

## *The Gaon of Rogatchov: A Study in Abstraction*

By: DOVBER SCHWARTZ

### Introduction

Rabbi Yosef Rosen, known as the Rogatchover Gaon (the Genius of Rogatchov), and also often referred to by the title of his main work *Tzafnas Paane'ach* (*Decipherer of Secrets*), was one of the most prominent Talmudic scholars and rabbis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

He was born in Rogatchov, Belarus, in 1858. His father, Fishel Rosen, was a well-known and respected Lubavitcher Chassid. At the age of five he was taken by his father to see the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, who instructed him to learn *Maseches Nazir*.<sup>1</sup>

Upon reaching the age of bar mitzvah, his father sent him to Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, the Rav of Brisk, where he became a study partner of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik for a year. He was known there by the nickname of the *iluy ha'chatzuf* (the impish genius) due to his sharp wit and biting humor.

After this he went to the city of Shklov, where he studied with the Maharil Diskin (Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin). In 1889, when the Rogatchover was 31, the Kapuster Rebbe, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Schneersohn, appointed him to be the Rav of the Lubavitch-Kapust community in Dvinsk. The Lithuanian Rav there

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<sup>1</sup> There are those who posit that he took this as a sort of *nezirus* and therefore never cut his hair. Other theories are that he did not want to uncover his head since he would not be able to learn Torah, or that it hurt him to cut his hair.

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was Rabbi Meir Simchah HaCohen (the author of *Ohr Same'ach* and *Meshech Chochmah*), with whom he enjoyed good relations.<sup>2</sup>

The Rogatchover was a unique personality. He would answer those who came to him with questions very concisely and summarily. Many of his responses were extraordinarily biting and sharp or, at the very least, incredibly short, with *ayin*<sup>3</sup> after *ayin* and nothing more.

His *sefer, Tzafnas Paane'ach*<sup>4</sup> was, and generally remains, a closed book even for scholars. It is written with extreme conciseness and is riddled with ambiguous hints as to his intent. Adding to the difficulty is that often the sources cited in building his theory are so numerous and dense as to make understanding the text a near impossible feat.

Another obstacle is that his theory on a given subject is not usually easily compartmentalized, nor is it presented as incrementally increasing building blocks. If that would be the case, it would be easier to digest a piece of his writing, since one would be able to focus on breaking down and understanding one line and then advancing. The problem is that often what he is trying to convey can only be understood in conjunction with all the other parts of the theory. Standing on its own, one part may not be comprehensible. The reader is forced to jump into the nucleus of the idea without the aid of independent pieces of information that indicate where he is headed with a certain concept.

This was his "Written Torah." His "Oral Torah," however, was entirely different. He had a unique ability to communicate even

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<sup>2</sup> Much of the following brief description of the Rogatchover's character is translated from an article written in Hebrew ("*Turei Yeshurun*" Volume 44, Shvat-Adar 1975) by Noah Zevulini who lived with the Rogatchover from 1932 until 1933.

<sup>3</sup> *Ayin* means to look up the source referenced. For example he would write "*ayin Makkot* page 17." Aside from being indirect and forcing the questioner to look up numerous sources, these responses were often extremely ambiguous as to what part or concept on the page he was referring to.

<sup>4</sup> Literally "Decipherer of Secrets," meaning the book deciphers the secrets of the Torah. However, there are those who, in a play of words, interpret the title that one must decipher the secrets of the book itself.

dense and technical ideas in a clear and lucid manner. Most of the content of his books was taken from what he wrote in the tiny margins of his *sefarim*. When asked what he meant in a particular place of his writing, he often explained it at length and in an unambiguous manner.

In this he was the polar opposite of the Lithuanian Rav of the town, Rabbi Meir Simchah HaCohen, who reportedly was extremely brief in his verbal responses to people, yet very clear and explanatory in his writing.

In stark contrast to all the other leading rabbis of his day, he had a small bookshelf and very few *sefarim* that he would use on a consistent basis. The *sefarim* he did have included a set of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, a *Tur* and some Rishonim. The crown jewel of his small study was his *Mishneh Torah*; he considered Rambam to be his teacher. He would refer to the *Rambam* as “my master” and reportedly would talk to him, bidding him good morning or expressing his delight when unraveling a complex concept from his works.

He was very popular with the yeshivah students for his humor and sharp wit. He often was critical of Acharonim, and while being respectful of the Rishonim, he would neglect to study them at times. Instead he would, on occasion, draw conclusions straight from the Talmud itself.

Shmuel Yosef Agnon, a Nobel Prize laureate writer and one of the central figures of modern Hebrew fiction, visited the Rogatchover and wrote the following:<sup>5</sup>

I went into his room and found him suffering immensely from his sickness. When he noticed me he started to pour out his heart to me. “I am afraid,” he said, “that all my suffering is a result of my not being respectful enough of the Rishonim. All my days I immersed myself in the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*; it was my central focus and toil and even when I learnt other Rishonim, I only studied them to gain more understanding and perspective of the Rambam’s approach.”

“He then started to cry,” continued Agnon, “and yelled out,”

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<sup>5</sup> As told by Yair Buruchav in his biographical book *HaRogatchovi*, p. 158.

“Where are the other masters of the Torah? Where are Rashi and *Tosafot*? Where are the Raavan and the Ri? What have I done? Why did I not put effort into understanding and expounding upon their words? It is because of this I am being punished.”

He was silent for a bit, and then a spirit of calm settled over him.

“It is all worth it,” he declared suddenly. “If I am suffering because of my connection and bond to the Rambam I accept the pain joyously!”

Noah Zevulini relates the following:

Every day I would enter his house and study and talk to the Rogatchover. One day the Rogatchover told me that Nachman Bialik had come to him and they had discussed various matters. The Rogatchover then gave him a copy of his book the *Tzafnas Paane’ach*, at which point Bialik left.

Bialik later wrote that from the mind of the Rogatchover could be carved out two Einsteins. Legend has it that when the Rogatchover heard this statement he dryly remarked, “And from the leftover specks one could create numerous Bialiks.”

The Rogatchover Gaon passed away in 1936 at the age of 78 and was buried in Dvinsk.

His main work, a commentary on *Mishneh Torah*, was published during his lifetime, as were five volumes of halachic responsa. The remainder of his surviving writings appeared in the United States many years after his death. All are titled *Tzafnas Paane’ach*, a title given to the Biblical Joseph by Pharaoh (*Bereishis* 41:45).

His manuscripts were smuggled out of Latvia on microfilm during World War II by his successor, Rabbi Yisrael Alter Safrin-Fuchs (1911–1942), who remained in Latvia to complete this task, and his daughter, who had come to Dvinsk from Eretz Yisrael to help preserve her father’s manuscripts. Both died at the hands of the Nazis as a result. A portion of these manuscripts were edited and published by Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher.

His works include the following:

- *Tzafnas Paane’ach*—his magnum opus, a two-volume set on the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*

- *Chibur al Moreh Nevuchim*—found in the back of his Torah commentary
- *Tzafnas Paane'ach al HaTorah*—a five-volume set on the Torah
- *Tzafnas Paane'ach al HaShas*—four volumes covering the tractates of *Bava Kamma*, *Bava Metzia*, *Makkot*, *Horayos* and *Sanhedrin*.
- *Tzafnas Paane'ach Responsa*—the Dvinsk edition contains two volumes. The Warsaw edition contains three volumes.
- *Sh"ut Tzafnas Paane'ach HaChadashos*—Responsa on *Orach Chaim* and *Yoreh De'ah* and glosses on the *Tur*.
- *Michtevei Torah*—a book of correspondence between the Rogatchover and Rabbi Mordechai Kalina, containing 290 letters from the years 1922 to 1926. The entire correspondence started with one letter from Rabbi Mordechai Kalina and the ensuing 289 letters were all derivative concepts and debates from the first letter.

Books on the Rogatchover's writings are few. The most extensive is the *Mefaane'ach Tzefunos* by Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher. The first part of the book contains several essays on the methodology and conceptual framework of the Rogatchover. The second part is a compilation of sources from the Rogatchover on several key concepts. Unfortunately, this part of the book is still essentially unintelligible unless vast amounts of time are spent unraveling the sources, since no explanatory or supplementary material is provided.

Another book was written by Rabbi Moshe Grossburg called *Tzefunos HaRagatchovi*. It is more conceptual and analytical than the *Mefaane'ach Tzefunos*. In it, the author takes several core concepts that the Rogatchover revolutionized and provides some background and context. Rabbi Grossburg also annotated much of the responsa of the Rogatchover, adding background information on the sources cited in the letters.

Another source is an essay written by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin. In his book *Ishim VeShittos*, which is a methodological and conceptual analysis of several of the giants of Torah scholarship in the last century, he explains some of the central guiding principles behind the Rogatchover's system of Torah analysis.

Another source—and probably the most readily understandable and user-friendly one—is the *Pirkei Mavo* written by Rabbi Moshe Shlomo Kasher, the son of Rabbi M. M. Kasher. They are printed in the beginning of each volume of the *Tzafnas Paane'ach al HaTorah*.

Rabbi M. S. Kasher also translated an article written by Rabbi Chayim Sapir titled “*Der Lebediker Shas*” or “The Living Talmud.”

Another two scholars who added to this area are Rabbi Yehoshua Mundshein (*Paane'ach Raza*) and Rabbi M.M. Tenenbaum (*Shittas Limudo shel HaRagatchovi*).

Recently a biographical book was published by Yair Buruchav on the life of the Rogatchover.

### Part One<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This article is an excerpt from a book I am writing in English on the Rogatchover's system of Torah thought, focusing on the conceptual innovations inherent within it. I do research independently and in conjunction with several professors and Torah scholars who are knowledgeable on the topics. I hope to publish the first volume within the coming year. It will contain several sections, most notable being an analysis of the Rogatchover's conception of a Torah-based political theory—that is to say, how collectives are formed and what the individual's relationship is to societal obligation and collectivist constructs. Concurrently I am translating and annotating the Rogatchover's glosses on *Bereishis* and will be publishing a *chumash* with his commentary. This essay is an explanation of the unique style and approach of the Rogatchover Gaon.

The sources used for this article can mostly be found in *Mefaane'ach Tzefunos, Perek 1, Siman 3* and in the various *Pirkei Mavo* scattered throughout the chapter. I have primarily relied on the sources that the *Mefaane'ach Tzefunos* brings, although I have taken liberty with restructuring the order and often the thrust and theme of various sources. I have also relied on word searches, consultation with the few people well versed in *Tzafnas Paane'ach* and cross-referencing from the *Klalei HaTorah V'Hamitzvos. Mefaane'ach Tzefunos* greatly reduces the workload for the researcher trying to unravel the works of the Rogatchover. However, I have not bound myself to Kasher's understanding of the text and at times, after careful study of the source material, have deviated from the theme that Kasher understood that piece to fall into. Kasher's understanding itself is only implied by his ordering of the various sources from the *Tzafnas Paane'ach* since his comments are sporadic and terse.

To begin to understand the innovations and impact of the Rogatchover Gaon, it is helpful to start by considering the nature of the Talmud.

In its some 6,000 pages one engages with thousands of facts and arguments on a vast number of topics. Written as a series of conversations, the Talmud is fluid and tangential, jumping from topic to topic, unconstrained by subject or order. A conversation in tractate *Shabbos* can be picked up in *Sanhedrin*, and an argument touched upon in *Pesachim* is fully explained in *Rosh Hashanah*, despite their being many volumes apart.

Besides the lack of a structured sequential progression of ideas, the Talmud's content is complex and often intimidating, lending itself to multiple interpretations. The Talmud's structure demands careful scholarship and much commentary. Yet, as centuries of Jewish scholars discussed and debated the Talmud, the complex and fractious nature of the Talmud only expanded.

In the world of the Rogatchover, however, a Talmudic dispute is never just what it seems to be on the surface. The dispute recorded is simply the result of a long stream of more primary and basic disputes ending in the argument recorded in the Talmud.

This type of approach has numerous, profound consequences for how one views the Torah. If one would simply read the Talmud from cover to cover, one would come away knowing thousands of facts and arguments, yet they would all seem to be independent and fragmented items of information and disputes.

The Rogatchover radically altered and reconstructed the way one can view the body of Torah knowledge. From his perspective, all the fractious and disparate items of knowledge and disputation in the Talmud are derivatives of more basic and inclusive concepts. In field after field of Torah, the Rogatchover took numerous debates on seemingly disconnected subjects and showed how they are all predicated upon one core concept. All the disagreements were seen as ramifications and extensions of underlying core concepts.

The Rogatchover is reported to have said that he could refine and abstract all of Torah knowledge into ten ideas! Thus, in the eyes of the Rogatchover, the Torah is a unified, interconnected and harmonious body of knowledge, with all the apparent disparateness being merely the outer, superficial layer of thought.

A Mishnah in *Uktzin* regarding apple stems, a Mishnah in *Shabbos* concerning perfume, and a Gemara in *Bava Kama* discussing property damages may all be expressions of the same idea. The coherency and cogency that he developed in Torah was so pervasive and prevalent in his learning that one is hard-pressed to find a single piece of his writings that doesn't show how apparently unrelated laws are, in fact, all one and the same.

Minute technical laws about animal hides and candles were his building blocks for grand sweeping theories on the nature of life, religion and reality.

A debate about grass fibers became a debate about the very existence of our world, and whether halachah views physicality as the primary determinant or spirituality as the primary determinant.

An argument about slaves and converts was transformed into an argument about the ability of an entity to change its intrinsic identity.

A prophecy about the wolf lying with the lamb became a conceptual construct within which to discuss the advantages of quality versus quantity.

The finesse and grace with which the Rogatchover abstracted seemingly innocuous and technical Gemaras was and is unparalleled. The Rogatchover did not just excel in Torah. He created an entirely new field, not dissimilar to what Einstein did in helping to create the field of quantum physics and relativity.

His style differed somewhat from the schools of *lomdus* which were prevalent in his day and which still enjoy widespread dominance in the yeshivos. Although an analysis of the differences between Reb Chaim (the father of modern *lomdus*) and the Rogatchover's style is beyond the scope of this work, I think it might be captured somewhat by the following parable. Reb Chaim was a microscopic scholar. He took laws and delved into their complex ambiguous depths to discover their inner core, their molecular structure, if you will. He split hairs and refined each element of a law until the difference between all the parts became clear.

The Rogatchover, on the other hand, was a telescopic scholar. In each minute law he saw the universe of Torah. In his mind each subject of Torah orbited around the others until they were all intertwined and fused together. He abstracted each law until it took on

massive proportions and gained immense applicability to all other fields of Torah.

The following quote from Rabbi Hillel Tzeitlin is somewhat in line with this characterization:

זכורני, שגדולי הלמדנים החב"דיים שבעירתי, פעם – תוך כדי שיחתם בגדלותו העצומה של "העילוי מרוגצ'וב" – אמרו זה לזה בלחישת: אבל בלימוד "על אתר", בזה הוא לא כל-כך "איי-איי-איי" ... כלומר, כל הגדלות שלו מתבטאת בבקיאות וביכולת להקים בנין מורכב ממאות אבנים מהבבלי, ירושלמי, תוספות, רי"ף, רא"ש ובעיקר – רמב"ם. אבל לימוד "על אתר" היה נקרא, אצל הלמדנים שלנו: להתעמק בסוגיא כלשהי, לדייק בכל מלה ומלה, לחדור יותר ויותר לתוכה ופנימיותה עד שמגיעים לשורשה, ואז להצמיח משורש זה אילן, ענפים, זלזלים, עלים ופירות. ולא פעם היתה ההעמקה בסוגיא גדולה כל-כך, עד שהיו מסתבכים ותועים בה כבשבילי יער עבות.

I remember that the greatest Chabad scholars in my town once were describing the exceptional greatness of the genius of Rogatchov. All of a sudden, they whispered to each other: "But his localized knowledge of each *sugya* is not so exceptional." In other words, all his greatness was expressed in his breadth and scope and in his ability to construct a tower comprised of hundreds of pieces from Bavli, Yerushalmi, *Tosafos*, the Rif, the Rosh, and most importantly, the Rambam. But localized learning meant to delve into the depths of the *sugya* as is; to be precise with every single word, to drill deeper and deeper into the internal structure of the *sugya* until reaching its roots. And then to grow from the roots a beautiful tree with branches, twigs, foliage and fruits.

And it was not uncommon to delve so deeply into a *sugya* that we would stroll and wander [in the *sugya*] as if we were on a path in a gigantic forest.<sup>7</sup>

The following is a demonstration of this style of abstraction and harmonization.

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<sup>7</sup> His article can be accessed at: <[http://www.shturem.net/index.php?article\\_id=64&section=blog\\_new](http://www.shturem.net/index.php?article_id=64&section=blog_new)>.

### Part Two: *The Spiritual and the Tangible*

The schools of Shammai and Hillel were intellectual and scholarly rivals for hundreds of years and were major influencers of the development of Torah. Between Hillel and Shammai there were only three (possibly five) disputes. But 316<sup>8</sup> arguments between the schools they founded are recorded in the Talmud. Of these arguments, 221 revolve around various halachos, 66 are *gezeiros* (preventative laws), and 29 are discrepancies over Biblical and legislative interpretations.<sup>8</sup> Despite Shammai's tendency to be strict and Hillel to be lenient, in 55 of these disputes (fully one-sixth), the school of Shammai ruled on the side of leniency.

Many theories have been proposed as to the central (or at least one of the central) differences between the schools. The theories as to the core conceptual difference between the schools range from psychological and hermeneutical, to socio-economic and analytical preferences.

The Rogatchover Gaon's key insight into the core difference between Hillel and Shammai is related to their differing perspectives on the degree to which spiritual versus tangible elements of reality should be taken into account in determining halachah.

The Talmud (*Chagigah* 12a) states: "The school of Shammai says, 'The heavens were created first and then the earth.' The school of Hillel says, 'The earth was created first and then the heavens.'" What does this argument revolve around? Is there an underlying theme?

Indeed there is.<sup>9, 10</sup> Shammai says the heavens were created first. By heavens, Shammai means spirituality and the intangible. In Shammai's view, spirituality is the primary determinant in halachah and is the main barometer of reality. It was created first since it is the dominant reality.

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<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "House of Hillel and House of Shammai."

<sup>9</sup> In *Michtevei Torah* letter #289: וזה שיטת ב"ה בחגיגה דף יב דחומר נברא תחלה ואח"כ הצורה היולית, אך ב"ש ס"ל להיפך, דצורה היולית נבראת תחלה ואח"כ חומר, וזה באמת בכל התורה דעיקר צורת הדבר.

<sup>10</sup> In *Mahadurah Tinyana* p. 180: וזה הגדר דפליגי בחגיגה דף יב, דשמים נבראו תחלה (ווארשא) ס"י נ במחלוקת ב"ש לדעת ב"ש, ור"ל דהצורה הוא העיקרית, ע"כ. ובש"ת צ"פ (ווארשא) ס"י נ במחלוקת ב"ש וב"ה בחגיגה יב, שמים נבראו כ"י, ר"ל אם המציאות הוא הצורה או החומר.

[Spirituality in this context does not have any sort of other-worldly implication. It simply means something that exists in our universe yet is immaterial and lacks concrete substance.]

Hillel says, however, that in our physical world, material considerations are of primary importance, and one must use the physical spectrum as the dominant factor in deciding halachah. Therefore the earth, meaning physicality, was created first.

The Rogatchover<sup>11</sup> proceeds to pinpoint this dispute as the epicenter of two Gemaras that seemingly have no connection to this. The Talmud in *Shabbos* 62b states the following (I paraphrase):

A woman may not go out on Shabbos carrying a spice bundle (an ornament worn around the neck in which women would place spices so as to create a fragrance) or a flask of balsam oil. If she did go out she has transgressed the Shabbos and is required to bring a *korban chatas* (an atoning sacrifice in the Temple). This is Rabbi Meir's opinion.

Rabbi Eliezer disagrees and says she has not transgressed the Sabbath and is exempt from a *korban*. The reason she is exempt is because a pendant containing spice or a small flask containing oil are considered to be in the category of *tachshit* (ornaments). Items that are categorized as a *tachshit* are Biblically permitted to be worn on Shabbos since it is not considered carrying when going out with them. Just as wearing a shirt on one's back is not considered "carrying," so, too, items that, while not being essential, have aesthetic or secondary uses and benefits are allowed to be worn on one's person.

Rabbi Eliezer then qualifies his ruling and states that she is only exempt when the spice bundle contained spices inside and the flask contained oil inside. But if they did not have spice or oil inside them then she is obligated to bring a *korban* (meaning she has transgressed the Sabbath). Since it is not the norm to wear a pendant or a flask when they are empty, they are not considered ornaments when worn empty. Therefore, since they are not able to be classified as ornaments, they revert to *masa* (carrying) status.

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<sup>11</sup> In *Tzafnas Paane'ach Sh"ut Dvinsk, Siman* 50: ע"י ברכות, דזה רק צורה ולא חומר, מג, נשמה נהנה כו' דאין בו ממש, ופליגי בזה שבת סב, אם יש עליו גדר פחות משיעור

[To facilitate a fluid, smooth understanding of the next part of the Gemara, it is necessary to preface the following principle about carrying on Shabbos. In order to transgress the Shabbos it is not enough to simply carry something outside in the public domain. One must carry a certain minimum quantity in order to be Biblically culpable. Each item has its own minimum requirement or *shiur*. For example, one carrying food must take out (generally) enough food equal to the size of a dried fig.

The minimum amount for other objects may be less or more, depending upon the specific item in question. For example, one taking out a vessel such as a jar would be Biblically liable even for carrying out a tiny jar, since one has carried a whole, complete vessel. With food, however, it is not dependent on whether one has carried a complete item, but rather on the amount of food.]

The Talmud in *Shabbos* 93b discusses an intriguing case concerning one who takes out a jar containing food, where the food does not satisfy the minimum requirement yet the jar does satisfy the *shiur* (since it is a complete vessel). What is the *din* (law)?

Seemingly, there should be no question as to their culpability. For the jar (which satisfies the *shiur*) they are liable, and for the food (which does not) they should not be liable.

Yet it is more complex than that. Since the jar is being used as a receptacle for the food, it is viewed as not having its own independent existence and is merely an accessory of the food. Thus, one is not liable for carrying the jar, since it is not its own halachic entity. Rather, it is an extension of the food. Yet for the food one also cannot be liable since the amount of the food is less than the *shiur*. Thus, counter-intuitively, for carrying out more (the food as well as the jar) one ends up not being liable (as opposed to if one would have just carried out the jar without the food, in which case one would indeed have been liable).

The Gemara attempts to deduce something from Rabbi Eliezer's opinion. Rabbi Eliezer said that when the flask is empty one is liable since then it is not a *tachshit* (because it is not the normal custom to wear an empty flask).

But what about the scent of the balsam oil that still emanates from the flask? Isn't that comparable to the case brought before where one took out food less than the *shiur* in a vessel?

Here too one is taking out two things: the scent that is wafting from the flask (which is less than the *shiur*, since scent has no substance to which we could pin a minimum *shiur*) and the flask itself (which satisfies the *shiur* since it is a complete vessel). Yet still Rabbi Eliezer holds that one is liable in this case! Is he not arguing on the Mishnah on 93b and forming his own opinion? According to the Mishnah on 93b, one should not be culpable for the scent since it lacks a minimum *shiur*, and also not for the flask, since the flask is carrying the scent, and is therefore merely an accessory and extension to the smell.

The Talmud answers that these two cases are not conceptually parallel. Smell has no tangibility (*leis bei mamasha*) since it has no substance, and the flask is considered empty and cannot be said to be an accessory to the scent.

What essentially is the discussion here in the Gemara? The Rogatchover sees it as being predicated upon the tension between the tangible and the intangible realms.

Scent here is classified as belonging to the spiritual realm. It is not tangible or concrete at all, and halachically it is viewed as being the only sense that is a sensory tool of the soul, as opposed to being a sensory faculty of the body. (This is why on Saturday night, at the closing of Shabbos, we smell spices to comfort the soul as we head into the lesser holiness of the week.)

This, then, is the point. Is smell part of our reality? Are non-tangible items viewed as determinants in our decisions and perspectives? If they are, then the smell of the oil in the flask should be viewed as being “something,” albeit less than the *shiur*. If that is so, then the two cases are conceptually parallel and we can build a corollary from one case to the other. That would dictate that just as when one carries out food in a jar one is *patur* (exempt), since the jar is considered to be an accessory to the food and the food itself lacks the minimum requirement, so too when one carries out a scented flask without actually having scented oil inside, one should be *patur*, since again, one cannot be liable for the jar being that it is an accessory of the scent.

If scent is not viewed as part of our considerations, and halachah only deals with tangible factors, then fragrance is not considered an

entity and the flask is properly defined as being empty, thus ending any hopes of building a comparison between the two cases.

### Peppery Potential

Another expression<sup>12</sup> of this battle of perspectives is in a Mishnah in *Uktzin* 3:6. The *Mishnah* records a dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel regarding black cumin (*katzach*). Shammai says it is *tabor* (ritually pure) and not susceptible to *tumah* (ritual impurity) since it is not considered a food, as it is too harsh and bitter to eat. Hillel says it is susceptible to *tumah* since it is able to be eaten. On the surface they seem to be arguing about the physical existence of cumin and disputing a factual truth, which is not considered to be an optimal way of understanding halachah and Talmud (*ein machlokes b'metziyus*).

However, our analysis will shed light on this strange, seemingly factual, dispute. In order to do so, we must first avail ourselves of another statement from the Talmud.

The Talmud in *Berachos* 40a states:

What is *katzach*? Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina said, one who eats a lot of cumin (*katzach*) will not experience illness or heart pains. Rabi Shimon ben Gamliel then asked, but *katzach* is recorded as being one of 60 plants that hasten death?

The resolution in the Talmud is that one of the teachings (that *katzach* averts pain and illness) was stated regarding its taste, and the other (that *katzach* hastens death) was concerning its smell. The smell is harsh and hastens death, whereas the taste is healthy and wholesome.

That being the case, Beis Shammai holds that black cumin is not susceptible to *tumah* since its smell is harsh and unhealthy and not fit for consumption; whereas Beis Hillel holds that we only consider tangible factors, and since smell is intangible it is not a factor. Thus we only consider the taste, and the taste is healthy and fit for

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<sup>12</sup> In *Mabadurah Tinyana* page 180: ועיי' במאי דפליגי בסוף עוקצין פ"ג מ"ו ו ב"ש וב"ה: דלב"ש קצח פטור מן המעשרות והטעם דס"ל דהעיקר הוא הריח, וזה ריחו קשה (ברכות דף מ). ובשו"ת שם: דס"ל (לבייש) דהעיקר הוא הצורה והיינו הריח

consumption. Therefore it is susceptible to *tumah* since it is halachically considered a food.

### **Alcoholic Abstraction**

This essential argument between these two schools is also reflected<sup>13</sup> in the following Gemara in *Berachos* 43b:

If one has wine (which he intends to drink) and scented oil (which he intends to smell) in front of him, he should take the oil in his right hand and the wine in his left hand. He should then make a blessing on the oil, smell it and then make a blessing on the wine and drink it. This is the opinion of Beis Shammai.

Beis Hillel says the opposite: One should take the wine in his right hand and the oil in his left, make a blessing on the wine and then proceed to the oil.

The explanation given by the commentaries is that Beis Shammai holds that the blessing on the oil takes precedence (and thus is held in the right hand) since the pleasure gained from it is immediate and does not require an action on one's part, whereas the wine's pleasure is only once one drinks it and digests it.

Beis Hillel, however, reasons that wine, which is consumed by the body, is more significant than oil, which is merely smelled, therefore the blessing on the wine takes precedence.

This does not explain, however, why Hillel holds that tangible intake of pleasure (consumption of the wine) is more significant than intangible intake of pleasure (smelling)?

Additionally, what does Shammai say to Hillel's point about consumption of pleasure versus merely smelling pleasure?

According to our analysis it is clear. Hillel holds that tangible pleasure is more significant than intangible pleasure in accordance with his world view that tangible factors are the primary determinants, as opposed to intangible factors. Shammai retorts that quite the contrary, intangible and abstract factors are the primary determinants. Thus the oil (merely smelling) takes precedence.

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote 8 above.

### The Solidity of the *Sotab* Water

There is a debate in the Talmud about how much of G-d's name needs to be erased before we force the *sotab*<sup>14</sup> to drink the *sotab* water. Beis Hillel says at least two letters (the first *yud* and the first *hei*) need to be erased. Beis Shammai says even one letter is enough to compel the drinking of the water (Yerushalmi *Sotab* 2:4).

Elsewhere in the Gemara there is an inquiry concerning how many letters a Sefer Torah must possess in order to retain its status of sanctity. We know from the oral tradition that it needs 85 letters, but the Rabbis weren't sure if the 85 letters needed to be together, or even if they are all from different parts of a Torah scroll (*Shabbos* 115b).

In addition, there is an argument about how many extra letters invalidate a *mezuzah*—whether even just one or at least two extra letters are required to make it *passul* (*Menachos* 32b).

What is the thread running through these questions? The commonality they all share is that<sup>15, 16</sup> they all revolve around the identity and character of a single letter. In the Hebrew language there are no one-letter words. A word can be composed of even two letters, but a single letter can never be a word. That being so, perhaps a letter does not have its own inherent identity? Maybe it can never be

<sup>14</sup> The *sotab* was a woman suspected of adultery who was brought to the Temple and given a special concoction to drink, which had Divine powers to ascertain the veracity of her claims of innocence. She had the option of demanding a divorce instead of drinking the potion. But if the potion had already been prepared, she was forced to drink it, because part of creating the drink involved erasing the Divine name. The Sages debated how much of the Divine name needs to be erased before she would be compelled to drink.

<sup>15</sup> In *Mahadurah Tinyana* p. 180: וכן ס"ל לבי"ש בירושלמי סוטה פ"ב (ה"ד) דאף אם כתב אות א' מן שם יש בו קדושה, ובי"ה לא סבירא להו. ע"י במה דפליגי בזה בשבת קטן, אם גם להציל מן הדליקה אם גם אותיות מפוזרין הוי כן לצרף לפ"ה אותיות, ע"ש

<sup>16</sup> And in *Mahadurah Tinyana* p. 52: והנה מבואר במנחות דף לב, גבי כתבו אגרת, ע"ש בדברי דבינו דאם הוסיף אפילו אות א' בפנים במזוזה אפילו בפ"ע פסולה המזוזה, ובאמת זה תליא בהך מחלוקת דבי"ש וב"ה דהירושלמי פוטר, פ"ב ופ"ג אם אות א' יש עליו גדר מציאות, או לא חל עליו שם גדר בפ"ע רק חלק, כיון דכל תיבה באות א', ע"ש דמבואר דאם כתב בפרשה פוטר לבי"ש אות אחת יתירה בפני עצמה שלא בתיבה שוב נפסלה כל הפרשה סוטה, ואז אם מחקה חייב מלקות משום השמות שבה, ובי"ה ס"ל דוקא עד שיכתוב שתי אותיות יתירות.

seen as its own idea, and is always a building block of a word, without ever embodying meaning and content on its own.

Or perhaps there is some intrinsic meaning to a letter on its own and it is considered to be its own halachic entity, notwithstanding its deep-seated need to pair with another letter in order to form a word.

Although seemingly disconnected, this is actually the same debate that we saw regarding the *sotah* waters. Shammai says that even if only one letter of G-d's name was erased, it is sufficient to activate the full status of *sotah*. Shammai says this because in his view a single letter is its own entity, and thus by erasing even one letter from G-d's name, one has fragmented the name of G-d and the sanctity of the document has been destroyed.

Hillel disagrees. One letter on its own is nothing,<sup>17</sup> and is merely a part of the whole. Therefore, by erasing only one letter from G-d's name you have not erased a significant entity and therefore the sanctity of G-d's name is still there. Consequently, the *sotah* waters were not activated and the woman is not forced to drink and may still recant.

Obviously, this is also the debate regarding a *mezuzah*. If one letter has intrinsic identity, then even one extra letter adds to the *mezuzah* scroll and invalidates it.

This also applies to the "85-letters argument." If a single letter stands on its own conceptually and halachically, then the 85-letter requirement can be satisfied from 85 single letters. If a letter is not its own entity, then the 85 must be comprised of paired letters.

What does all this have to do with the differing *Weltanschauungs* of Shammai and Hillel? Well, if tangibility is the primary determinant of halachah and reality, then a single letter would not stand on its own. This is because in concrete terms and from an empirical

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<sup>17</sup> In *Mefaane'ach Tzefunos*, p. 55, fn. 1, Rabbi Kasher adds the following: ומבואר דס"ל שאות אחת לבייש הו' עליה גדר צורה, וחייב ולבייה פטור משום שאין עליה גדר מציאות של תיבה. ועיי' צפנת פענח השלמה צד 39. ויש להוסיף עפמ"ש בתניא להגרש"ן וחיצונית וכו'. באגרת הקדש סה: "אך האותיות הן בבחינה חומר וצורה, הנקרא פנימית עיי"ש, ולפי"ז ב"ש לשיטתם דעיקר הצורה גם אות אחת יש לה פנימיות, משא"כ לבייה דהעיקר החומר ופחות מהשיעור שתי אותיות אין על זה שם מציאות של תיבה. וראה צ"פ תרומות סג ע"א.

viewpoint, a single letter can never contain content or meaning. Thus, a single letter on its own is not considered its own entity.

If, however, as Shammai asserts, intangibility and spiritual elements are factors to be reckoned with, then a single letter does stand on its own. This is because spiritually each letter of the Hebrew alphabet contains intrinsic and individualized holiness and metaphorical and symbolical meaning.

This whole subject is further amplified in light of how the Rogatchover understands<sup>18</sup> the infusion of holiness into G-d's name. The Yerushalmi in *Berachos* 5:1 states:

If a scribe was writing a Sefer Torah and was in middle of writing the name of G-d, then even if the king himself asks him a question, he is not allowed to respond.

Rambam codifies this in *Hilchos Tefillin* 1:15:

If one was writing a Torah and did not have full intent when writing G-d's name (*kasav shelo lishmah*), the entire Torah is invalid. Therefore, if a scribe is in middle of writing G-d's name, he should not even respond to the king.

Simply speaking, the reason is that by responding to the king the scribe is partially distracted and not able to have full concentration on writing G-d's name. Yet, why can't the scribe stop writing, respond and then continue writing G-d's name? This way he could have full concentration while writing G-d's name, with only a short intermission between starting to write and finishing the name.

The reason the Rogatchover offers is that G-dliness is not able to be compartmentalized. What this means is that the name of G-d in a Torah is expressing and constitutes an actual embodiment of G-dliness. G-dliness is not an existence given to fragmentation and disparate parts. Thus, since it is absolute and not able to be partitioned, the physical letters of the name of G-d (which is the vehicle

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<sup>18</sup> In *Mabadurah Tinyana* p. 140 באמת הטעם דהוה מציאות אחת ואי אפשר לחלק לפיכך הכל מודים בכותב את השם (בשבת אינו חייב) עד שעה שישלים אף-על-פי שענין שיעור הכתיבה בשבת (שתי אותיות משם גדול) יש חילוקי דיעות, מכל מקום ביחס לכתיבת שם השם הכל מודים, שאינו חייב עד שישלים עצם פשוט ואינו זה אינו דבר מצטרף ח"ו רק מתחלק.

in which this G-dliness will be revealed and communicated to the world) must also be one and absolute.

We can ask, however, why can't the tangible expression be dissimilar in its character from the idea and truth it carries and embodies? This is because from the perspective of Torah and halachah the physical must resonate and be a transparent conduit through which G-dliness will flow into the world. There can be no friction between the physical and the G-dly. Therefore the physical letters (that are the expressers of the Divine truth inherent in the name of G-d) must reflect in their physical character the G-dly characteristics of Divine truth. They therefore cannot be written in a fragmented manner.

Thus we find that the authentic way of writing G-d's name was by holding four quills in between the five fingers and writing all four letters of G-d's name at the same time. The knowledge of how to perform this maneuver was known by one man who refused to share it with others, bringing down the condemnation of the Sages upon him.<sup>19</sup>

This explains an intriguing halachic discrepancy. The halachah is that one is not allowed to write on Shabbos. How much does one need to write in order to have transgressed this Biblical prohibition? The halachah is that writing two letters violates the Biblical directive not to write. Yet Yerushalmi *Shabbos* 13:1 states that "all agree that regarding writing G-d's name, one has not transgressed until he writes the complete name of G-d (more than two letters)."

What is the reason for this legislative inconsistency concerning writing G-d's name? After writing a *yud* and *hei* (the first two letters of G-d's name) one should be liable to the full extent of the law!

Our analysis on the nature of the relationship between G-dliness and the letters of G-d's name, however, sheds light on this enigma. Since the letters of G-d's name are not given to fragmentation and disparateness, therefore, by only writing two letters of G-d's name one has not written anything. The letters existentially do not stand on their own and are viewed as an entity only in their complete state of all four letters of G-d's name together.

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<sup>19</sup> See *Yuma* 38a.

### Domestic Dualities

This distinction remains valid<sup>20</sup> in another important controversy, regarding the relationship between two women who were both married to a man who died childless. Generally, the deceased's brother would have a mitzvah to marry one of his brother's widows. There are situations, however, where a brother may be exempt from *yibum* (marrying his brother's widow) or *chalitzah* (performing the ritual that releases his brother's widow). One such case is if the brother is related to the widow in a way such that *yibum* would constitute a Biblically forbidden relationship — an “*issur ervah*” (see *Yevamos* 3b). The first Mishnah in *Yevamos* lists those cases where the widow would be forbidden to the brother but was not forbidden to the deceased.

What about the other wives? If only one of the deceased's wives is forbidden to the brother, does that automatically exempt all the other wives? There is a disagreement. Shammai permits the non-related widows to marry the brother, and Beis Hillel forbids it (Mishnah *Yevamos* 1:4).

According to Beis Shammai, from a legal point of view there is no point in linking the fate of the widows together. The widow who is his wife's sister cannot enter into a Levirate marriage with him because it is a prohibited marriage, while the other widows are autonomous and can marry the brother of the deceased.

Beis Hillel holds the opposite: the two women are not autonomous; their status is conditional on their being the ex-wives of the same deceased man and their destinies continue to be interconnected.

What is the core matter being debated? Beis Shammai holds that even though one of the wives is forbidden to the brother, this does not affect the other wife. Why is this, though? The Talmud in *Yevamos* 3b states that the other widows are released from any obligation to the brother if any one of them is forbidden to the brother.

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<sup>20</sup> In *Mefaane'ach Tzefunos* p. 55: במהד"ת ע' 180 וכן זה הגרר ביבמות רף יג ע"ב גבי צרת ערוה, ערוה אבראי קיימא, ע"ש דף מד ע"א. ובסגנון אחר בס' השלמה דף ב ע"א: וכבר כתבתי בזה אם איסורים הם רק תואר בהדבר או עצם, ובזה פליגי ב"ש וב"ה, ביבמות רף יג גבי צרת ערוה, דב"ש ס"ל דאיסור הוא עצם. וכמו איילונית שם רף יב, וע"ש בתוס' דף ח ואבראי קיימא ע"ש רף מד ע"א.

Shammai, however, doesn't view the prohibited wife as even existent (*ervah abrai kayma*), that we would then be able to say that due to her unavailability she exempts the other wives. Since she is *assur* (forbidden) she is not even considered to be in front of the court. This is because the *issur* is not peripheral or secondary, but rather, an *issur* is laid onto the very essence of the forbidden item or person. This is, of course, a more abstract and intangible "take" on the nature of an *issur*.

Hillel, on the other hand, views the related and forbidden widow as being here and existent in the case, just that the *issur* prevents her from marrying the deceased's brother. This is in keeping with Hillel's tangible and grounded worldview.<sup>21</sup>

### Categorical Colors<sup>22</sup>

The Gemara in *Chullin* 136b brings a *machlokes* (dispute) between Shammai and Hillel regarding different colored figs. The halachah is that one cannot take *terumah* (one of five different types of tithes a Jew had to take from his produce) from one species of produce for another. So, for example, one could not take a tithe of oranges to permit apples, etc. Each plant, vegetable or fruit had to have the tithe separated from it to make the rest of that species of produce permitted for consumption.

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<sup>21</sup> This touches upon another well-known debate concerning the definition of a Torah prohibition: Whether the *issur* affects the very essence of the item (*issur cheftza*) or is instead merely a rule forbidding a person (*issur gavva*) to engage in the *assur* item. While one might make the argument that Shammai, keeping in tune with his intangible dominant theme, would gravitate more towards an *issur cheftza* opinion, and Hillel would relate to an *issur gavva*, I have not seen this correlation made anywhere. While the Rogatchover makes a very similar correlation in the above case, it is clear (to me at any rate) that he means it in a way that is very localized and specific to Levirate marriage.

<sup>22</sup> See *Michtevei Torah* #283: בגדר צורה בלא חומר מחלוקת בית שמאי ובית הלל חולין. דף קלו ע"ב אם מראה הוה מציאות אף דזה גדר צורה בלא חומר, דאם יטחן החומר לדק נתבטל המראה כמ"ש בספר המורה בהקדמות של המדברים. ותליא אם מראה הוה עצם איכות, או רק מכמות: *Michtevei Torah* #55. And *Tzafnas Paane'ach, Sh"ut, Warsaw, Siman* 50: ועיין בחולין דף קלו ע"ב: דב"ש וב"ה פליגי אם שינוי מראת הוי מין אחד או ב' מינים.

Here the Gemara asks, what about taking *terumah* from black figs in order to exempt and de-sanctify white figs? Is that permissible? Beis Shammai says no and Beis Hillel says yes.

This is a dispute revolving around the tangible versus intangible question. What is color? Is it merely an accessory part of an item, or is it an absolute existence? Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:73 discusses the nature of color. He brings the opinions of the Mutakallemim that color is intrinsic to physical matter. They say that if one takes snow, for example, the white color is there in every piece of snow and is part of its very existence.

Rambam, however, rejects their opinion and says that one sees that when things are ground down into tiny flecks and turn into powder the color is gone. Therefore, color is only part of the whole and not existent in the individual parts.

At any rate, we see that there are differing perspectives on the nature of color. According to some it is merely a superficial layer of existence while others view it as being firmly part of the item that it is coloring.

This, then, is the debate about black and white figs. According to Hillel, we permit the taking of *terumah* from black to white, because the different colors are not important and significant enough to make us consider the black and white figs as different species of produce. This is because the colors are only skin deep and not reflective of the essence of the figs. This, in turn, is because Hillel is grounded in concrete reality, which allows Hillel to see that different colors are simply just that, and not existential divides.

Shammai, however, considers the differently colored figs to be different types of fruit. Therefore, one cannot take *terumah* from one to the other. This is the result of Shammai's abstract perspective that different colors actually create a different category.

### Sinai and *Harim*/Quixotic Quality<sup>23</sup>

Another instance of the Talmud's preference can be seen in *Horayot* 14a:

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<sup>23</sup> In *Mahadurah Tinyana* p. 180: עיי יבמות דף יד דלכך ס"ל דעשו ב"ש כדבריהם משום דמחודדי טפי אף דב"ה רובא, וא"כ חזינן דאזלינן בתר הצורה אף דבהעצם הוי מיעוטא.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel and the Rabbis debated. One said that *sinai* is a superior quality in learning, while the other side said *oker harim* is a finer trait.<sup>24</sup>

Who is a man embodying *sinai* qualities? Rav Yosef. Who is a man embodying *oker harim* abilities? Rabbah. They sent the debate to the east (Eretz Yisrael) for a resolution and the answer sent back was, *sinai* (vast knowledge) is superior.

*Sinai* versus *oker harim* is essentially a debate on quality versus quantity. *Sinai*, which is broad global knowledge, is equivalent to quantity of knowledge. *Oker harim*, which is localized sharp thinking, is equivalent to quality of thought.

With this in mind, we can uncover a further layer of depth, which is that quantity versus quality is, at its core, a debate about tangibility versus intangibility.

Quantity is a tangible and quantifiable (the very word implies concrete objective data) factor. It is a physical reality of having more. For example, the concept that majority rules, since there are more people who hold a certain view, is a concept predicated upon tangible, readily observed phenomena.

Quality, on the other hand, is a whole different beast. It is non-concrete and intangible. Although the majority wants a certain approach, if the minority is smarter and more experienced, follow them, says quality.

We now come back to *sinai* versus *harim*. This is yet another place where the Talmud makes clear its position that tangible factors must outweigh (for the time being; see later) intangible elements. Hence *sinai* is superior, hence quantity is superior (i.e., majority rules in halachic decision-making), and hence tangible and

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<sup>24</sup> *Sinai* generally refers to Mt. Sinai. Here the Talmud uses *sinai* as a metaphor for the quality of vast knowledge and scholarship. As if to say, one who has the entire Torah at his fingertips as it was given at Mount Sinai. *Oker harim* literally means the “uprooter of mountains.” The Talmud uses it as a metaphor for one who has sharp and incisive analytical skills. Although this individual may not know all of Torah by heart, and is not as knowledgeable as the other, he is possessed of superior and deeper intellectual abilities. Thus the Rabbis and Rabbi Shimon are debating which is the more desirable and admirable trait in Torah study.

physical phenomena must be of primary consideration to us, while spiritual factors are of secondary importance.

What does this have to do with Shammai and Hillel? The Talmud in *Yevamos* 14a records that Beis Shammai held the high ground in terms of superior thinkers and scholars, while Beis Hillel had a larger number of scholars and Torah legislators.

Beis Hillel, however, followed its own opinions *l'halachah* (practically). This was an astonishing phenomenon, when one considers that Beis Hillel knew and acknowledged Beis Shammai's superior caliber of scholars and legislators!

Yet according to our analysis, it was a phenomenon that makes perfect sense. Since Hillel held the view that tangible factors must always trump intangible ones, they concluded that their quantity of scholars outweighed the quality of Shammai's.

### The Sin of Following Shammai's Rulings

The Talmud in *Berachos* 58b relates the following:

Rav Pappa and Rav Huna were walking along a road and they met Rabbi Chanina. Rabbi Chanina proceeded to make the blessing of *chacham harazim*,<sup>25</sup> telling them that they are as wise as and equal to 600,000 people in his eyes.

They then rebuked him, saying, "Are you indeed this smart and knowledgeable [to make such a character judgment]?" A short time later, Rabbi Chanina died.

What is the deeper meaning of this enigmatic story? Rabbi Chanina was a follower of Shammai.<sup>26</sup> He subscribed to their worldview. He therefore felt that since they were as wise as 600,000 people, he could make a blessing. Even though the required number

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<sup>25</sup> The blessing of *chacham harazim* is a blessing made upon seeing 600,000 people gathered together acknowledging G-d's omnipotent ability to create infinite variations of wisdom within people.

<sup>26</sup> In *Mahadurah Tinyana* p. 180: ובוזה יש לבאר הך דברכות דף נח ע"ב גבי עוברא דר"פ ור"י ורב אחא בריה דרב איקא דבריך עלייהו ויהבו ביה עינא ומת, וע"ש ברמב"ן במלחמות (ולא מברכינן חכם הרזים אלא על אוכלסיא ואע"ג דחשיבי טובא), ור"ל כך, משום חד, רק בגדר תואר (אוכלסא) והנה וכו', עכ"פ כאן נמי חזינן דר"א בריה דרב איקא דאחשבינהו כמו אוכלסא ובריך עלייהו ברוך חכם הרזים ס"ל ג"כ כך, אי"כ ס"ל כב"ש (דצורה הוא העיקר) ולכך נענש כמבואר בברכות דף יא (כל העושה כדברי בייש חייב מיתה), ובמ"א אבאר בזה.

of people to make the blessing was not gathered together, qualitatively there was the requisite amount of wisdom.

He was punished so severely because the halachah is that anyone who follows the opinion of Beis Shammai is liable to the death penalty (*Berachos* 11a).

### **Tangible Torah**

Whom does halachah follow? Who has the final say? It turns out that it's not so simple. Although intangible and spiritual factors are considered to be a stronger reality, as we will see in a discussion about the era of Moshiach, tangibility is closer to the human experience, and as such is the primary determinant in the decision-making processes of Torah.

Since Torah is a system for dealing with our physical world and since physicality is a stronger reality to us, therefore it is the main factor in halachah. In light of this, consider the following halachah (*Yerushalmi Yuma* 6:1):<sup>27</sup>

If one has two animals he can use for a *korban*, but one is stronger and of superior stock while the other simply looks better aesthetically, which one is he to bring? The one that is stronger physically is the preferred animal and is used as the *korban*.

The requirement regarding *korbanos* is to bring the best animal. Here we are faced with a decision in which one animal is superior physically while the other is superior in matters that are not as concrete. Take the tangibly superior one, says the Torah, thus informing us that when we need to make a decision, we should use tangibility as our main measuring stick of reality.

### **Messianic Times**

The Rogatchover's pinpointing of the fundamentally different approaches related to spirituality versus tangibility can be applied to the well-known and fascinating assertion that in the times of the

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<sup>27</sup> *Pirkei Mavoiv, Bereishis*, p. 21.

Moshiach the halachah will switch to be in accordance with Beis Shammai (*Mikdash Melech to Zohar*, Vol. I, 17b).

In day-to-day life we grant supremacy to the tangible and material while intangible factors are only accorded secondary status. However, when Moshiach comes it will be a time of, as the Rambam says (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim* 12:5): “The Jews will be great sages, and know the hidden matters;” (*Mishneh Torah*, loc. cit. 11:4): “Moshiach will perfect the entire world;” and (Isaiah 11:9): “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the L-rd as the waters cover the sea [bed].”

When Moshiach comes, our spectrum of reality will be elevated to a more refined and subtler level. Spiritual and intangible truths will resonate even within our physical spectrum.

The halachic switch to Shammai will be an instinctive natural gravitation instead of a conscious legislative effort. The fragrance of the small vessel being carried on *Shabbos* will seem real and practical, the intrinsic independent identity of a single letter will be clear, and the validity of subscribing to a spiritual-based worldview will seem compelling and precise. ❧