

Exploring *the* Depth

A small sampling of
the Torah of
**Harav Levi
Yitzchok**

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ביסטאן





The Torah of Harav Levi Yitzchok is deep and vast; it covers every area of Torah. In the writings he composed before his exile, the flow of his pen seemed to never stop, as he went on for pages upon pages, deciphering cryptic texts of the Mishnah and Gemara, applying Kabbalistic concepts to practical Halachos, and finding *remazim*, *gematriyaos*, and fascinating insights in the words of *pesukim* in Chumash. Later, in exile, he wrote concise notes on the margins of the few *seforim* he had with him, further challenging the reader to discover the depth of his genius.

The Rebbe once said (with characteristic humility) that all the explanations he gives on his father's Torah are only "*B'derech efshar* (suggestions), for my father's words cannot be fully explained. His understanding far supersedes my own; I offer only a possible approach..."¹

Harav Levi Yitzchok's Torah cites much Kabbalah and deals with subjects unfamiliar to most students, and he writes with an ease that often leaves readers perplexed.

However, the Rebbe published these *seforim* for everyone to learn and discussed them at almost every Shabbos farbrengen for years. The Rebbe wished that these writings be studied and appreciated by all, especially at the time of his father's *Yom Hilula*, on Chof Menachem-Av.

In a famous *ksav yad kodesh*, the Rebbe makes a personal, heartfelt request, which he refers to as his "obligation and privilege"—that everyone learn from Harav Levi Yitzchok's Torah on his *yahrtzeit*.

With the right effort and attention, Harav Levi Yitzchok's Torah can not only be accessed, but the reader can soon begin to appreciate and enjoy his beautiful insight and deep perspective.

As we approach the 80th *Yahrtzeit-Hilula* of Harav Levi Yitzchok, we felt it appropriate to present a few ideas from his vast writings. These ideas were culled by **Rabbi Eli Wolff**, who combed through Harav Levi Yitzchok's works and published short excerpts on each parsha, making this vast treasure more accessible to all.

It should be noted that these are by no means indicative of the breadth and depth of the original teachings. In fact, these *vertlach* are often based on **two or three lines** out of multiple pages of writings. Nevertheless, the reader can still enjoy a taste of Harav Levi Yitzchok's Torah and be inspired to further study.

FOR MORE ABOUT HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK'S TORAH SEE:

"**Mavo**"—Introduction by Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine to Sefer Hamafteichos L'Toras Levi Yitzchok V'Leikkutei Levi Yitzchok.

"**Chacham Harazim**" by Reb Yoel Kahn, published in Toldos Levi Yitzchok (5778) vol. 3, p. 421.

"**Broad Perception & Meticulous Precision**," Derher Av 5777.

"**Yalkut Levi Yitzchok Al HaTorah**" compiled by Rabbi Dovid Dubov.

The Seforim published by Rabbi Eli Wolff:

"**Tipah Min Hayam**"—on Bereishis, Shemos, and Vayikra; "**Nitzutzei Levi Yitzchok**"—on Bamidbar, Devarim, and Yomim Tovim.

An adaptation of some of Harav Levi Yitzchok's Torah is also available in English, titled "**An Inner Perspective**," by Rabbi Eli Block, published by Kehos.



Delving Into *Shevet Levi's* Founding Families

A theme that repeats itself several times in Harav Levi Yitzchok's Torah is based on an explanation of the Alter Rebbe in *Likkutei Torah*², elucidating the meaning of the three families of Shevet Levi: **Gershon**, **Kehos**, and **Merrari**.

In the narrative of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Alter Rebbe says, Hashem's 'Hand' is described in three ways:

“*Yad Rama*”—The Exalted Hand.

“*Yad Hagedolah*”—The Great Hand.

“*Yad Hachazaka*”—The Strong Hand.

A “**hand**,” which is a receptacle, in Kabbalistic terms—a *Keli*, connotes restriction (dimming and limiting the light that passes through it). *Shevet Levi* represents the *middah* of *Gevurah*—severity and restriction. With this in mind, the Alter Rebbe explains how each of these three founding families aligns with one of the three “hands” mentioned in the Torah. **Gershon** is *Yad Hagedolah*, **Kehos** is *Yad Rama*, and **Merrari** is the *Yad Hachazaka*.

In a fascinating *pirush* on a Mishnah in *Maseches Middos*, Harav Levi Yitzchok expounds on the Alter Rebbe's words and explains how these three categories also apply to the members of Moshe Rabbeinu's family: **Miriam**, **Aharon**, and **Moshe**. He bases this on the words of Chazal that “רוּב בְּנֵי דוּמִין לְאַחֵי הָאָם—Most children are similar to

their mother's brothers.” It follows that Yocheved's children, Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe, should be similar to Yocheved's brothers, Gershon, Kehos and Merrari:

Aharon resembles **Gershon**. For this reason, the Torah specifies³ that “עַל פִּי אַהֲרֹן וּבְנָיו תְּהִיָּה כָּל עֲבֹדַת בְּנֵי הַגֵּרְשֵׁנִי וְגו'—The family of Gershon's work was done in accordance with the instructions of Aharon and his sons...” Aharon's name is mentioned in the context of the family of Gershon but not the others.

Miriam is similar to **Merrari**. It's in the name: Miriam is rooted in the word “*merrirus*”—bitterness, because when she was born, the real bitter suffering began in Mitzrayim. The name Merrari is similarly rooted.

Moshe is similar to **Kehos**. Moshe represents, in Kabbalistic terms, the level of *Daas*, which alludes to **Yad Rama**. This is also alluded to in the context of the *possuk* about Moshe Rabbeinu: “וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדָיו וְגו'—And it happened when Moshe raised his hands” (the words “*yarim yado*” are the same as “*yad rama*”).

Harav Levi Yitzchok concludes this point with a fascinating point about their mother, Yocheved:

The name “יוֹכֵבֶד” is *b'gematriya* 42—equivalent to 3 times 14. She incorporated within herself the 3 types of “יד”—which is *gematriya* of 14.⁴

Marriage and Divorce: Understanding Abaye and Rava

Two of the most famous Amoraim cited in the Gemara, often with differing opinions, are Abaye and Rava. In most instances, the Halacha follows Rava's opinion, aside from six *sugyos*, known by the acronym “יע"ל קג"ם”, when the Halacha follows Abaye.

One of those *sugyos* is the *machlokes* regarding

“*Kiddushin she'ein messurin l'biah*”—betrothing (performing *kiddushin* on) a woman with whom consummation would be impossible. For example, if a man is *mekadesh* one of two sisters without specifying which one, it would be impossible to consummate the marriage, since each of the sisters might actually be the sister of his betrothed, with

whom he is forbidden to have relations.

Abaye says “*Kiddushin she'ein messurin l'biah havu kiddushin*”—it is a valid betrothal (and can be terminated only with a *get*). Rava says “*lo havu kiddushin*,” the betrothal is invalid to begin with; it never took hold.

Harav Levi Yitzchok offers a deep explanation of this *sugya*, explaining the Kabbalistic meaning of *kiddushin* and *biah*, and why Abaye and Rava each say what they do on this subject:

“*Kiddushin*” represents “*ohr makif*”—an external spiritual energy that the husband transmits to the wife, while *biah* represents “*ohr pnimi*”—an internal energy.

As is known in Kabbalah, within *ohr makif* itself, there are two components: “*Makif hakarov*”—a divine energy which, although it is external and ‘hovers from above,’ is closer to its subject; and “*makif harachok*”—an energy that is utterly transcendent. *Makif hakarov* is closer and more relatable to the person and can be grasped—albeit from afar, while *makif harachok* is completely out of reach.

These two levels are represented by two letters of the Aleph-Beis: *Shloss-Mem* and *Samech*. Both symbolize the encompassing nature of *Makif*, but in different ways.

The *Shloss-Mem* is closed from all sides, representing the fact that it is a “*makif*”—closed off and not providing any direct contact with the person. However, it has corners, which represent a sense that there is a kind of ‘beginning’ and ‘end.’ It cannot be grasped by human comprehension, but can - to some extent - be ‘glimpsed.’ Additionally, the *Shloss-Mem* is associated with the regular *Mem*, which has an opening on the bottom, symbolizing the *ohr pnimi*—direct contact with the subject.

The letter *Samech* is also closed from all sides, but it is rounded, symbolizing that it cannot be grasped at all, it has no ‘start’ or ‘finish.’ It is the distant and unapproachable *makif harachok*.

Kiddushin in general is a form of *ohr makif*—the word *Kedusha* connotes distance— and the two types of *Kiddushin* mentioned in our *sugya* fit perfectly with the two levels of *ohr makif*.

“*Kiddushin she'ein messurin l'biah*,” betrothal that cannot be consummated, is *makif harachok*. It remains transcendent, never leading to *ohr pnimi*. Regular *Kiddushin*, on the other hand, is *makif hakarov*, which results in a *yichud pnimi*.

Abaye represents *makif harachok*—the loftier, untouchable energy. Therefore, Abaye maintains that *kiddushin she'ein messurin l'biah* is valid.

Rava represents *makif hakarov*—the closer (albeit external and removed) energy. Therefore, Rava maintains that *Kiddushin* which stays in the realms of the untouchable is not valid.

As proof that Abaye and Rava indeed represent these respective levels, Harav Levi Yitzchok adds two interesting anecdotes from other places in Gemara:

The Gemara relates⁵ that Abaye and Rava both descended from Eili Hakohen, and were destined to live short lives. Rava studied Torah diligently and in that merit, lived to the age of 40 (*gematriya* of the letter *Mem*). Abaye studied Torah and engaged in *gemilus chassadim*, and in that merit, lived to the age of 60 (*gematriya* of the letter *Samech*).

The Gemara tells another story:⁶

When Abaye and Rava were children, they were asked by their teacher, Rabbah, “Who do we address when we recite a *bracha*?” They both answered, “*Kudsha Brich Hu*.” Rabbah then asked them where He is. Rava pointed to the ceiling, while Abaye went outside and pointed to the heavens. A ceiling is beyond our reach, but not very much. It symbolizes *makif hakarov*. The sky, on the other hand, represents *makif harachok*.

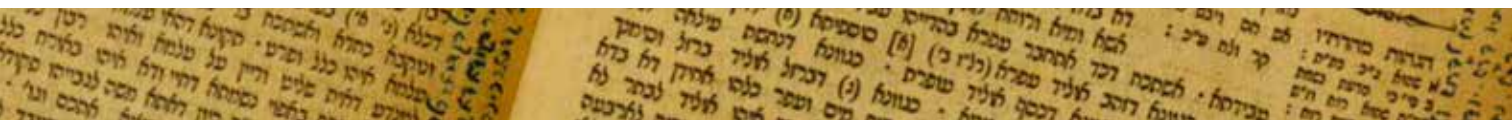
Get—the Parallel of Kiddushin

This same logic applies in another *sugya* in the ע"ל םק"ג group: The *machlokes* of *Giluy daas b'get*.⁷

A husband sends a *get* (a bill of divorce) to his wife through a *shliach*. Once the *shliach* is en route, however, the husband *intimates* (“*giluy daas*”) that he no longer wants to divorce his wife, but does not say so explicitly. Does the *giluy daas* invalidate the *Get*?

Abaye maintains that “*giluy daas b'get lav milsa hee*”—indicating that you don’t want the *Get* is not sufficient, and the *Get* is still valid. Rava maintains that “*milsa hee*”—expressing dissatisfaction with the *Get* is sufficient and the *Get* is therefore invalid.

Harav Levi Yitzchok explains that since a *Get* undoes what was accomplished through *kiddushin*, its mechanism parallels the *kiddushin*, in reverse. Abaye and Rava’s differing opinions, therefore, follow the same logic as in



the previous *machlokes*:

Abaye symbolizes *makif harachok*. Therefore, *kiddushin* is valid even when it cannot result in consummation (when, for example, a man doesn't know exactly which woman he betrothed). The fact that he doesn't know is inconsequential, since the *kiddushin* of *makif harachok* transcends *Daas* altogether. Likewise when it comes to giving a *Get*, the fact that he made his intention (his *Daas*) known that he no longer wishes to go ahead with the *Get* is inconsequential. *Kiddushin* and *Gittin* have nothing to do with *Daas*!

Rava, on the other hand, symbolizes *makif hakarov*. *Kiddushin* can be valid only when the person's *Daas* is

clear, when he knows who he betrothed. Therefore, when it comes to giving a *Get*, as soon as he made his *Daas* clear that he no longer wishes to proceed, the *Get* is invalid.

As mentioned, these are two of the six *sugyos* יע"ל קג"ם where the Halacha follows Abaye's view - the "ק" of קדושין and the "ג" of שאין מסורין לביאה.

Harav Levi Yitzchok explains that the acronym "קגם" can also stand for "קהת, גרשון, מררי". *Kiddushin* is connected with Kehos, which means gathering together and bringing close (as the *possuk* states וְלוֹ יִקְהֶת עַמִּים—nations will gather to him), which is the theme of *Kiddushin*. *Get* is connected with Gershon, which has the same root as the word *gerushin*—divorce.⁸

Twice Saved

Two Levels of Torah and Tzedakah

On the words of the *possuk* "וצדקה תציל ממות"—Tzedakah saves from death," Rabbi Yosei says in the Zohar⁹:

"Tzedakah saves from death; this applies to those who toil in Torah study... For Torah is [also] referred to as Tzedakah... An alternative explanation: Tzedakah saves from death, this refers to actual Tzedakah (charity). It comes in two colors and two sides (תרין גוונין ותרין סטרין)... but [ultimately] they are one and the same..."

Harav Levi Yitzchok offers a fascinating insight into the statement of Rabbi Yosei:

The *possuk* "וצדקה תציל ממות" contains the word "מות" (death) twice; once spelled out clearly and an additional, cryptic spelling, through its acronym. This alludes to two types of death: physical death of the body in this world and spiritual "death" of the soul in the next world.

Death originates in the world of *Tohu*, which precedes our world of *Tikkun*. The Torah first mentions the word "תהו" in Bereishis, in the *possuk* of "והארץ היתה תהו". Similar to the word "מות"—the word "תהו" is also mentioned twice in this *possuk*; once spelled out clearly, and the second time cryptically, by acronym.

The way with which one can save themselves from these two types of death is by toiling in Torah study and giving Tzedakah on two levels:

Learning Torah in the way one is accustomed to or

giving an ordinary amount of Tzedakah.

Learning Torah while going above and beyond the usual, and giving Tzedakah in an amount that transcends one's good-hearted nature.

In other words:

The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya,¹⁰ based on the words of the Gemara, that one who reviews his studies 101 times reaches a much higher level than one who does so only 100 times. Because the practice in those days was to review every subject 100 times, reviewing one's learning even one extra time defied the norm.

Similarly, with Tzedakah, the Alter Rebbe describes¹¹ two levels: *Maaseh Hatzedakah*—the act of giving Tzedakah, when one gives in accordance with their Jewish nature, as someone who is naturally prone to compassion; and *Avodas Hatzedakah*—the work of giving Tzedakah, when one strains themselves and gives more than what they're naturally inclined to give.

By following the ordinary level of Torah study and Tzedakah giving, a person is saved from physical death. By following the higher level of Torah study and Tzedakah giving, one is saved from spiritual "death" (the type alluded to by acronym).

Further examining the words of the Zohar, Harav Levi Yitzchok offers another beautiful explanation:



Rebbi Yosei mentioned תרין סטרין and תרין גוויין—two shades (colors) and two sides. Colors are easily apparent, referring to the lower level of Torah study and Tzedakah, saving the person from physical death. “Sides,” on the

other hand are less obvious, referring to the higher level of Torah study and Tzedakah, saving the person from spiritual death.¹²

Proliferance

Moshiach’s Times Explained

About the times of Moshiach, the Zohar states:

Rebbi Yehuda said: Hashem will reveal deep secrets of the Torah at the time of King Moshiach (מלכא משיחא), as it says: “מלאה הארץ דעה אתה כמים לים מכסים”—The earth will be filled with knowledge of Hashem like water covers the seabed.” And it says: “ולא ילמדו עוד איש את רעהו ואיש” —A person will no longer teach their friend or their brother, for all will know Me, from the smallest to the greatest.”

Harav Levi Yitzchok explains that when Moshiach comes, there will be a revelation of *Elokus* from the world of *Akkudim*, which transcends the world of *Tohu*. The world of *Akkudim* represents **Chessed—Kindness**. In the world of *Akkudim*, all the *Sefiros* are combined within one space, and the differences between them are inconsequential.

For this reason, when Moshiach comes there will be no differences in levels of study, upending the hierarchy of teachers and students. Nowadays, people of lesser stature learn from those that are greater, and even the greatest teachers are not perfect. The Torah itself prescribes a *korban chatas* for a case when “a matter is hidden from the eyes [i.e. the leaders] of the congregation.”

When Moshiach comes, the differences in comprehension will dissipate, as everyone will learn Torah from Hashem Himself. As a matter of fact, the *Navi* mentions the “smaller ones” first, preceding even the greatest teachers (“למקטנם ועד גדולם”).

Concluding in his inimitable fashion, Harav Levi Yitzchok demonstrates that this concept can be deduced from the words of the *possuk* and the Zohar:

The term used by the Zohar to describe Moshiach is מלכא משיחא, *b’gematria* 450, which is five times the word “מים”—water, which symbolizes *Chessed*.

(90 = מים, times 5 = 450).

The words לים מכסים לים כמים has the *gematria* 360, which is exactly the same sum as five times the word “חסד”.

(72 = חסד, times 5 = 360).

This demonstrates the overarching theme of *Chessed*, to be revealed through the world of *Akkudim* in the times of Moshiach, may he come speedily in our days!¹³ **T**

1. Shabbos Parshas Bo 5733; Toras Menachem vol. 71, p. 72.
2. Parshas Nasso, 21b.
3. Bamidbar 4:27.
4. Toras Levi Yitzchok p. 292. Nitzutzei Levi Yitzchok, Parshas Bamidbar, p. 19.
5. Rosh Hashanah 18a.
6. Brachos 48a.
7. Gittin 34a.
8. Toras Levi Yitzchok p. 137; Nitzutzei Levi Yitzchok Parshas Ki Seitzei, p. 139.
9. Mikeitz, 199a.
10. Ch. 14.
11. Iggeres Hakodesh ch. 12.
12. Likkutei Levi Yitzchok Bereishis, p. 176. Nitzutzei Levi Yitzchok p. 120.
13. Likkutei Levi Yitzchok Shemos-Devarim, p. 310. Nitzutzei Levi Yitzchok p. 65.