reflected in his behavior and performance, the yeshiva expelled him beginning a story which has no happy ending. As a young adult, this former student took his own life. His brother had no doubt where to place the blame for this tragic loss:

I learned in the same school and I know the situation first hand. The teachers killed him. I remember that period very well, when he wanted to come back to school and they did not permit him to. Even if a child is a joker and troublemaker, they must know how to deal with him and not to break him. Bitter words. Hard words. Words, admittedly, expressed during a time of extreme grief. However, there is one point that resonates true, that needs to be examined. “[They] must know how to deal with him and not to break him.” When did our teachers cease to love transmitting knowledge and become, instead, masters of discipline? When did we stop seeing our children as priceless and unique and instead come to view them as fanatical automatons? When a student does not respond to one style of teaching, why is it the student who must bend? Why must he conform to a teaching style, rather than the teaching style adapt to him? There are those who look askance at such “liberal” and “permissive” learning methods. But is it so wrong to provide a variety of learning menus for those students, those innocent young children with precious Jewish neshamot, souls, who simply can't meet the yeshiva's methods and expectations for whatever reason? A demonstration of genuine love and concern for the talmid (student) would be to provide a full spectrum of learning opportunities. These could include Talmud, but also Chumash, Navi, machshava (thought), hashkafa (religious outlook), the works of musar (character improvement) and, an introduction to practical skills necessary for eventual parnasah needs. About such students, those who are shunned by their teachers, Rav Ovadya Yosef asks, “Whom are you throwing out? A rock? Some accumulated trash?” Worse, to what environment are we throwing them? To a world teeming with sin and squalor, to a world

filled with drugs and senseless temptation. To a place that will only bring them further down. What does it say about us that we treat our students thus? Rav Shmuel Brudny, one of the most esteemed Roshei Yeshiva in Brooklyn's Mir always stood up when approached by a student! Imagine! He would never remain seated when speaking to any of his students. What love and honor he communicated to them in that simple, determined gesture of respect! Fine and good for a prominent and beloved rabbi, but what of the exhausted and beleaguered teacher? After all, it is all fine and good to elevate teaching to such a high spiritual level in theory, or as the behavior for the blessed few. But in practice, teaching is hard work. Students come to class with a myriad of problems and issues that seem far beyond the scope of the teacher to solve or even address. Yes, teaching is challenging. Very. But it is never wise to conclude that your student's problems and issues have no solution. Every child can be reached. This must be the fundamental belief and strategy of every teacher. Perhaps it appears impossible with the traditional methods but it need not be so with more creative, caring methods. Every child can be reached. Every Jew prays daily “V'ha'er eineinu b'Toratecha” – light up our eyes with Your Torah. Each of us can be turned on to the light of Torah. If not, why beseech G-d for the light? The key to teaching is finding the right switch to turn on that light – to fully identify with the student, to understand where he is “coming from.” When you can see and sense what your student does, then you will find the solution to how to teach him. Is it really so radical to ask that the teacher reach out to the student? Is it so unconventional for a teacher to “walk a mile” in the shoes of his student so that he can better help them see the light of Torah? Too often, we teach as if our students were not living, breathing human beings but some defined quantity of “student” to simply stuff with knowledge. Where, in that, is the dignity of learning? Of teaching? Rav Pam speaks of the introduction of R' Akiva Eiger to his Teshuvos, Responsa, wherein his children describe his guidelines for publishing his responses. Among those guidelines was the instruction that they delete all honorary titles addressed to him in the letters asking the questions, being that many of the sha'ilot (questions) had been posed by his very many talmidim who eventually became rabbis in various European communities; in the printed sefer he insisted that none be addressed as talmidi – my student. “I never called anyone ‘my student’ because who could know who learned more from whom, me from them or them from me?” If we only shared this same humility, respect and love of our students. Talmidim are quite literally thrown out to the streets like so much discarded trash. And the community's response? Sure, we bemoan all the teens at risk out there. It's terrible. A shanda, a shame. But do we ever stop to ask, How did they get there? We remain silent even as louder and more pronounced “threats” are voiced. Students who do not conform will not be allowed back in the yeshiva, nor will their siblings be allowed to attend for fear they might bring “impurities” from their homes into the school! Wouldn't it benefit ourselves and our students to embrace the sentiments of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik who taught that:

Teaching involves more than the transmission of knowledge and understanding. It requires empathy between teacher and student, and a sharing of feelings, thought and motives. There is an interaction of personalities, an exchange of values and insights. To teach is to know how to unlock not only the mind, but the heart, feeling and interest of every student, as well. “What we require,” Rav Soloveitchik continued, “is the warm embrace as much as the brilliant idea; sympathetic understanding, true befriending, and a human reaching out: a suggestion that we care; the teaching role is inadequate.” Rather than seek to unlock the heart of their students, yeshivot lock their doors to them and throw them out. Do they ever think, Where should they go and what will become of these “throw-aways”? It wasn't so long ago that we embraced every student who was willing to sign up for yeshiva; only a



short few decades ago that we feared the day would come when we would have to close our yeshivot for lack of students. And now? Yeshivot are greedy for more classroom space to accommodate the multitudes of students. The thinking seems to be, We have more than enough students to spare. We have the “luxury” of being “choosey”; of throwing out all who do not conform to our strict standards. So, indeed, where do they go when we throw them out? Of all our questions, this is the easiest to answer for the answer stares us in the face every single day. We see and meet the expelled talmidim on the street corners and avenues of all major Orthodox neighborhoods, entrenched in all that is ugly and foreign to Torah life. Instead of turning away, pause and speak to these young men. Ask them, How did you get here? You will hear the answer openly and honestly. “They threw me out of the yeshiva.” What offense committed in yeshiva deserves such a fate? Look where our children end up, on the streets! **WHAT IS OUT THERE?!** We must hold and keep our children in our embrace, nurture them, help them become good Jews. No one ever entering a classroom with this mission statement as his or her credo would ever consider allowing a student to fall by the way side into the street. But how do we hold on to them? Rav Ovadya Yosef counseled patience:

Don’t throw them out. We are dealing with nefoshos (souls)! This is *dinei nefoshos* (category of Jewish law dealing with capitol punishment). Our Rabbonim only addressed *dinei nefoshos* when there was a Sanhedrin, 23 chachamim. This is *dinei nefoshos*. You throw him out and what will be with him then? You know what will be? Do you accept responsibility for what he will become? Therefore, you must love him and smother him with love... bring them closer with sweet words and this is how we bring them into the Torah fold. Think of this child as your son, what would you do? You would tolerate him! This is a son, your son! *Ve’shinantam le’vanecha* (and you should teach it to your children) refers to your students. The power and importance of Rav Yosef’s counsel can be found in an article in *Ami Magazine*. The article, which I paraphrase here, was related by Sarah Pachter and concerned an incident that happened long ago in a yeshiva in which a young student had been caught smoking... on Shabbat! The mere mention of the trespass seemed so blasphemous as to make one shudder. Certainly such an offender would be expelled from the yeshiva, never again to study a *daf Gemara*, a page of *Talmud*. That is what would happen today, for a much lesser transgression. But that is not what happened. As the story was told, before such an outcome could unfold, the transgressor found himself briefly in the company of the Chofetz Chaim. What happened during those brief moments when the two were together remained known only to the two of them. What was known to the young man’s classmates was that he returned to yeshiva a few minutes later, reopened his *Gemara* and from that moment forward dedicated himself to his studies with devotion and determination. In fact, he eventually became a *rav*. Such an unexpected outcome! What had the Chofetz Chaim said to this young profligate? What could he have said, what could anyone have said that had the power to transform a person in such a short time? The answer to this question puzzled many; and they often considered it as they went about their own lives over the years and decades that followed. And then, many years later, it happened that another rabbi was delivering a Shabbat afternoon lecture in a hotel in Miami. On this particular Shabbat, post-afternoon nap and post-Mincha, the room was filled with participants. The rabbi began with a quote from the *Gemara* where Rabbi Tarfon says, “I doubt that there is anyone in this generation who accepts reproach. If you tell someone, ‘Remove the splinter from between your teeth,’ he will retort, ‘Remove the beam from between your eyes.’” In the context of this quote, he recounted a story he had once heard, a story of a time the Chofetz Chaim had touched the heart of a wayward bochor in Radun with the most amazing results. “And although we don’t know what the Chofetz Chaim said, we do know that the young boy stayed in yeshiva and was later ordained by the

Chofetz Chaim himself.” The rabbi then proceeded with the rest of his *drasha*, sermon. When he was finished, an older man rose and slowly approached him. Shaking the rabbi’s hand, the man asked him where he knew the story from. The rabbi shrugged. “To tell you the truth, I’m not really sure where I heard it. Maybe I read it somewhere a long time ago. What’s more, I can’t even verify its authenticity, but there’s a great message to be learned there.” A faraway look took over the elderly man’s mien. “Oh, the story is true; there’s no doubt about that. I was just curious where you knew it from.” Then he sighed. “I didn’t realize anyone still remembered it...except for me.” He raised his eyes to the rabbi and held him in his gaze. “I was that young man.” The rabbi looked at him, astonished. Without waiting, the old man went on to say how, as a young man, he had wanted to break free from the yeshiva, to see and experience the world. He got no joy or pleasure from his studies; no meaning. But his parents were adamant. Being determined, he decided that, if he could not leave on his own accord, he would do something that would force the yeshiva to send him away. And so he did. The rabbi listened with deep consideration until the old man paused. “So, nu, tell me. What earth-shattering insights did the Chofetz Chaim share that caused you to change direction so suddenly?” The older man smiled even as his eyes misted over with the power of that long ago moment. “He said, ‘Shabbos.’” The rabbi’s eyes arched questioningly. The old man nodded. “That is all. He said, ‘Shabbos’ and then he began to cry. How his tears splashed down! He took me in his arms, hugged me, and repeated the one word, ‘Shabbos.’ It was not the length of time his ‘reproach’ took; it was its intensity, the largeness of his heart. “And then it was all over. As he walked me to the door I was suddenly filled with the feeling that there was obviously nothing more important in the world than Shabbos. If the Chofetz Chaim loved it, then I loved it too. It was as simple as that.” If one is to teach, this is the lesson he must learn. Love. Caring. Joy. These will return a reprobate to the fold; not punishment, not banishment.

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Rabbi Wein - Parshas Vaeschanan  
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Thu, Aug 2, 2012 at 2:05 PM

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**Rabbi Berel Wein**

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**Parshas Vaeschanan**

**Shema Yisrael**

The basic declaration of Jewish faith - *Shema Yisrael* – appears in this week’s *parsha*. This affirmation of the core principle of Jewish faith – the uniqueness and oneness of God coupled with our acceptance of God’s sovereignty over us – according to Jewish tradition was first uttered by the children of Yaakov at the time of his passing from this life to a better world. Throughout Jewish history, this became the final prayer of Jews passing from this life as well. It also became, because of our long and bitter history of physical persecution and martyrdom, the symbol of Jewish tenacity and commitment. When a Jew enters the world and is old enough to first speak, the words first uttered are, *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe* (Moshe has commanded us regarding the Torah.) But, after life has been lived, with all of its differing experiences, one of the last words that a Jew recites are *Shema Yisrael*. Torah is intellect and a way of life, commandments, ritual and custom. Torah is particular and not general, parochial and not universal. It is the stuff of this world and its complexities, challenges, disappointments. Faith - the *Shema Yisrael* statement – is the stuff of eternity, of the better world, of a transcendent relationship with the Creator of us all. It is universal and its message is directed to all, Jew and non-Jew, scholar and unlettered alike. Faith and belief alone, without actions and observances, is not sufficient for Jewish life to exist. But actions and observances without faith and belief

eventually become meaningless, if not even hypocritical. A Jew is bidden to recite Shema Yisrael twice daily, with fervor and concentration. One is to actually think about the words that one is reciting when saying the prayer. The rabbis called the Shema Yisrael a declaration - "the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven." In a world of idols and paganism, this declaration is what sets the Jewish people apart from the rest of the nations of the time. In our world devoid of actual paganism but without faith and moral direction this declaration again stands as the line of separation between the Jew and the general society. The recitation of Shema Yisrael regularly, twice daily, over and over again, carefully and lovingly with correct pronunciation, serves to reemphasize to us God's presence in our lives and in our world. It serves to remind us that we are not necessarily the free agents in life that we often think that we are. Shema Yisrael inhibits our thoughts and behavior even if just for the moment. It focuses our hearts and minds on the good and noble that lies within each one to achieve and accomplish. And perhaps just as importantly it serves to unite us with all of the past generations of Jews, all of the way back to our father Yaakov and his children, to the origins of Shema Yisrael itself. When we recite Shema Yisrael it is as if we are speaking directly to our father Yaakov, to Yisrael himself. There can be no greater comforting thought for us on this Shabat of consolation than this reality of the bond of Jewish life over all of these centuries. Shabat shalom,

Rabbi Berel Wein

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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

Weekly Parsha

#### **THE RESIDUE OF THE PAST**

Jews treasure their past and remember it vividly. The past comes to us not as a hazy dream but rather as a present and current reality. In the main, this is a positive achievement for it allows all later generations to experience the great moments of our history such as the exodus from Egypt, revelation on Mount Sinai, the consecration and later destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem, etc.

However, just as when we overpack our suitcase to go on a trip, taking along all sorts of clothing and items that we will never really wear or use, and that should really and rationally be discarded, so too do we overpack our historical suitcase of memories and reactions to situations. Much of the conflicts that we witness in today's Jewish world are the residue of old issues from decades and centuries ago. Even though the situation is far different now, these issues continue to affect the Jewish people. For instance, Jews have bitter memories of being forced to serve in armies in Central and Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. For certain sections of Jewry, this memory has been translated into refusing service in any army, at almost any time. It is patently obvious that the current Nachal Charedi, for instance, is a far different situation than serving twenty-five years in the army of the Czar. But the coercion of having to serve in that army of the Czar is part of the residue of history that is packed in our suitcase and though no one talks

about, I believe it to be part of the current ongoing debate and controversy. The Holocaust and its effect upon Jewry still haunts us. We have invented and created many means to commemorate that horror – museums, books, films, special days and unique prayers. But none of these, in my opinion, have really helped us come to grips with the theological and social consequences of that ghastly event in Jewish history. One must agree that faith and belief in God was badly bruised by the Holocaust. I have been told by survivors that though they have resumed a fully observant/Chasidic/yeshiva life style after their harrowing experiences, they no longer believe in God! In my years in the rabbinate I have learned, often very painfully, to distinguish between those that are outwardly observant and those who truly believe and have faith in the God of Israel. It is also critical to note who actually survived the Holocaust. Russian Jewry, raised and nurtured under atheistic Communism, is here in great numbers in Israel and in other Jewish communities in the world. Hungarian Jewry, the hotbed of extreme secularism and extreme Orthodoxy at one and the same time and place, also substantially survived. Polish Jewry (95%) and Lithuanian Jewry (98%), the more moderate elements in Jewish life in Eastern Europe were in the main destroyed. And, this is the residue of religious extremism, atheism and divisiveness that permeates much of Jewish political and religious life today – that part of past history that remains with us today. The attitude of disparate groups in world Jewry to the nature, if not the very existence, of the State of Israel is also a result of the past that still lives with us. Zionism as practiced in the Land of Israel in the early part of the twentieth century took a decided turn to the left. The kibbutz, radical Socialism and Communism were the orders of the day. The Soviet Union was the heroic force in the world. Stalin voted for the creation of the Jewish state because he was duped into thinking that it would become a Soviet satellite state and grant Communism its entry into the Middle East. When Israel regained its political balance and economic and social good sense, and allied itself with the West, the Left became disenchanted with it. This disenchantment continues today with all of the Leftist NGO's and liberal organizations calling for all sorts of punitive measures against Israel. The bitter romance of sections of world Jewry a century ago with Marxism has left a strong residue of frustration and self-hate in today's Jewish world. And, at the other end of the spectrum, much of the Orthodox world is still fighting the battle against Zionism long after that battle has ended. Whether theologically there should have been a state or not is a non-issue in today's world. There is a state and the only issue is how to strengthen it, preserve it and make it more Jewish and exemplary. Efforts at fighting a battle long ago decided by history itself are patently futile and self-destructive. Much of the unneeded residue of history can be safely discarded. Shabat shalom  
Berel Wein

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From: Rabbi Kaganoff  
Sent: Monday, July 30, 2012 3:52 AM  
To: [kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com](mailto:kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com)  
Subject: a tefillin shoppers guide-- attached

#### **How Are Tefillin Manufactured A Tefillin Shoppers Guide By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question: I am in the process of purchasing tefillin for my son. This is a major purchase, since I hope that he will use these tefillin for many, many years to come, and tefillin are such an important mitzvah. Therefore, I have been making a lot of inquiries as to what to look for. Unfortunately, the more questions I ask, the more confused I become. Rather than gaining clarity, I am hearing many unfamiliar terms such as avodas yad (handmade), devek bein habatim (glue between the compartments of the tefillin shel rosh), perudos (separated), and gasos batim (hide of a mature animal). Could you please explain what I should be looking for in my search for mehudar tefillin?

Answer: Your questions are all very valid, and I am very glad that you have provided me the opportunity to explain these issues. Your quest is also complicated by the fact that, because most tefillin are made in Eretz Yisroel, it is sometimes difficult for someone in chutz la'aretz to find out all the details about their manufacture, especially since many rabbanim have never seen a pair of tefillin made! However, I hope to present you with enough halachic and practical basics to assist you in your search.

First, we need to understand the basics of tefillin manufacture.

As we will see, many details of the halachos of tefillin are halacha le'Moshe mi'Sinai, meaning that they were taught to Moshe Rabbeinu directly by Hashem, even though there is no reference or even allusion to these halachos in the written Torah. The Rambam counts ten such examples (Hilchos Tefillin 3:1).

There are four places in the Torah where the mitzvah of tefillin is mentioned, twice in Parshas Bo, a third time in Parshas Va'eschanan and a fourth time in



Parshas Eikev. Handwritten copies of these four sections of the Torah are placed inside specially made cases which comprise the tefillin worn on the arm and the head.

#### COMPONENTS OF THE TEFILLIN

Tefillin have three major components:

1. The Parshiyos (singular, parsha). These are the parchments on which the sofer painstakingly and carefully writes the four sections of the Torah mentioned above. For the tefillin shel yad (arm tefillin), all four parshiyos are written on one piece of parchment, whereas for the tefillin shel rosh (head tefillin), each parsha is written on a separate piece of parchment.

2. The Batim (singular bayis). These are the housing of the parshiyos. The bayis itself has three subcomponents. (a) The Ketzitzah, the cube-shaped box inside which the parshiyos are placed. (b) The Titura, the base on which the ketzitzah rests. (c) The Ma'avarta (Aramaic for "bridge"), the extension of the titura through which the straps are inserted. In good quality tefillin, the entire bayis, that is the ketzitzah, titura, and ma'avarta, are all made from one piece of hide.

3. The Retzuos, the straps.  
**MANUFACTURE OF THE HIDE**

Every pair of tefillin contains parts made of three different types of animal hide: the parchment on which the parshiyos are written; the thick hide from which the batim are manufactured; and the softer leather used for the retzuos.

The parchment, the hide and the leather used for making tefillin as well as other devarim she'bi'kedusha (holy items) must come from a kosher species, although not necessarily from an animal that was slaughtered in a kosher way (Shabbos 108a; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 32:12).

Tefillin must be manufactured "lishma," for the sake of the mitzvah. Practically speaking, this means that the beginning of each process should be performed by an observant Jew who declares that the production is for the sake of the mitzvah of tefillin (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 32:8).

Modern tanning of hide for parchment, batim and straps is a multi-stage process. For this reason, it is preferable that each step be performed, or at least begun, by an observant Jew lishma. Because of this, one of the questions to be ascertained when purchasing tefillin is to what extent an observant Jew was involved in the processing of the hide. This issue impacts on the question of machine-made vs. hand-made parchment and retzuos, which I will discuss later.

#### WRITING THE PARSHIYOS

Before starting to write, the sofer must state that he is writing these parshiyos for the sake of the mitzvah of tefillin (see Rosh, Hilchos Sefer Torah Ch. 2; Tur Orach Chaim Chapter 32). In addition, every time he writes any of the names of Hashem, he must first state that he is writing the name for kedushas Hashem. If he did not make these statements verbally, it is questionable whether the tefillin are kosher (see Rama, Orach Chaim 32:19; Rabbi Akiva Eiger comments on Shulchan Aruch 32:8).

The parshiyos must be written with meticulous care, since an error that affects the kashrus of a single letter invalidates the entire tefillin (Menachos 28a). Thus, if only one letter is missing or written incorrectly, the tefillin are posul and the person who wears these tefillin has not fulfilled the mitzvah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 32:23). Furthermore, all the brachos he recites on the tefillin are in vain.

Here are some examples of mistakes that can occur while writing tefillin: If two letters touch one another, the tefillin are posul (Menachos 34a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 32:4).

The same thing is true if the sofer intended to write one letter and instead wrote something that looks like a different letter or does not meet the halachic requirements of how the letter must be written. For example, if a sofer intended to write the letter "zayin" and made it so long that it could be read as a "nun sofsis," the tefillin are invalid. Similarly, if the sofer intended to write the letter "reish" that is supposed to have a rounded upper right corner, and instead wrote it with a square corner, the tefillin are invalid.

Sometimes the letters of the parshiyos may seem perfect, and yet the tefillin are absolutely posul. For example, the letters written in tefillin (as well as sifrei Torah and mezuzos) must be written or formed directly. A letter cannot be formed indirectly by scratching off ink around the letter until only the letter remains. This halacha is called "chok tochos," which literally means, "he hollowed out the inside."

(The origin of this expression is from a case in the Gemara where a get was written by carving a piece of wood until the letters projected. This get is invalid since the letters of the get were not written but formed indirectly by removing the area around them. This does not fulfill the Torah's requirement that a get be written [Gittin 20a]. "Writing" requires that the letters must be formed and not created indirectly.)

Similarly, if a sofer wrote the letter "dalet" instead of a "reish," it is halachically invalid to erase the sharp corner of the "dalet" and form a "reish" (Tur Orach Chaim Chapter 32, quoting Sefer HaTerumos). If someone did this, he has not written a "reish" but rather he formed a "reish" indirectly, and this is not considered "writing." Any tefillin, sefer Torah or mezuzah made this way will be invalid (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 32:18).

If a sefer Torah was written through "chok tochos," the letter can be erased and rewritten. However, if this problem occurs in tefillin or mezuzos, the parsha will usually be irreparable (Taz 32:16), and the parsha will have to be put into sheimos (genizah).

#### WHY CAN'T THIS MISTAKE BE CORRECTED?

Halacha requires that the parshiyos of tefillin and mezuzos be written in the order in which the words appear in the Torah (Rishonim, quoting Mechilta, end of Parshas Bo). This requirement is referred to as being written "kesidran," in their proper sequence. For this reason, if a letter was skipped and filled in afterwards, the tefillin or mezuzah is posul and cannot be corrected. Similarly, if a "reish" was mistakenly written as a "dalet," and the problem was discovered after more letters were written, the parsha is posul, unless one erases all the letters written after the invalid "reish."

The law of kesidran (in their proper sequence) applies only to tefillin and mezuzos. Sifrei Torah, megillos, and other holy writings do not have this rule; their letters may be written out of order. Therefore if some of their letters become posul, they can be corrected.

Thus, we see that when one purchases tefillin or mezuzos, one is dependent completely on the integrity of the sofer.

Here is another case where the buyer is completely dependent on the integrity of the sofer. After investing many hours writing a beautiful parsha, a sofer checks the parsha and discovers that one of its letters was written incorrectly in a way that might invalidate the parsha. He takes the parsha to his rav, who paskins that the parsha is indeed posul and cannot be rectified. If the sofer lacks integrity, what is to stop him from fixing the invalid letter so that it now appears a hundred percent kosher?

Fortunately, tefillin and mezuzos purchased from reputable sources should not have problems of dishonest practices like those just described. However, one should still try to find out about the sofer whose tefillin one's son will be wearing. Although it is a difficult matter to check, one should at least attempt to ascertain whether the sofer appears to be a yarei Shamayim.

Furthermore, the sofer must be thoroughly familiar with the halachos of writing tefillin, or he will certainly produce posul tefillin. There are literally hundreds of ways that a non-knowledgeable sofer can write tefillin that will be invalid. Thus, when purchasing tefillin one should insist that the sofer who wrote them is knowledgeable in the halachos of safrus, and that he has up-to-date certification from a recognized organization or posek to be a sofer. Some of these organizations insist that the sofrim they certify take periodic, continuing examinations to ascertain that they are still competent in the halachos required for their profession.

When parents of a soon-to-be Bar-Mitzvah bochur begin researching purchasing tefillin for their son, they should be aware that looking for a "bargain" will sacrifice quality. Tefillin should be viewed as a long-term investment, since a good pair should last many decades. That means that buying a pair mehudar pair of tefillin that costs perhaps \$400 more than a minimally kosher pair will translate into spending approximately a nickel a day, if the tefillin are worn for the next thirty years. What other investment costs only a nickel a day?

#### A MODERN INNOVATION IN HALACHA

After the sofer finishes writing the tefillin parshiyos, he reads them over several times, and then they are checked by a specially trained examiner, or even better, by two trained examiners. In our era, the checking process has been tremendously enhanced by a modern innovation – computer-checking. The written parshiyos are scanned into a computer that has a program comparing the written parshiyos with the computer's version. The computer checks for missing and extra letters and words, for poorly and mistakenly formed letters, for connected or cracked letters and for other errors.

Experience has proven that computers have an infinite attention span and never get distracted by boredom or exhaustion. (Of course, the computer's proper performance depends on an alert operator.) It is common for computers to catch mistakes that humans overlook. There is a recorded instance of a pair of tefillin that was checked nine different times without discovering that a word was missing, until it underwent a computer check! When purchasing tefillin, one should insist that the parshiyos be computer checked.

However, one may not rely only on a computer check of the tefillin since, at present, computers cannot check for certain items such as proper spacing between letters and words.

It should be noted that neither the examiner nor the computer can detect certain problems that occur, such as letters written out of order and letters formed through “chok tochos” (scratching out or erasing to create letters, instead of writing). This is why the sofer’s yiras shamayim and his halachic knowledge are absolutely indispensable.

#### MANUFACTURE OF THE BATIM

Until now we have discussed the preparation of the parshiyos that go inside the batim of the tefillin. Now we will investigate the complicated process of making proper tefillin batim. The manufacturer of batim is generally referred to by the Yiddish term “batim macher.”

Several basic types of tefillin batim are manufactured. The highest quality batim are called “gasos,” large ones, because they are made out of the hide of mature (large) cattle. Their leather is high-quality and very durable. From the buyer’s perspective, these batim are well worth the higher cost. In addition to their superior durability, gasos batim have halachic advantages. Furthermore, they can be repaired easily if the tefillin are damaged. These are the type of batim purchased by people concerned about doing mitzvos properly.

#### ANOTHER MODERN INNOVATION

In fact, gasos batim are a relatively new development, made possible through the invention of the modern hydraulic press. Until this invention, the tough gasos hide could not be worked into the intricate shapes required for tefillin. Only today can tons of pressure be applied to the leather with a hydraulic press to produce the finest tefillin from the thick hide of gasos animals.

Gasos batim take several months to manufacture. Since the hide is very strong and tough, each step requires moistening it to make it malleable, forming it with the assistance of molds and a hydraulic press, and then allowing several weeks for the hide to dry.

Forming the separate sections of the tefillin shel rosh into four compartments is a delicate task. The hide must be bent and squeezed into separate compartments without tearing it. Although one internal tear does not invalidate the batim, more than one tear can render the bayis posul. For this and other reasons, one must be confident in the expertise, halachic knowledge and yiras shamayim of the batim macher.

#### THE SHIN OF THE SHEL ROSH

There is a halacha le’Moshe mi’Sinai that the tefillin shel rosh must have the letter “shin” on each side, a normal three-headed shin on the right side of the wearer, and an unusual four-headed shin on the left side (Tosafos, Menachos 35a, quoting Shimusha Rabba; Rambam, Hilchos Tefillin 3:1). The commentaries cite many reasons why the left side of the tefillin must have a four-headed shin (see Smag, Smak, Beis Yosef, Bach). Some say that the four-headed shin is reminiscent of the letter shin as it appeared in the luchos. =Since the letters were carved through the stones of the luchos, the letter shin appeared to have four legs and heads (Taz 32:35).

There is a dispute among early poskim whether the shin on the tefillin can be made completely by molding it. According to the lenient opinions, one can simply take a mold, soften the leather, push the mold onto the bayis and press out the shin on the tefillin shel rosh (Or Zarua, quoted by Darkei Moshe 32:18; Beis Yosef). However, the accepted practice is to be machmir and form the letter in a direct way first (many Rishonim quoted by Beis Yosef; Magen Avraham 32:57). This is done by painstakingly picking and pulling the leather until a kosher shin has been directly formed by hand. Only after the shin has been formed to the point that it is a halachically kosher letter is the mold applied to enhance and beautify it. This is permitted, since the minimum halachic requirements of the letter “shin” have been already created manually and directly. It is worthwhile to clarify how the shin of the tefillin one purchases was manufactured.

The dispute whether the shin may be molded takes us back to a previous discussion. Creating the shin through a mold is an act of “chok tochos,” indirectly creating a letter. As mentioned before, letters written for a sefer Torah, tefillin, mezuzos or a get are invalid when written as chok tochos. If so, why do so many poskim rule that the shin of the side of the shel rosh may be created through a mold?

The answer is that the Torah never states that one must “write” a shin on the side of the tefillin. The halacha le’Moshe mi’Sinai merely states that there must be a shin on the side of the tefillin, without specifying that the shin must be written there. Therefore, the lenient opinions contend that there is no requirement to “write” a shin on the tefillin, and it is sufficient for the shin to be made in any way, even through “chok tochos.” As mentioned above, the accepted practice is to form the shin first directly.

#### THE TEFILLIN MUST BE SQUARE

There is another halacha le’Moshe mi’Sinai that the tefillin must be perfectly square (Menachos 35a). The Rishonim dispute whether min haTorah both the bayis and the titura must be square, or only one of them. Since this matter is a

controversy, and furthermore, since some opinions require that they must both be square, we rule that both the bayis and the titura must be perfectly square.

The width of the bayis must be the exact same measurement as its length, and there may be no nicks, indentations, or bulges that ruin its perfect squareness. The height of the tefillin does not need to be the same as the width and length (Rambam, Hilchos Tefillin 3:1).

Similarly, the titura is shaped so that its length and width are equal.

In order to get the four compartments of the shel rosh to form a perfect square, many batim machers paste the sections of the bayis to one another to help them hold together. Although there is much halachic controversy about gluing the compartments together, many prominent poskim in earlier generations permitted it (such as Yeshuas Yaakov 32:24; Shu”t Chasam Sofer Orach Chaim #5 [however cf. Vol. 6 #68]; Shu”t Beis Yitzchok, Orach Chaim 7:6; Daas Torah 32:40).

Other poskim permit gluing the compartments only if the paste is applied to less than half the height of the wall of the compartment and is not applied along the outside edges. However, since there are poskim who disapprove of using any paste, it is certainly a hiddur not to use any at all (Chayei Odom 14:4). These batim are referred to as “perudos ad hatefer ligamri,” which literally means, separated completely down to the stitch, referring to the stitching on the top of the titura (which will be explained later).

Germane to this discussion is a well-known response from Rav Chaim Volozhiner. When asked whether pasting the compartments of the shel rosh together is permitted, he responded that he would not permit it, because the two gedolei hador of the previous generation, the Vilna Gaon and the Shaagas Aryeh, both contended that pasting the compartments invalidates the tefillin.

In earlier generations, when tefillin batim were made from much softer calf leather or even flimsier parchment, it was very difficult to make tefillin that would remain square if the compartments were not pasted together. However, today’s gasos batim are kept square through the stiffness of the hide and the pressure of the hydraulic press. Since the gasos batim are not dependent on paste to hold their shape, many contemporary poskim contend that one should refrain from placing any paste in the batim.

#### WHAT IS WRONG WITH GLUING THE COMPARTMENTS TOGETHER?

The problem is that the shel rosh is required to have four separate compartments, one for each parsha. The poskim who prohibit pasting the compartments contend that this makes them into one connected compartment, thus invalidating the tefillin. Those who are lenient contend that pasting the compartments together does not halachically make them into one compartment.

The compromise position contends that the compartments are considered separate if they are pasted less than half way up and the outside edge is clearly not connected. This makes the batim noticeably separate, which, they contend, is all that is required. One should ask his rav whether to request batim in which no paste was used at all.

At this point, the batim are almost ready; they still need painting, and need to have the parshiyos inserted. We have not yet discussed the processing of the retzuos, the finishing and sewing of the titura, and various other hiddurim of tefillin. These subjects will have to wait until next week.