

## Technologies of Transmission: Torah and New Media Class #1: Early Adopters and Early Resisters

Rabbanit Sara Wolkenfeld  
[sarawolkenfeld@gmail.com](mailto:sarawolkenfeld@gmail.com)

“Technologies are not mere exterior aids, but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word.”

- Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). Pg. 81
- What might we learn when we encounter Torah through new media?
- How has our tradition weathered past media shifts?
- What can we learn from past experiences to maximize the positive aspects of the digital revolution?

<p style="text-align: center;">גיטין ס' א:ב'-ו' שֶׁלְחוּ לִיהָ בְּנֵי גָלִיל לְרַבִּי חֶלְבוֹ: מֵהוּ לְקִרְוֹת בְּחוּמָשִׁים בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת בְּצִיבוּר? לֹא הָיָה בִּידֵיהָ.</p> <p>אֵתָא שְׂיִילֵיהּ לְרַבִּי יִצְחָק נַפְחָא, לֹא הָיָה בִּידֵיהָ.</p> <p>אֵתָא שְׂאִיל בֵּי מְדֻרְשָׁא, וּפְשֻׁטוּהָ מְהֵא דְּאָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה שְׁחָסַר יְרִיעָה אַחַת – אֵין קוֹרִין בּוֹ. וְלֹא הֵיא, הֵתָם מְחָסַר בְּמִילְתֵיהָ, הֵכָא לֹא מְחָסַר בְּמִילְתֵיהָ. רַבָּה וְרַב יוֹסֵף דְּאָמְרֵי פְרֻוּיָהּ: אֵין קוֹרְאִין בְּחוּמָשִׁין בְּבֵית</p>	<p><b>Gittin 60a:2-6</b> <b>The people of the Galilee sent a question to Rabbi Ḥelbo: What is the <i>halakha</i> with regard to reading from <i>ḥumashim</i>, i.e., scrolls containing only one of the five books of the Torah, in the synagogue in public? Is this permitted, or is it necessary to read from a complete Torah scroll? An answer was not readily available to him.</b></p> <p><b>He came and asked Rabbi Yitzḥak Nappaḥa, but an answer was not readily available to him either.</b></p> <p>Rabbi Yitzḥak Nappaḥa came and asked this question in the study hall, and they resolved the difficulty from that which Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani says that Rabbi Yoḥanan says: With regard to a Torah scroll that is missing even one sheet of parchment, one may not read from it in public. This indicates that an incomplete Torah scroll may not be used for a public Torah reading. The</p>
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<p>הַפְּנִיטָה, מִשּׁוּם כְּבוֹד צְבוּר.</p> <p>וְרַבֵּה וְרַב יוֹסֵף דְּאָמְרֵי תַרְוִיְהוּ: הָאֵי סֵפֶר אֶפְטָרְתָא – אָסוּר לְמִקְרֵי בֵּיהּ בְּשַׁבָּת.</p> <p>מֵאֵי טַעְמָא? דְּלֹא נִיתַן לִיְכַתְּבֵי. מַר בַּר רַב אֲשֵׁי אָמַר: לְטַלְטוּלֵי נְמִי אָסוּר. מֵאֵי טַעְמָא? דְּהָא לֹא חֲזִי לְמִקְרֵי בֵּיהּ. וְלֹא הִיא, שְׁרֵי לְטַלְטוּלֵי וְשְׁרֵי לְמִקְרֵי בֵּיהּ – דְּרַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן וְרַבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בְּן לֵקִישׁ מְעִינֵי בְּסִפְרָא דְּאֶגְדָּתָא בְּשַׁבָּתָא; וְהָא לֹא נִיתַן לִיְכַתְּבֵי, אֶלָּא בִּיּוֹן דְּלֹא אֶפְשָׁר, "עֵת לַעֲשׂוֹת לַיהוָה הִפְרוּ תוֹרָתָהּ"; הֵכָּא נְמִי, בִּיּוֹן דְּלֹא אֶפְשָׁר, "עֵת לַעֲשׂוֹת לַיהוָה הִפְרוּ תוֹרָתָהּ".</p>	<p>Gemara rejects this argument: <b>But that is not so</b>, i.e., this cannot serve as a proof to the matter at hand. <b>There</b>, it is <b>lacking part of the matter</b> it is addressing, as a sheet of parchment is missing, whereas <b>here, it is not lacking part of the matter</b> it is addressing, as it contains a complete book.</p> <p><b>Rabba and Rav Yosef both say: One does not read from <i>humashim</i> in the synagogue out of respect for the community. And Rabba and Rav Yosef both say: It is prohibited to publicly read the <i>haftara</i>, the portion from the Prophets that is read after the weekly Torah portion, on Shabbat, from a scroll containing only the <i>haftarot</i>.</b></p> <p><b>What is the reason</b> for this? It is <b>because</b> this type of scroll <b>may not be written</b>, as the words of the Prophets must also be written as complete books. <b>Mar bar Rav Ashi said: To handle</b> such a scroll on Shabbat <b>is also prohibited. What is the reason</b> for this? It is <b>because it is not fit to be read</b>. Consequently, it is treated as set-aside [<i>muktze</i>] on Shabbat. The Gemara rejects this argument: <b>But that is not so</b>; rather, <b>it is permitted to handle</b> such a scroll <b>and it is permitted to read from it</b>. And a proof for this is <b>that Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish used to read from a scroll of <i>aggada</i></b> containing the words of the Sages <b>on Shabbat. But</b> such a scroll <b>may not be written</b>, for in principle, the statements of the Oral Law may not be committed to writing. <b>Rather, since it is not possible</b> to remember the Oral Law without writing it down, it is permitted to violate the <i>halakha</i>, as indicated by the verse: <b>“It is time to act for the Lord; they have nullified your Torah”</b> (Psalms 119:126). <b>Here too</b>, in the case of a <i>haftara</i> scroll, <b>since it is not</b> always <b>possible</b> to write complete books of the Bible, due to the expense, it is permitted to apply the reasoning of <b>“It is time to act for the Lord; they have nullified your Torah.”</b></p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>תמורה י"ד א-ב</b></p> <p>אמר אי אשכחיה דכתיב איגרתא שלחי ליה לרב יוסף... ואי הוה ליה איגרתא מי אפשר למישלחא והא אמר רבי אבא בריה דרבי חייה בר אבא א"ר יוחנן כותבי הלכות כשורף התורה והלמד מהן אינו נוטל שכר</p> <p>דרש ר' יהודה בר נחמני מתורגמניה דר"ל כתוב אחד אומר (שמות לד, כז) כתוב לך את הדברים האלה וכתוב אחד אומר (שמות לד, כז) כי על פי הדברים האלה לומר לך דברים שעל פה אי אתה רשאי לאומרן בכתב ושכתב אי אתה רשאי לאומרן על פה ותנא דבי רבי ישמעאל כתוב לך את הדברים האלה אלה אתה כותב אבל אין אתה כותב הלכות אמרי דלמא מילתא חדתא שאני</p> <p>דהא רבי יוחנן ור"ל מעייני בסיפרא דאגדתא בשבתא ודרשי הכי (תהלים קיט, קכו) עת לעשות לה' הפרו תורתך אמרי מוטב תיעקר תורה ואל תשתכה תורה מישראל.</p>	<p><b>Temurah 14a-b</b></p> <p>He (R. Dimi) said "If I had a messenger, I would have written a letter and sent it to R. Yosef" ... And if he had a letter, could he have sent it? Didn't R. Hiyya bar Abba say in the name of R. Yohanan: Those who write the halachot are like one who burns the Torah, and he who learns from them receives no reward?</p> <p>R. Yehudah bar Nahmani, the Meturgeman of Resh Lakish, expounded: One verse says: "Write down for yourself these words" (Exodus 34.37) and one verse says, "For according to (al-pi, lit. "by the mouth") these words" (Exodus 34:37), in order to teach you that matters [transmitted] orally (<i>al-peh</i>) you are not permitted to recite from writing and those matters that are in writing you are not permitted to recite from memory. And it's taught in the school of R. Ishmael: Scripture says, "Write down for yourself these words" (Exodus 34.37)-- these words you may write but you may not write halakhot (laws). They said: Perhaps a new matter is different?</p> <p>For R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish used to study a book of Aggadah on the Sabbath. And they explained it in this manner: "It is time to act for the Lord, for they have made void Your Torah" (Psalms 119:126), which they explained: It is better that Torah be uprooted than Torah be forgotten in Israel.</p>
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- What has been the important "Oral Torah" (any important teaching or information you received orally) in your life?
- What is the important "Written Torah" in your life (any important teaching or information you learned from a written text)?

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>שמות לד:כז</b></p> <p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב־לְךָ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי עַל־פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּרַתִּי אִתְּךָ בְּרִית וְאֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p>	<p><b>Exodus 34:27</b></p> <p>And the LORD said to Moses: Write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>שמות רבה מז:א</b></p> <p>כָּתַב לָךְ אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, הֲדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב (הושע ח, יב): אֲכַתֵּב לּוֹ רַבִּי תוֹרָתִי כְמוֹ זֶר נִחְשָׁבוּ, בְּשַׁעַה שְׁנִגְלָה הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּסִינֵי לְתַן תּוֹרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אָמְרָה לְמֹשֶׁה עַל הַסֵּדֶר מִקְרָא וּמִשְׁנָה תְּלִמּוּד וְאַגְדָּה, שְׁנַאֲמַר (שמות כ, א): וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אָפְלוּ מֵה שֶׁהִתְלַמֵּד שׂוֹאֵל לְרַב</p> <p>אָמַר הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה בְּאוֹתָהּ שַׁעַה מֵאַחַר שֶׁלְּמַדָּה מִפִּי הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אָמַר לּוֹ לְמַדָּה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. אָמַר לְפָנָיו רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם אֲכַתֵּב אוֹתָהּ לָהֶם, אָמַר לּוֹ אֵינִי מְבַקֵּשׁ לְתַנְּהָ לָהֶם בְּכָתֵב, מִפְּנֵי שְׁגָלוּי לְפָנָי שְׁעוֹבָדֵי כּוֹכָבִים עֲתִידִים לְשַׁלֵּט בָּהֶם וְלַטֵּל אוֹתָהּ מֵהֶם וַיְהִי בְּזוּיִים בְּעוֹבָדֵי כּוֹכָבִים, אֵלֶּה הַמִּקְרָא אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָהֶם בְּמִכְתָּב, וְהַמִּשְׁנָה וְהַתְּלִמּוּד וְהַאֲגָדָה אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָהֶם עַל פֶּה, שָׂאֵם יְבוֹאוּ עוֹבָדֵי כּוֹכָבִים וַיִּשְׁתַּעֲבְדוּ בָהֶם יִהְיוּ מְבַדְּלִים מֵהֶם. אָמַר לְנִבְיָא אִם אֲכַתֵּב לּוֹ רַבִּי תוֹרָתִי כְמוֹ זֶר נִחְשָׁבוּ, וְמָה אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה לָהֶם, נוֹתֵן אֶת הַמִּקְרָא בְּכָתֵב, וְהַמִּשְׁנָה וְהַתְּלִמּוּד וְהַאֲגָדָה בְּעַל פֶּה. כָּתַב זֶה הַמִּקְרָא, (שמות לד, כז): כִּי עַל פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה זֶה הַמִּשְׁנָה וְהַתְּלִמּוּד, שְׁהֵם מְבַדְּלִים בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבֵין הָעוֹבָדֵי כּוֹכָבִים</p>	<p><b>Shemot Rabbah 47:1</b></p> <p>'Inscribe those words for yourself [for according to those words I have formed a covenant with you and with Israel]' As it is stated: 'I write for them the great things of My law like strange things they are considered.' When God revealed Himself at Sinai to give the Torah to Israel, He said [taught] to Moses the following order: Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and Aggadah, as it says : "God spoke all these words, saying", even what a student will ask his teacher.</p> <p>God then said to Moses, after he had learnt it from the mouth of G-d, "Teach it to Israel". He said to him, "G-d! Should I write it down?" He replied "I am not asking you to give it to them in writing because it is known to Me that in the future the nations will rule over them, and take it [the Torah] from them, and it will be degraded by the nations. So the Scriptures I will give them in writing but the Mishna, Talmud and Aggada I will give orally. If the nations will enslave them, the Jews will be different [unique] to the nations. He said to the prophet 'If I write for them the great things of My law, they will be considered like strangers.' And what am I [G-d] going to do? I will give them the Bible written, the Mishna, Talmud and Aggada orally. 'Inscribe those words for yourself ' 'Inscribe' refers to the Bible, 'for according to those words' refer to the Mishna and Talmud, for those are what separates the Jews from the nations.</p>
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- What's the use case for Oral Torah? What is it really good for? What does it add to the user experience of Torah?
- What's the use case for Written Torah? What is it really good for? What does it add to the user experience of Torah?
- How is digital Torah like Oral? How is it like Written?
- What are some aspects of Torah or ways of studying that aren't captured by either Oral or Written which you would like the digital age to provide?