

**Technologies of Transmission: Torah and New Media**  
**Class #3: The Digital Future**

**Rabbanit Sara Wolkenfeld**  
**sarawolkenfeld@gmail.com**

**1) Liquid Scripture: The Bible in a Digital World, by Jeffrey S. Siker, pg. 245**

One of the more significant developments with the arrival of digital Bibles is how the Bible as "the Book" has lost its covers. The unified Bible as a bound volume, a single physical volume between two tangible covers, vanishes into the pixels of a screen...To be sure, the Bible did not start out as a single bound volume. That form of the Bible only emerged with the codex in the first few centuries CE...But the digitization of the Bible reminds us that the words were not always written, that the message of the Bible has always been delivered in oral form for an aural experience. It is spoken and heard perhaps even more than it is read by individuals.

**2) Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Elman, "R. Zadok Hakohen on the History of Halakha."  
 Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought, (21)4, Fall 1985, Pg. 16**

Each successive effort of codification of Oral Law added to the Written Torah, and each code, as it became part of Written Torah, generated still more layers of innovation in Oral Torah. In practical terms, each portion of Oral Torah as it was reduced to writing generated new commentaries whose authors approached the newly incorporated work as the sages of Oral Torah had approached the original Written Torah... Progressive revelation continues through the medium of sage and text.

**3) Isaiah 11:9**

In all of My sacred mount Nothing evil or vile shall be done; For the land shall be filled with devotion to the LORD As water covers the sea.

ישעיהו י"א:ט'

לֹא-יִגְרְעוּ וְלֹא-יִשְׁחָתוּ בְּכָל-הָרָקָדְשִׁי כִּי-מִלְאָה  
 הָאָרֶץ דְּעָה אֶת-יְהוָה בְּפִימָם לְגַם מְכֻסִּים: (פ)

**4) Kohelet Rabbah 1:7:4**

Another interpretation: All streams flow to the sea - all of a person's wisdom is in their heart. Yet the sea is never full - the heart is never full...

קוהלת רבה א':ז':ד'

דָּבַר אַחַר, כָּל הַנְּחָלִים הַלְכוּיִם אֶל הַיָּם, כָּל  
 חֲכָמָתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם אֵינָה אֶלָּא בְּלֵב. וְהַיָּם אֵינָהוּ  
 מֵלֵא, וְהַלֵּב אֵינֵהוּ מִתְמַלֵּא לְעוֹלָם...

- What are the tools you need in order to navigate large quantities of information,

or to take in new information?

- Have you ever encountered a new technology that feels immediately comfortable? If so, what was it and why was it a comfortable shift?

### 5) Taanit 7a:5

It is taught in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Bena'a would say: Anyone who engages in Torah for its own sake, his Torah study will be an elixir of life for him, as it is stated: "It is a tree of life to them who lay hold upon it"** (Proverbs 3:18)...**And anyone who engages in Torah not for its own sake...his Torah will be an elixir of death for him, as it is stated: "My doctrine shall drop [ya'arof] as the rain," and arifa means nothing other than killing, as it is stated: "And they shall break the heifer's neck [arefu] there in the valley"** (Deuteronomy 21:4).

### תענית ז' א:ה'

תניא היה ר' בנאה אומר כל העוסק בתורה לשמה תורתו נעשית לו סם חיים שנאמר (משלי ג, יח) עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה... וכל העוסק בתורה שלא לשמה נעשית לו סם המות שנאמר יערף כמטר לקחי ואין עריפה אלא הריגה שנאמר (דברים כא, ד) וערפו שם את העגלה בנחל

### 6) Tosafot on Taanit 7a:5:1

Anyone who engages in Torah not for its own sake, it will be an elixir of death for him. This is difficult, because it says in the Talmud in Pesachim that a person should always engage with Torah, even if not for its own sake, because by doing it not for its own sake, they will come to do it for its own sake. The solution is that there are two kinds of "not for its own sake." The one elsewhere is referring to a case where the person wants to be called "rabbi" or receive honor, and here, where it says that the Torah will be an elixir of death, it is referring to a case where the person is learning in order to instigate.

### תוספות על תענית ז' א:ה':א'

וכל העוסק בתורה שלא לשמה תורתו נעשית לו סם המות. וקשה והלא אמרינן (פסחים דף נ:): לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה אע"ג שאינה לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה ויש לומר דתרי שלא לשמה הוי דמה שאמרינן לעולם יעסוק בתורה אפילו שלא לשמה היינו כלומר כדי שיקרא רבי או כדי שיכבדוהו ומה שאמרינן הכא כל העוסק בתורה שלא לשמה נעשה לו סם המות היינו מי שלומד לקנטר:

- Do you think that the technology you use to aid Torah learning reflects the attitude you bring to that learning? If so, in what ways?

### 7) Chagigah 14b:8-9

§ **The Sages taught: Four entered the orchard [pardes], i.e., dealt with the loftiest secrets of Torah, and they are as follows: Ben Azzai; and ben Zoma; Aher, the other, a name for Elisha ben Avuya; and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva, the senior among them, said to them: When, upon**

### חגיגה י"ד ב:ח'-ט'

ת"ר ארבעה נכנסו בפרדס ואלו הן בן עזאי ובן זומא אחר ורבי עקיבא אמר להם ר"ע כשאתם מגיעין אצל אבני שיש טהור אל תאמרו מים מים משום שנאמר (תהלים קא, ז) דובר שקרים לא יכון לנגד עיני בן עזאי הציץ ומת עליו הכתוב אומר (תהלים קטז, טו) יקר בעיני יהוה המותה

your arrival in the upper worlds, **you reach pure marble stones, do not say: Water, water,** although they appear to be water, **because it is stated: “He who speaks falsehood shall not be established before My eyes”** (Psalms 101:7). The Gemara proceeds to relate what happened to each of them: **Ben Azzai glimpsed** at the Divine Presence **and died. And with regard to him the verse states: “Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His pious ones”** (Psalms 116:15). **Ben Zoma glimpsed** at the Divine Presence **and was harmed**, i.e., he lost his mind. **And with regard to him the verse states: “Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you, lest you become full from it and vomit it”** (Proverbs 25:16). **Aher chopped down the shoots** of saplings. In other words, he became a heretic. **Rabbi Akiva came out safely.**

לחסידיו בן זומא הציץ ונפגע ועליו הכתוב אומר (משלי כה, טז) דבש מצאת אכול דייך פן תשבענו והקאתו אחר קיצץ בנטיעות רבי עקיבא יצא בשלום

#### 8) Avot D'Rabbi Natan 18:1

He called R' Akiva a full storehouse. What was Rabbi Akiva like? A worker who goes out with his basket. He finds wheat - he puts it in, barley - he puts it in, spelt - he puts it in, beans - he puts it in, lentils - he puts it in. When he arrives home he sorts out the wheat by itself, barley by itself, spelt by itself, beans by themselves, lentils by themselves. So did Rabbi Akiva; he arranged the Torah rings by rings.

- How might we navigate current technologies so that we take in what is best about Torah and maximize its benefits?
- What are new tools we would or would not want that would help us continue to benefit from Torah?

#### 9) Sanhedrin 17a:22-17b:1

**Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: They place on the Sanhedrin only one who knows how to render a carcass of a creeping animal pure by Torah law.** The judges on the Sanhedrin must be so skilled at logical reasoning that they could even produce a convincing argument that

#### אבות דרבי נתן י"ח:א'

(א) לר' עקיבא קרא לו אוצר בלום למה רבי עקיבא דומה לפועל שנטל קופתו ויצא לחוץ מצא חטים מניח בה מצא שעורים מניח בה כוסמין מניח בה פולין מניח בה עדשים מניח בה כיון שנכנס לביתו מברר חטים בפני עצמן שעורים בפני עצמן כוסמין בפני עצמן פולין בפני עצמן עדשים בפני עצמן. כך עשה ר' עקיבא ועשה כל התורה טבעות טבעות.

#### סנהדרין י"ז א:כ"ב-י"ז ב:א'

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב אין מושיבין בסנהדרין אלא מי שידוע לטהר את השרץ מה"ת אמר רב אני אדון ואטהרנו ומה נחש שממית ומרבה טומאה טהור שרץ שאינו ממית ומרבה טומאה אינו דין שיהא טהור ולא היא מידי דהוה אקוץ בעלמא

creeping animals, which the Torah states explicitly are ritually impure, are actually pure.

**Rav said: I will discuss** the *halakha* of the creeping animal **and render it pure**, i.e., I am able to demonstrate how it is possible to construct such a proof: **If a snake, which kills** other creatures whose carcasses are impure **and** thereby **increases impurity** in the world, is itself nevertheless **pure**, as it is not included in the list of impure creeping animals, then concerning a **creeping animal that does not kill and** does not **increase impurity, isn't it logical that it should be pure?** This argument is rejected: **But it is not so;** the logic of the *halakha* of a creeping animal is **just as it is** concerning the *halakha* **with regard to an ordinary thorn**, which can injure people or animals and can even kill and thereby increase impurity, but is nevertheless pure. It is therefore apparent that this consideration is not relevant to the *halakhot* of impurity.

#### 10) Chidushei Agadot on Sanhedrin 17a:9

The point is that we don't appoint someone to the Sanhedrin unless they know how to attribute merit to even a guilty person, and this is what is being hinted to in saying that someone who knows something is definitely impure, such as a creeping thing, that the person must be able to figure out how to declare it pure...

- What do you think is the relationship between having vast quantities of knowledge and the ability to empathize with others?
- How might we use digital tools to increase both access to knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge productively?

#### חידושי אגדות על מסכת סנהדרין י"ז א:ט'

לטהר השרץ כו'. ענינו שאין מושיבין בסנהדרין אלא שיוכל ללמוד זכות לחייב וזה שרמז היודע בדבר שודאי טמא כגון שרץ למצוא לו זכות לטהרו...

### 11) Berakhot 64a:13-14

**Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Hanina said: Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is said: “And all your children [*banayikh*] shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children” (Isaiah 54:13). If all the children of Israel are taught of the Lord, there will be peace for all. The Sages interpreted this verse homiletically: **Do not read your children [*banayikh*], but your builders [*bonayikh*]**...**

### ברכות ס"ד א:י"ג-י"ד

אמר רבי אלעזר אמר רבי חנינא: תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם, שנאמר: "וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי ה' וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵיךָ". אל תקרי "בְּנֵיךָ" אלא "בּוֹנֵיךָ"...

### 12) Pirkei Avot 6:2

And it says, “And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tablets” (Exodus 32:16). Read not haruth [‘graven’] but heruth [‘freedom’]. For there is no free person but one that occupies himself with the study of the Torah.

### משנה אבות ו' ב'

ואומר (שמות לב) והלחת מעשה אלהים הָמָּה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות על הלחת, אל תקרא חרות אלא חרות, שאין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה. וכל מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה הרי זה מתעלה, שנאמר (במדבר כא) וממתנה נתת ליאל ומנתת ליאל במות:

- Can you think of some examples of how new technologies free us, and how they confine us?
- What are some of the constraints on your learning that you hope might be reduced or eliminated by new technologies?

*Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Sara Wolfenfeld*