



THE HISTORY OF WRITING THE TORAH

When did Moses begin writing the Torah? When did he write the stories of Genesis? And how did he manage to write thirteen Torah scrolls himself?

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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Published and Copyright 2023 by
Shluchim Office International
816 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn,
NY 11213

718.221.0500

5783 - 2023

Founded in 2008 in memory of Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg OB" M
Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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We read about a special commandment in this week's Torah reading: every Jew should write "this song" (Source 1). This means they should write the entire Torah, where this song, the song of Haazinu, is written. (Source 2)

Seemingly, the Rebbe asks, in the wake of this commandment, thousands of Jews would have been writing Torah scrolls, yet we find no allusion to such an occurrence taking place. Moreover, between the giving of this commandment and Moses' passing on the seventh of Adar (Source 3) until the Jews entered Israel on the tenth of Nissan (Source 4) there was very little time. This wouldn't have allowed for the writing of Torah scrolls, which is a huge undertaking.

B. A Work In Progress.....9

In the days preceding the giving of the Torah at Sinai, Moses wrote the Torah from Genesis until that point in time (Source 5). Before Moses descended from Sinai, G-d instructed him to "Write these words for you" (Source 6), which the Talmud understands to mean that the written Torah may not be studied orally, and the Oral Torah may not be written down. (Source 7)

Based on this law, the Rebbe says that everything Moses taught the Jews in the desert must have been transcribed in real time, because it was forbidden to study it orally. Indeed, Maimonides writes explicitly that after a class from Moses, the Jews would write it down. (Source 8)

Effectively, when the Jews received the commandment to write their own Torah scrolls, most of it was already written, they only needed to complete the job.

C. Thirteen Torah Scrolls.....13

Moses wrote thirteen scrolls. He gave one to each of the twelve tribes, and the final one was kept in the Ark of the Covenant (Source 9).

How was Moses able to write thirteen scrolls in one day? Some say that Moses used supernatural powers to complete it. The Rebbe negates this explanation, reasoning that mitzvot needs to be accomplished within the laws of nature. This is illustrated by the story of the Alter Rebbe, who wouldn't recite the blessing on the new moon after his boat had miraculously stopped; insisting that it stop naturally.

According to what we explained above, Moses wrote the scrolls during the forty years in the desert, and on this day, he completed them.

Tangentially, the Rebbe learns a powerful lesson from this: Moses, out of his love for the Jewish people, insisted on writing each scroll himself and did not have others assist him. (Source 10)

D. Why Don't We Write Torah Scrolls?.....17

Why don't Jews write their own Torah scrolls? The Rebbe explains that the community writes one on behalf of everyone.

We find a similar example with the Lulav and Etrog. The Torah commands that it must be "yours." In times when they were difficult to obtain, the community would source one set for communal use. How did it belong to everyone? During the performance of the mitzvah, the community would give ownership of the Lulav bundle to the person using it, and then it would be transferred to the next person in line.

In conclusion, the Rebbe encourages every Jew to purchase a letter in a collective Torah scroll, because when a person has one letter in the scroll, they have a connection to the entire scroll and it is considered as if they had written it all themselves.

Introduction

In this week's Torah reading we read the commandment for every Jew to write a Torah scroll. What did the Jews do upon hearing this commandment? Did they devote all their waking hours to quickly writing a Torah scroll? Why do we not write our own scrolls today?

A journey through time to learn how Moses wrote his scrolls, how the Jews wrote theirs, and how we fulfill this mitzvah today.

השיעור לשבוע נצבים וילך

משיחת י"ט כסלו ה'תשמ"ב
תורת מנחם חלק ב' עמ' 529 ואילך,
ומשיחת ליל ב' דחנוכה, ה'תשמ"ב
שם, עמ' 601 ואילך,
רשימת השומעים בלתי מוגה.

A. When Did They Have Time?

Write This Song - The Torah

In this week's Torah reading, we learn of a special commandment of G-d to Moses: tell the Jewish people to write this song down for themselves.

Source 1 Deuteronomy 31:14-17, 19

Student's
pg. 3

G-d said to Moses, "Behold, your days are approaching for you to die. Call Joshua and stand in the Tent of Meeting, and I will inspire him. So Moses and Joshua went, and stood in the Tent of Meeting. The L-rd appeared in the Tent, in a pillar of cloud. The pillar of cloud stood at the entrance to the Tent. And the L-rd said to Moses: Behold, you are about to lie with your forefathers, and this nation will rise up and stray after the deities of the nations of the land into which they are coming. They will forsake Me and violate My covenant which I made with them. My fury will rage against them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will befall them. They will say on that day, 'Is it not because our G-d is no longer in my midst, that these evils have befallen me?'

Now, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it into their mouths, in order that this song will be for Me as a witness for the children of Israel.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה הֲנִי קָרְבוֹ יְמֵיךָ לְמוֹת, קְרָא אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְהִתְיַצְּבוּ בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, וְאֶצְוֶנּוּ, וַיִּלֶּךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד. וַיִּרְא ה' בְּאֹהֶל בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן, וַיַּעֲמֵד עַמּוּד הָעָנָן עַל פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה: הִנֵּה שָׁכַב עִם אֲבוֹתֶיךָ, וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וְזָנָה אַחֲרַי אֱלֹהֵי גֹזֵר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא כָּא שְׂמָה בְּקִרְבִּי, וַעֲזָבוּנִי וְהִפְרוּ אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר פָּרַתִּי אִתּוֹ. וְחָרָה אַפִּי בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַעֲזָבוּתִים, וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פְּנֵי מַהֵם וְהָיָה לָאֵכָל, וּמִצְאָהוּ רְעוֹת רְבוֹת וְצָרוֹת. וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא: הֲלֹא עַל כִּי אִין אֶלְקֵי בְּקִרְבִּי מִצְאוּנִי הָרְעוֹת הָאֵלֶּה.

וְעָתָה כְּתוּבוּ לָכֶם אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת, וְלַמְדָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמָּה בְּפִיהֶם, לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבִנְיֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Ralbag explains—and the same is implicated by Maimonides in his introduction to Mishneh Torah—that the words “write down this son for yourselves” are a commandment to write the entire Torah where this song, the song of Haazinu, is written.

Source 2 Ralbag, ad loc

Student's **Now, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it into their mouths:** It is later explained that “this song” is the entire Torah, as the verse states “And Moses wrote this song,” and “It was, when Moses finished writing the words of this Torah in a scroll, until their very completion.” This attests that “this song” means the entire Torah, including this specific song.

pg. 3

וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת
וְלַמָּדָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמְרָהּ
בְּפִיהֶם. כְּכֹר נִתְבָּאֵר אַחֵר זֶה,
שֶׁהַשִּׁירָה הִיא דְבַר הַתּוֹרָה בְּכֻלָּם
עַד תָּמָם. שְׁנַאֲמַר, "וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה
אֶת הַשִּׁירָה", "וַיְהִי כְּכֹלֹת מֹשֶׁה
לְכַתֵּב אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת
עַל סֵפֶר עַד תָּמָם". וְזֶה מְעִיר
שֶׁהַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת רְצָה בּוֹ כָּל דְּבָרֵי
הַתּוֹרָה בְּכֻלָּם וְגַם הַשִּׁירָה עִמָּהֶם.

>> The Rebbe

Every Jew Had To Write A Torah Scroll

Student's Moses's command to the Jewish people “now write down this song for yourselves” was given during their fortieth year in the desert, shortly before Moses's passing on the 7th of Adar. We can deduce this dating from the fact that Moses began to relay the book of Deuteronomy on “the first day of the eleventh month” (Shevat), so the conclusion of the book, including “now write down this song,” must have been said shortly before the 7th of Adar.

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Seemingly, when the Jewish people heard this command from Moses they were all immediately obligated to write a personal Torah scroll - all 600,000 adults! However, we don't find any trace of this extraordinary event.

ציווי משה רבינו לבני ישראל (בפעם הראשונה) - "ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה גו'" - נאמר בשנת הארבעים, בחודש אדר, סמוך לשבעה באדר. כי הרי התחלת אמירת ספר דברים היתה "בעשתי עשר חודש באחד לחודש" - ראש חודש שבט, ועל פי זה - סיום ספר דברים, כולל הציווי "ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת", נאמר בסמיכות לשבעה באדר.

ולכאורה, כאשר בני ישראל שמעו ציווי זה ממש רבינו - היו צריכים ששים ריבוא בני ישראל (גדולים) לכתוב ספר תורה, היינו, שכל אחד ואחת מהם יכתוב ספר תורה לעצמו. ולא מצינו רמז לדבר!?

A Tight Schedule

Source 3 Deuteronomy 34:5-6; 8-9

Moses' passing on Adar 7

Student's
pg. 4

Moses, the servant of the L-rd, died there, in the land of Moab, by the mouth of the L-rd. He buried him in the valley, in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Pe'or. And no person knows the place of his burial, until this day.

The Children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days, and then the days of weeping in mourning for Moses came to an end. Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands upon him. The Children of Israel obeyed him, and they did as the L-rd had commanded Moses.

וַיָּמָת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד ה' בְּאֶרֶץ
מוֹאָב עַל פִּי ה'. וַיִּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ בְּגִי
בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב מוֹל בֵּית פְּעוֹר וְלֹא
יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת קְבֻרָתוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם
הַזֶּה.

וַיִּבְכּוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מֹשֶׁה
בְּעָרְבַת מוֹאָב שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וַיִּתְּמוּ
יָמֵי בְכֵי אָבֶל מֹשֶׁה. וַיְהוֹשֶׁעַ בֶּן
נוּן מְלֵא רוּחַ חֲכָמָה כִּי סָמַךְ מֹשֶׁה
אֶת יָדָיו עָלָיו וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֵלָיו בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת
מֹשֶׁה.

Source 4 Joshua 1:1-2; 4:19

Crossing the Jordan on Nisan 10

Student's
pg. 5

After the death of Moses the servant of the L-rd, the L-rd said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant: Moses my servant has died; arise now and cross the Jordan River, you and this entire nation, to the land I am giving to the Children of Israel.

The people came up out of the Jordan River on the tenth day of the first month, and camped in Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד ה'
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נוּן מִשְׁרַת
מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר. מֹשֶׁה עֶבְדִּי מָת וְעַתָּה
קוּם עֲבַר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה אַתָּה וְכָל
הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
נֹתֵן לָהֶם לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

וְהָעָם עָלוּ מִן הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּעֶשְׂוֹר לַחֲדָשׁ
הָרִאשׁוֹן וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּגִלְגָּל בְּקִצְצָה מִזֶּרֶח
יְרִיחוֹ.

>> The Rebbe

Mission Impossible

Student's
pg. 5

Moreover, shortly after this commandment was given, Moses passed away on the 7th of Adar, and the Jewish people mourned him for thirty days. After the mourning period was over, the Jewish people began their preparations for crossing the Jordan River "on the tenth of the first month" (Nisan), and following that they were occupied with conquering the Land of Israel.

ויתירה מזו: תיכף לאחר שבעה
באדר היה האבל על פטירת משה
רבינו במשך "שלושים יום", ואחר
כך התחילו בני ישראל בהכנות
לעבור את הירדן, ועברו את הירדן
"בעשור לחודש הראשון" (י' ניסן),
ואחר כך התחילו בכיבוש הארץ
כו'.

It seems impossible that, in the short time between the 7th of Adar and the 10th of Nisan, every Jew was able to fulfill this mitzvah to write a personal Torah scroll. There are also specific prerequisites for writing a Torah scroll: a trained scribe, parchment, ink, etc. It seems completely impossible for such an enormous job to be carried out in such a short period of time.

ובפשטות - לא יתכן שבמשך זמן קצר כזה (סמוך לז' באדר עד י' בניסן) הספיק כל אחד ואחד מישראל לכתוב ספר תורה לעצמו (כדי לקיים את המצות עשה של "כתבו לכם את השירה גו'" ששמעו זה עתה ממשה רבינו), ומה גם שכתובת ספר תורה דורשת כמה תנאים מיוחדים - סופר היודע לכתוב, הכנת הקלף והדיו וכו', ובפשטות - הרי זה דבר בלתי אפשרי כלל לסיים מלאכה אדירה זו במשך זמן קצר ביותר!

Writing a Torah scroll is no simple feat. It requires specialized tools and advanced training. Firstly, the writing must be done with a feather quill and ink. The scroll must be parchment, and processing one from animal hides takes much time and effort, and is subject to detailed halachic rules.

In addition, the scribe, an expert at his craft, must invest great care in writing the Torah in accordance with all the rules, a process that usually takes around a year. If just a single letter isn't written according to the rules the entire Torah is disqualified. Clearly such an enormous undertaking couldn't have been executed by all Jews over the course of a single month!

B. A Work in Progress

When Was The Torah Written Down?

Source 5 Exodus 24:3-4

When the Torah describes the events preceding the giving of the Torah, we read that after the people declared “Whatever G-d speaks we will do,” Moses wrote all of G-d’s words. What exactly did Moses write?

Student’s
pg.6

Moses came and told the people all the words of the L-rd and all the ordinances. The people all answered in unison: "All the words that the L-rd has spoken we will do." Moses wrote all the words of the L-rd, and he arose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve monuments for the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rashi

Moses came and told the people: On that very day, **all the words of the L-rd:** The mitzvot of separation and keeping a distance from the mountain. **All the ordinances:** The seven mitzvot commanded to all of humanity; and the mitzvot of Shabbat, honoring parents, the red heifer, and the laws commanded at Marah. **Moses wrote:** From Genesis until the giving of the Torah, and he wrote the mitzvot commanded at Marah. **He arose early in the morning:** On the fifth of Sivan.

וַיְבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לְעַם כָּל דְּבָרֵי ה' וְאֵת כָּל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה. וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל דְּבָרֵי ה' וַיִּשְׁפֹּם בְּבִקְרָו וַיִּכֶן מִזְבְּחַ תַּחַת הָהָר וּשְׁתֵּים עָשָׂרָה מִצֵּבֹה לְשִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

וַיְבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לְעַם: בּו בַּיּוֹם. אֵת כָּל דְּבָרֵי ה': מִצְוֹת פְּרִישָׁה וְהַגְבָּלָה. וְאֵת כָּל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים: שִׁבְעַ מִצְוֹת שְׁנֵצֶטּוּוּ בְּנֵי נֹחַ, וְשִׁבְתַּ וְכַבּוּד אָב וְאִם וּפְרָה אֲדָמָה וְדִינִין שְׁנֵתְנוּ לָהֶם בְּמַרְה. וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה: מִבְּרֵאשִׁית וְעַד מַתָּן תּוֹרָה, וְכָתַב מִצְוֹת שְׁנֵצֶטּוּוּ בְּמַרְה. וַיִּשְׁפֹּם בְּבִקְרָו: בְּחֻמְשָׁה בְּסִינַי.

Even before the giving of the Torah, Moses had written everything from creation until the present—the creation story, the Patriarchs, exile in Egypt, the mitzvot of Marah. During the coming years, after key events or commandments, additional chapters were added.

The Written Torah - Not By Heart

Source 6 Exodus 34:27

Student’s
pg.6

G-d said to Moses: "Inscribe these words for yourself, for according to these words I have formed a covenant with you and with Israel."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה כָּתֹב לְךָ אֵת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי עַל פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּרַתִּי אִתְּךָ בְּרִית וְאֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The Talmud interprets this as a prohibition on studying the Written Torah by heart, and on transcribing the Oral Torah.

Source 7 Talmud, Gittin 60b

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Rabbi Yehuda bar Nachmani, the interpreter of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, said: "It is written 'Inscribe these words for yourself,' and it is also written 'according to (lit. by the mouth of) these words.' How does this work? Written words may not be studied orally, and oral words may not be transcribed."

דַּרְשׁ רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בַּר נַחֲמָנִי, מִתְּרַגְּמָנֵי שֶׁל רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן לָקִישׁ, כְּתוּב: "כְּתוּב לְךָ אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה", וְכְתוּב: "כִּי עַל פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה" – הֲאֵלֶּה פִּי צָדָד? דְּבָרִים שֶׁבְּכֶתֶב אֵי אֵתָהּ רִשְׁאֵי לְאוּמָרָן עַל פֶּה, דְּבָרִים שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה אֵי אֵתָהּ רִשְׁאֵי לְאוּמָרָן בְּכֶתֶב.

The Ran explains that there are many details that are derived from the way the Torah is written: the specific spelling used, variances between how it is written and how it is pronounced, etc. When these verses are recited orally, one misses the deeper meaning hidden in the text. (There are other explanations as well which are beyond the scope of this class.)

>> The Rebbe

The Personal Torahs Were Written In Real Time

Student's
pg. 7

When the Jewish people received the Torah the verse states "and Moses wrote all of G-d's words . . . and he took the scroll of the covenant." Rashi explains that at this time Moses wrote down the entire Torah from Genesis until the point of the giving of the Torah. At that point, the distinction between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah was created: The Written Torah had to be committed to writing, while the Oral Torah could not be. This is the meaning of the verse "write these words," as Rashi explains, "however, you are not allowed to write down the Oral Torah."

ויש לומר הביאור בזה:

בעת מתן תורה נאמר "ויכתוב משה את כל דברי ה' גו' ויקח ספר הברית", ומפרש רש"י: "מבראשית ועד מתן תורה". זאת אומרת, שמזמן מתן תורה נעשה גדר החילוק בין תורה שבכתב ותורה שבעל פה, היינו, שתורה שבכתב צריכה להיות בכתב דוקא, מה שאין כן תורה שבעל פה כו'. וכמו שכתוב² "כתב לך את הדברים האלה", ובפרש"י: "ולא אתה רשאי לכתוב תורה שבעל פה".

We can deduce from this that, post-Sinai, the Jewish people were obligated to commit all new sections of the Torah to writing, because it is forbidden to study parts of the Written Torah from memory only.

ועל פי זה מובן שכל הענינים של התורה שבכתב שנאמרו במשך כל הזמן שלאחרי מתן תורה - נכתבו על ידי בני ישראל, כי לא היו יכולים ללמוד זאת בעל פה, מאחר שדברים שבכתב אי אתה רשאי לאומרם בעל פה.

The process of Torah study in the desert went like this: Moses taught the people a section of the Torah, and they immediately committed it to writing. Everything had to be written down because there is a law that the Written Torah can't be studied from memory. Maimonides describes this process explicitly:

Source 8 Maimonides' preface to his commentary on the Mishnah

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Know that every mitzvah commanded to Moses by G-d was given with its explanation. G-d told Moses the mitzvah and then explained all the ideas and concepts included in it.

דע כי כל מצוה שנתן הקב"ה למשה רבנו עליו השלום נתנה לו בפרושה. היה אומר לו המצוה, ואחר כך אומר לו פרושה וענינה. וכל מה שהוא כולל ספר התורה.

Maimonides explains what the Oral Torah is. Moses essentially was given both the Written and Oral Torahs at Sinai. First, he recorded the text, the mitzvah, and that became the Written Torah. Then he explained the meaning of the text, which is what we call the Oral Torah.

The order of teaching it to the Jewish people is explained in the Talmud: Moses would enter his tent, followed by Aaron, and Moses would tell him the mitzvah once, followed by its meaning. Aaron then went to Moses' right side, and his children Elazar and Itamar entered and Moses told them what he had told Aaron. One sat on Moses left side and the other on Aaron's right, and then the seventy elders entered and Moses taught them what he had taught Aaron and his children. Then came all the Jews desiring to hear G-d's word and Moses taught them, until everyone had heard it from Moses' mouth.

וסדר למודו לישראל היה כפי שאומר (עירובין נד:): היה משה נכנס באהלו ונכנס אליו בתחלה אהרן ומשה היה אומר לו המצוה הנתונה לו פעם אחת ולמדוהו פרושה. ויסתלק אהרן ויחזור לימין משה רבנו ונכנסו אחריו אלעזר ואיתמר בניו, והיה משה אומר להם מה שאמר לאהרן. ויסתלקו, וישב האחד לשמאל משה רבנו והשני לימין אהרן, ואחרי כן יבאו שבעים זקנים וילמדו משה כמו שלמד לאהרן ובניו. ואחרי כן יבאו ההמון וכל מבקש ה' וישם לפניהם המצוה ההיא עד ישמעו הכל מפיו...

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Then the people went home and taught it to their fellows, and they wrote it on scrolls, which they read regularly. Then they studied the G-d-given meaning and explanation of that mitzvah. They wrote down the mitzvah and studied the explanation orally.

ואַחֲרַי כֵּן הָיוּ כָּל הָעַם הוֹלְכִים לְלַמֵּד אִישׁ לְאָחִיו מִה שֶׁשָּׁמְעוּ מִפִּי מֹשֶׁה, וְכוֹתְבִים הַמִּצְוָה הַהוּא בְּמַגֵּלוֹת, וְיֹשׁוּטוּ הַשָּׂרִים עַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְלַמֵּד וְלַהֲגוֹת עַד שֶׁיִּדְעוּ בְּגִרְסָא הַמִּצְוָה הַהִיא וְיִרְגִּילוּ לְקִרְוֹתָהּ, וְאַחֲרַי כֵּן לְמִדּוּם פְּרוּשֵׁי הַמִּצְוָה הַהִיא הַנְּתוּנָה מֵאֵת הַשָּׁם. וְהַפְּרוּשׁ הַהוּא הִיא כּוֹלֵל עֲנִינִים, וְהָיוּ כּוֹתְבִים הַמִּצְוָה וְלוֹמְדִים עַל פֶּה הַקְּבֵלָה.

>> The Rebbe

The Scrolls Were Already Almost Complete

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As a result, when the Jewish people heard the commandment from Moses to “now write down this song for yourselves,” they already had all the previously delivered sections of the Torah in writing. All they had to do at that point was to complete the Torah, from the verse “now write down this song” until the end of the Torah.

This explains how it was possible for all Jews to write a Torah scroll over such a short period of time: They already had most of the Torah written, all they had to do now was complete it.

(It is important to note that the above explanation was given by the Rebbe in this sichah and in the next farbrengen, held on Shabbos Vayeishev. But in the likut that was later published the Rebbe explained differently. While the Jewish people did indeed write everything they learned in scrolls in real time, the Rebbe states that for various reasons it is difficult to maintain that these were kosher as Torah scrolls. The Rebbe gives a different answer for the question of how they were able to fulfill the mitzvah of writing Torah so quickly: The thirteen scrolls written by Moses and given to each of the tribes fulfilled their personal obligation.)

זאת אומרת: כאשר בני ישראל שמעו ממושה רבינו את הציווי “ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת” - כבר היו כל הענינים של התורה שבכתב (שנאמרו לפני זה) כתובים אצלם, ולא נותר להם אלא להשלים את ספר התורה, היינו, מהפסוק “ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה גו” עד סיום התורה.

ועל פי זה מובן כיצד היה בגדר האפשרי שכל בני ישראל יוכלו להספיק לכתוב ספר תורה במשך זמן קצר כזה - כי המדובר רק אודות סיום ספר התורה, מאחר שרוב הספר תורה היה כתוב כבר מקודם לכן.

C. Thirteen Torah scrolls

Who Did Moses Give The Scrolls To?

Source 9 Deuteronomy 31:9

Student's
pg. 10

Moses wrote this Torah, and gave it to the priests, the descendants of Levi, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the L-rd, and to all the elders of Israel.

Rashi, Deuteronomy 29:3

I heard that on the very day that Moses gave the Torah scroll to the sons of Levi, as the verse says, "And he gave it to the priests, the descendants of Levi" (Deut. 31:9) all of the people came before Moses and said to him: "Moses, our Teacher! We also stood at Sinai and accepted the Torah, and it was also given to us! Why, then, are you giving the members of your tribe control over it, so that someday in the future they may claim, 'It was not given to you, it was given only to us!'"

Moses rejoiced over this and it was on that account that he said to them, "This day, you have become a people" (Deut. 27:9). This meant: "It is today that I understand that you cleave to G-d and desire Him."

Midrash Rabbah, Chapter 29

Rabbi Yannai said: He wrote thirteen Torah scrolls; twelve he gave to the twelve tribes, and one he placed in the Ark, as a control against forgeries.

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי הַנֹּשְׂאִים אֶת אֲרוֹן בְּרִית ה' וְאֶל כָּל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

שְׁמַעְתִּי שְׂאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם שֶׁנָּתַן מֹשֶׁה סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה לְבְנֵי לֵוִי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בְּפָרָשַׁת וַיֵּלֶךְ "וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי", בָּאוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנָי מֹשֶׁה וְאָמְרוּ לוֹ, "מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ, אַף אָנוּ עָמַדְנוּ בְּסִינַי וְקִבְּלְנוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה וְנִתְּנָה לָנוּ, וּמָה אַתָּה מְשַׁלֵּיט אֶת בְּנֵי שִׁבְטְךָ עָלֵינוּ, וַיִּאָּמְרוּ לָנוּ יוֹם מִחָר 'לֹא לָכֶם נִתְּנָה, לָנוּ נִתְּנָה'?"

וְשָׂמַח מֹשֶׁה עַל הַדְּבָר, וְעַל זֹאת אָמַר לָהֶם "הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיִיתָ לְעָם וְגו'" – הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הִבְנִיתִי שְׂאֵתָם דְּבָקִים וְחַפְצִים בְּמַקּוֹם.

אָמַר רַבִּי יַנַּי: כָּתַב שְׁלֹשׁ עָשָׂר תּוֹרוֹת, שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר לְשִׁנַּיִם עָשָׂר שְׁבָטִים, וְאַחַת הִנִּיחַ בְּאֲרוֹן, שְׂאֵם יְבַקֵּשׁ לְזִיף דָּבָר, שִׁיְהִיוּ מוֹצְאִים אוֹתָהּ שִׁבְאָרוֹן.

>> The Rebbe

13 Torahs In One Day?

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The question is asked, how could Moses have written thirteen Torah scrolls in one day? One answer given is that this was done by employing a Kabbalistic formula to make the quill write on its own.

Automated writing?

We have discussed many times that mitzvot need to be observed in a natural manner, not through miracles - unless absolutely necessary. It is therefore difficult to say that the writing of thirteen scrolls was done through supernatural means.

The Rebbe Rayatz related a famous story about the Alter Rebbe on this theme. While he was imprisoned by the Czarist government, he was being transported by boat from the Peter-Paul fortress to the secret police for an interrogation. The Alter Rebbe wanted to use the opportunity to recite the blessing on the new moon, so he asked the officer to stop the boat for him. When the officer refused, the boat came to a sudden stop on its own. But the Alter Rebbe didn't go ahead and say the blessing until the officer agreed to stop the boat himself. The reason was that the Alter Rebbe wanted the boat to stop for the blessing in a natural manner.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, known as the Alter Rebbe, was the founder of the Chabad branch of Chassidut. He was falsely accused of rebelling against the Czar and was incarcerated in S. Petersburg. When the government officials wanted to question him, an officer would escort him by boat from the prison to the appropriate government building.

על פי זה מובנת תמיהה נוספת:

ידועה הקושיא כיצד היה משה רבינו יכול לכתוב י"ג ספרי תורה ביום אחד?! - ואחד הביאורים בזה הוא, כתיבת הי"ג ספרי תורה היתה על ידי השבעת הקולמוס כו'.

והנה, דובר כמה פעמים שקיום המצוות צריך להיות על ידי פעולה טבעית דוקא, ולא באופן של מעשה נסים כו' (רק כאשר הדבר בלתי אפשרי לגמרי כו'). ולכן, לא מסתבר לומר שכתבת י"ג ספרי התורה היתה באופן של השבעת הקולמוס - מעשה נסים.

וכידוע סיפור כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר³ אודות אדמו"ר הזקן, שכאשר הובילוהו בסירה מהמבצר הפטרופבלי לחקירה (במועצה החשאית), רצה אדמו"ר הזקן לקדש את הלבנה, וביקש מהפקיד להעמיד את הסירה, וכאשר סירב הפקיד, עמדה הסירה מאליה. אבל אדמו"ר הזקן עדיין לא אמר את ברכת קידוש הלבנה, עד שהפקיד נתרצה להעמיד את הסירה - כי אדמו"ר הזקן רצה שעמידת הסירה לברכת קידוש לבנה תהיה באופן טבעי.

Once, while crossing the river by boat, the Alter Rebbe wished to recite the blessing for the Sanctification of the Moon, and he asked the officer to stop the boat. The officer refused. Miraculously, the boat froze in its place, and the Alter Rebbe recited the psalm said before the actual blessing. When he concluded the psalm, before beginning the blessing, he paused.

The boat began to move, and the Alter Rebbe once again asked the officer to stop the boat. Having witnessed the miraculous occurrence moments earlier, the officer asked the Alter Rebbe to give him a blessing in writing, and he would gladly stop the boat. The Alter Rebbe agreed. Upon receiving the note with the blessing, the officer stopped the boat, and the Alter Rebbe recited the blessing.

It is told that the blessing was indeed fulfilled, and the officer lived to a ripe old age amid much wealth and honor.

This story was related by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the sixth Rebbe of Lubavitch. He added: "When I was a child, I wondered: Why didn't the Alter Rebbe recite the blessing the first time the boat stopped, without needing to rely on the officer's goodwill? However, when I grew older and studied Chassidut, I understood the reason: Mitzvot must be performed via natural means, without relying on supernatural miracles."

*

The goal of mitzvot is to refine the physical world and permeate it with sanctity, not to get rid of it. If you encounter difficulty when performing a mitzvah, it should be viewed as something positive. Unnatural means should not be employed to remove it, as that would diminish the mitzvah's potency.

The same is true for outcomes that naturally arise from doing a mitzvah. Miracles should not be used to remove them, as that would mitigate the mitzvah's effect on nature.

>> The Rebbe

Writing In Installments

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Based on the above explanation regarding the Jewish people writing Torah scrolls in a short period of time, we can resolve this question as well. Moses didn't have to write thirteen full Torah scrolls from beginning to end on a single day. Most of the scrolls had been written already, and all that remained was to complete them, from the verse "now write down this song" until the end of the Torah.

אבל על פי האמור לעיל - מובן הדבר בפשטות: משה רבינו לא היה צריך לכתוב את כל י"ג ספרי התורה בשבעה באדר, כי כתיבת רוב הספרים נעשתה במשך הזמן שלפני זה, ולא נותר לו אלא לסיים את ספרי התורה - מהפסוק "ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה גו'" עד סיום התורה.

Moses's Incredible Love For The Jewish People

Source 10 Torat Menachem 5744, vol. 3, p. 1724

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pg. 12

While Moses was writing these Torah scrolls he certainly wasn't able to do other things. Writing a Torah, and specifically the Divine names it contains, demands full concentration. This is true about any scribe and any Torah, and is all the more true regarding Moses and the Torah scrolls designated to teach and guide the Jewish people for all future generations!

Nevertheless, Moses put everything aside in order to write these Torahs himself, and didn't delegate the task to Joshua, Aaron, or Aaron's sons. He insisted on writing these scrolls himself because of his incredible love and care for the Jewish people.

מוֹכֵן וּפְשׁוּט שֶׁבְּשִׁעָה שֶׁמִּלְשָׁה רַבִּינוּ עָסֵק
בְּכַתִּיבַת סְפָרֵי תוֹרָה, לֹא הָיָה בְּאִפְשָׁרוֹתָיו
לְעֵסֵק בְּדִבְרֵי אַחֵרִים – שֶׁהָרִי כְּתִיבַת סֵפֶר
תוֹרָה, וּבִפְרָט כְּתִיבַת שְׁמוֹת הַקְּדוֹשִׁים, צְרִיכָה
לְהִיזוֹת מִתּוֹךְ כּוֹנֵה כּוֹ, וְעַל-אַחַת-כַּמָּה-וְכַמָּה
כְּאֲשֶׁר מְדַבֵּר בְּאַפֵּן הַכְּתִיבָה שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה רַבִּינוּ,
וּבִפְרָט סְפָרֵי תוֹרָה שְׁנוּעֵדוּ לְהוֹרוֹת אֶת דְּרָכָם
שֶׁל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד סוֹף כָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת!

וְאֵף-עַל-פִּי-כֵן, הִנֵּיחַ מֹשֶׁה רַבִּינוּ אֶת כָּל
שְׂאָר עֲנִינָיו, כְּדֵי לְכַתֵּב בְּעֵצְמוֹ (לְמִרוֹת שֶׁיִּכּוֹל
הָיָה לְצִוּוֹת אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, אֶהֱרֵן וּבְנָיו וְכוּ' שֶׁהֵם
יְכַתְּבוּ) סְפָרֵי תוֹרָה שֶׁעַל פִּיהֶם יִתְנַהֲגוּ בְּמִשְׁךְ
כָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת! וְכֵן זֶה – מִפְּנֵי גְדֹל מַעֲלָתוֹ
בְּאַהֲבַת יִשְׂרָאֵל!

D. Why Don't We Write Torah Scrolls?

>> The Rebbe

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On the theme of writing Torah scrolls, there is a major question:

Maimonides rules that “there is a positive mitzvah for every Jew to write a personal Torah scroll, as the verse states, “now write down this song.” The Code of Jewish Law also cites this obligation. Yet, we don't see this mitzvah being fulfilled by every Jew.

This includes the greatest Torah authorities, who were very particular in their observance of every major and minor detail of Jewish law. But they too weren't particular to write a Torah themselves, or even just to repair a single letter in a Torah scroll.

I can speak from personal knowledge. My father and teacher was extremely meticulous in his observance of every detail of Jewish law. But he never instructed me—not when I became Bar Mitzvah and not years later—to make an effort to fulfill this positive mitzvah of writing a Torah.

Shared Torahs

An explanation for this: In addition to private Torah scrolls, there are also publicly owned Torahs. The Talmud and later authorities mention this concept a number of times, and we see it in practice as well.

והנה, בענין זה ישנה תמיהה גדולה ביותר: מובא ברמב"ם⁴, "מצות עשה על כל איש ואיש מישראל לכתוב ספר תורה לעצמו, שנאמר ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה". ועל דרך זה בשולחן ערוך⁵, "מצות עשה על כל איש מישראל לכתוב לו ספר תורה". ואף-על-פי-כן, לא מצינו שכל אחד ואחד מישראל יקיים את המצות עשה של כתיבת ספר תורה!?

והמדובר גם אודות גדולי ישראל, שדקדקו בקיום המצוות בהידור כו', קלה כחמורה כו' - ואף-על-פי-כן, לא מצינו שידייקו לכתוב ספר תורה, או להגיה אות אחת בספר תורה!?

ואני יודע זאת בעצמי - אדוני אבי מורי ורבי היה מהדר במצוות, קלה כחמורה כו', ואף-על-פי-כן לא שמעתי ממנו מעולם (לא רק בסמיכות לגיל בר מצוה, אלא גם כמה וכמה שנים לאחרי זה) שאשתדל לקיים את המצות עשה של כתיבת ספר תורה!

ויש לומר הביאור בזה:

כשם שישנו ספר תורה של יחיד, ישנו גם ספר תורה של רבים - כמובן מלשון המשנה והגמרא והפוסקים כו' בכמה וכמה מקומות, וכפי שרואים במוחש.

4. הלי ס"ת רפ"ז.
5. יו"ד רסע"ד.

This is similar to what the sages teach us about Moses, that he wrote thirteen Torah scrolls—one Torah for each tribe, and a thirteenth that was kept in the courtyard of the Temple. We see that Moses wrote a Torah for an entire tribe - a public Torah.

The law is that the authority over a public Torah scroll is in the hands of the Rabbinic court. As a result, the court can stipulate that the writing of a public Torah should be done on behalf of every Jew.

Through the writing of public Torah scrolls, every Jew fulfills the mitzvah, because the court stipulates that the writing is done on his behalf as well.

Community-Owned Lulav Sets

We find an example of this concept in the mitzvah of the Lulav bundle.

The verse states that on the first day of Sukkot we must “take [the four kinds] for yourselves.” This is interpreted as a special requirement that on the first day of the festival one must personally own the Lulav and Etrog that are used to fulfill the mitzvah.

Historically there were many Jewish communities where the entire community used a public Lulav set. Circumstances often didn't allow for each member of the community to be able to afford their own set, so everyone would use the public one.

וכמסופר במדרשי רז"ל שמשנה רבינו כתב י"ג ספרי תורה - י"ב ספרי תורה עבור י"ב השבטים, וספר תורה נוסף המונח בעזרה. זאת אומרת, שמשנה רבינו כתב ספר תורה אחד עבור כל השבט כולו, ואם כן, הרי זה ספר תורה של רבים.

והנה, כאשר מדובר אודות ספר תורה של רבים - הרי בית דין הוא בעל הבית על ספר תורה זה, ולכן, בכחו של בית דין להתנות שכתובת ספר התורה תהיה עבור כל אחד ואחד מישראל.

ועל פי זה מובן שכל אחד ואחד מישראל יוצא ידי חובת קיום מצות כתיבת ספר תורה - על ידי כתיבת ספר תורה של הרבים, כי "לב בית דין מתנה עליהם" שכתובת ספר התורה תהיה גם עבורו.

דוגמא לדבר - במצות נטילת לולב:

המצוה של נטילת לולב צריכה להיות באופן של "ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון גו", היינו, שביום הראשון ישנו חיוב מיוחד שהד' מינים יהיו שלו.

והנה, ידוע שבכמה קהילות בישראל היו נוהגים לברך על ד' מינים של הקהל, כי מפני צר ומצוק הגלות לא היה באפשרות כל אחד ואחד מאנשי הקהילה לקנות ד' מינים משלו (מפני גודל העניות כו'), ולכן היו כל הקהל מברכים על ד' מינים של הקהל.

To satisfy the requirement of personally owning the Lulav set on the first day, the community—through its appointed representative—would gift each person full ownership over the set for the time it took for them to fulfill the mitzvah. It was a gift, conditional on it being returned to the community, and in this way the community was able to then gift the same set to the next person, and so on.

In other words, the Rabbinic court stipulated that when each Jew picked up the Lulav set in order to make the blessing, it was considered his personal property—even though the same set was the personal property of someone else a minute earlier, and would belong to yet another person a minute later.

The same applies to Torah scrolls. The court stipulates that when a person is called up to the community Torah and makes the blessing on reading it, the Torah is considered their personal property.

(Note: In the sichos of this period the Rebbe discussed at length the precise halachic mechanism under which the communal Torah belongs to each individual. The details are beyond the scope of this class, so we have just explained the general concept.)

The Universal Torah

Related to the above discussion, this is the time to make mention of the idea of uniting the Jewish people through the writing of public Torah scrolls in which every Jew should purchase a letter.

ומאחר שישנו התנאי של "לכם" - הנה כאשר כל אחד ואחד מאנשי הקהילה היה לוקח את הד' מינים כדי לברך עליהם, הרי באותה שעה מקנה לו ה"קהל" [על ידי הגבאי או השמש כו', שהוא הבא-כח של בית הדין, שבעה טובי העיר כו'] את הד' מינים שיהיו נחשבים לרכושו הפרטי - מתנה גמורה על מנת להחזיר, ואחר כך מקנה ה"קהל" את הד' מינים לחבירו שבא לברך עליהם, וכן הלאה.

זאת אומרת: "לב בית דין מתנה עליהם" שכאשר כל אחד ואחד נוטל את הד' מינים כדי לברך עליהם, הרי זה נחשב לרכושו הפרטי - "לכם", למרות שברגע שלפני זה וברגע שלאחרי זה נחשבים הד' מינים לרכושו הפרטי של אחר כו'.

ועל דרך זה מובן בנוגע לענייננו - ש"לב בית דין מתנה עליהם" שכאשר כל אחד ואחד עולה לתורה כדי לברך וללמוד בספר התורה של הרבים, יחשב ספר התורה לרכושו הפרטי, וקרינן עליו "לכם".

בהמשך להאמור לעיל - הרי זו שעת הכושר להזכיר עוד הפעם אודות כללות הענין של אחדות בני ישראל על ידי כתיבת ספרי תורה כלליים, היינו, שכל אחד ואחד מפני ישראל ירכוש אות באחד מספרי התורה הכלליים.

When a person purchases a single letter in the Torah they have an association with the entire Torah scroll. This is similar to repairing a letter in a Torah scroll which is considered akin to writing the entire Torah.

משיחת י"ט כסלו ה'תשמ"ב
תורת מנחם חלק ב' עמ' 529 ואילך,
ומשיחת ליל ב' דחנוכה, ה'תשמ"ב
שם, עמ' 601 ואילך,
רשימת השומעים בלתי מוגה

וכמובן, שכאשר יהודי רוכש אות אחת
בספר התורה, יש לו שייכות לכל ספר
התורה כולו - בדוגמת המגיה אות
אחת בספר התורה, שהגהה זו נחשבת
ככתיבת כל הספר התורה כולו.