

# Fascinating Torah Topics



Teshurah from the bar mitzvah of

**LEVI YITZCHAK  
ALTEIN**

3 Menachem Av, 5782

## FASCINATING TORAH TOPICS

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# Foreword

It is our pleasure to present this *teshurah* in honor of the bar mitzvah of our son Levi, in appreciation to all those who made the effort to participate in our *simchah*.

May this *teshurah* succeed in instilling an increased *geshmak* in learning Torah in all its readers, including the bar mitzvah *bochur* and his classmates.

Yehuda and Cheyena Altein  
3 Menachem Av, 5782



# Introduction

In 5777-5780, I had the merit of preparing a bi-weekly column for the *Yagdil Torah Bulletin* titled “Fascinating Torah Topics.” The goal of the column was to demonstrate how enjoyable it can be (and is!) to study Torah.

Of course, any *sugya* you delve into will become *geshmak* once you get into it. However, some topics are more outwardly interesting than others. In this column, I selected a number of such topics and discussed what Torah sources say about them.

In total, eleven topics were covered: Animal speech, extraterrestrial life, *gilgulim*, *golems*, hidden *tzaddikim*, *kefitzas haderech*, the *livyasan*, *malachim*, *sheidim*, and the Ten Shevatim. This *teshurah* presents three of these topics: Extraterrestrial life, the Ten Shevatim, and *sheidim*.

It is my hope that in addition to enjoying these essays, you will be inspired to learn Torah with more zest, *chayus*, and focus.

2 Elul  
Rabbi Yehuda Altein



# Extraterrestrial Life

Throughout the ages, humans have always been fascinated by the notion that there might be other worlds out there somewhere, populated by unknown civilizations and strange creatures. In the past, these ideas were mere figments of imagination. However, with the advent of the Space Age, advanced technology allows us to probe the distant corners of the universe, searching for the elusive sign of life on another planet. Although science has yet to find proof of any such existence—even in the form of a miniscule microbe or bacteria—the search is still on. Humans everywhere are eager to see what findings lie ahead of us.

What does the Torah say about extraterrestrial life? Can it be that life exists elsewhere, aside from on our planet? If yes, what type of creatures inhabit these other worlds? And what does all this have to do with us and our mission in serving Hashem?

## OTHER WORLDS IN CHAZAL

One of the first to discuss this topic was R' Chisdai Crescas, a Rishon who lived in Barcelona, Spain, during the fourteenth century. In his *sefer* Or Hashem,<sup>1</sup> he devotes an entire chapter to the possibility of the existence of numerous physical worlds. After discussing at length the philosophical pros and cons of both sides, he concludes that there is no logical argument that rules out the existence of more than one world. Therefore, if we can prove from Chazal that additional worlds do exist, there is no reason to believe otherwise.

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1 4:2.

R' Chisdai proceeds to cite a proof from Maseches Avodah Zarah. The Gemara<sup>2</sup> describes what Hashem does during the twelve hours of the day: “During the first three hours, He sits and studies Torah. During the second three hours, He judges the world’s inhabitants. During the next three hours, He provides sustenance to all the world’s creatures. During the final three hours, He plays with the *livyasan*.”

The Gemara continues: “What does Hashem do during the night? He rides His speedy angel and flies through 18,000 worlds.” This Gemara, says R' Chisdai, is clear proof for the existence of other worlds other than our own.

(Although the Gemara offers two alternative answers to its question, the difference between them is merely regarding what Hashem does at night. However, all agree that these worlds exist.)

Of course, this doesn’t mean that Hashem actually flies through these worlds. It simply means that Hashem watches over them and tends to their needs. The “flight” on a “speedy angel” is a *mashal*, referring to the speed with which Hashem oversees these worlds.

This proof was also cited by R' Yehudah ben Barzilai, a Rishon who also lived in Barcelona, some two hundred years before R' Chisdai.<sup>3</sup> R' Yehudah elaborates on this Gemara, and he asks: Why doesn’t Hashem provide for the needs of these worlds by day as well, at the same time when He provides for our needs?

R' Yehudah offers two explanations:

1. By telling us that we are the only world Hashem looks after by day, while the other 18,000 worlds are dealt with all together at night, the Gemara is demonstrating that our world is much more important to Hashem than all the others.

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2 Avodah Zarah 3b.

3 *Pirush Sefer Yetzirah LeRebbi Yehudah Bartzeloni* (new ed., pp. 225–227).



2. On the contrary: It takes longer to deal with worldly inhabitants, as we are prone to sin and He must spend time to forgive our sins. The other worlds are inhabited by creatures without an evil inclination who do not sin—perhaps by angels, spirits, or similar entities—and Hashem can therefore tend to their needs quickly, after which He derives pleasure from their song and divine service.

(R' Yehudah points out a difficulty, however, with this last premise, that these other worlds are inhabited by angels: Why do these angels inhabit actual worlds, instead of dwelling in the heavens?)

Another proof to the existence of other worlds was brought by R' Dovid Nieto, an Italian rov during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> R' Dovid cites the last Mishnah of Mishnayos<sup>5</sup>: “In the future, Hashem will bequeath 310 worlds to each *tzaddik*.”

A similar proof can perhaps be deduced from the *possuk* in Tehillim,<sup>6</sup> “*Malchuscha malchus kol olamim*—Your Kingship is the Kingship over all worlds.”

However, all these proofs can be refuted if we say that these worlds are *spiritual* worlds. Perhaps this is why, when the Rebbe addressed the topic of extraterrestrial life, he did not cite any of these proofs. Instead, he referenced a Gemara that proves that *actual* beings dwell somewhere in outer space.

## THE REBBE'S VIEW

On the Shabbos following the first successful landing of man on the moon, the Rebbe held a special *farbrengen* to discuss the lessons that can be learned from this historic event.

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4 *Mateh Dan* (1968 ed., p. 128).

5 Uktzin 3:12.

6 145:13.

Among other topics, the Rebbe addressed the Torah view on extraterrestrial life.<sup>7</sup>

The Rebbe prefaced his discussion by saying that *lichorah* there is no reason to discuss this topic, as it has no relevance to Torah and *mitzvos*. However, if someone knows what to answer on this topic, he may find it easier to influence another Jew to put on *tefillin*, keep Shabbos, or eat kosher. For this reason, the Rebbe decided to address the issue.

The Rebbe brings a proof from a *possuk* in Sefer Shoftim, in the song of Devorah.<sup>8</sup> Devorah says: “Cursed is Meroz, says the angel of Hashem; cursed are its inhabitants, for they did not come to the assistance of Hashem [to fight against Sisra’s army].” The Gemara<sup>9</sup> offers two interpretations for the word Meroz: “Some say it is the name of an important individual, and others say it is the name of a star.”<sup>10</sup>

Now, the *possuk* continues, “cursed are its *inhabitants*.” If Meroz is the name of a star, this means that this star is inhabited!<sup>11</sup>

[It should be noted that Rabbeinu Chananel<sup>12</sup> explains that the star’s “inhabitants” are the small stars adjacent to Meroz. However, the Rebbe explains that the term “inhabitants” refers to people, not stars.

Another way to explain this verse might be that the star’s “inhabitants” Devorah was cursing were humans who dwelled on the part of Earth directly underneath Meroz. However, this would contradict the Gemara that says<sup>13</sup> that the entire civilization dwells underneath the space of just one star (and not just a small group of people).]

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7 *Sichah* of Shabbos Parshas Devarim, 5729 (*Toras Menachem*, vol. 57, pp. 172–173).

8 5:23.

9 Moed Katan 16a.

10 The very stars fought with Sisra—see Shoftim 5:20.

11 This proof is also brought in *Sefer HaBris*, Section 1, 3:3.

12 To Moed Katan ad loc.

13 Pesachim 94a.

The Rebbe addressed the topic of extraterrestrial life on several other occasions as well.

A few years before the above *farbrengen*, a certain individual asked the Rebbe if Torah supports the view that life exists on other planets. In a letter dated 26 Marcheshvan, 5726, the Rebbe answered that since this question has no relevance to the day-to-day life of a Jew, there is no clear-cut *psak din* on the matter, and there are various opinions about it.<sup>14</sup>

A few weeks after NASA's Viking 1 lander touched down on Mars's surface, an individual from Milan asked the Rebbe about the Torah view on extraterrestrial life. In a letter dated Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5736, the Rebbe replied that since the entire universe was created so that Bnei Yisroel can fulfill the Torah, it follows that the planet Earth, which is where the Torah was given, is the primary purpose of Creation. However, this does not mean that life cannot exist elsewhere as well. This is why we find differences of opinion among *chachmei yisroel* on the matter.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 1970s, Dr. Velvl Greene was working with NASA to search for life on Mars. When he was told that this pursuit was contrary to the Torah, he asked the Rebbe if this was true. The Rebbe answered: "You should look for life on Mars, and you should keep looking for life on Mars. If you don't find it, then keep looking elsewhere, and do not stop looking. To sit here in this world and say there is no life elsewhere is to put a limit to what G-d can do. And nobody can do that!"<sup>16</sup>

It seems that all that's left now is to identify which star is Meroz and send a spaceship there. But what type of creatures might we find? Are there any Torah sources that provide clues to what extraterrestrial life might look like?

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14 *Moreh Ledor Navuch*, Vol. 3, p. 90.

15 *Nitzutzei Or*, p. 75.

16 [Chabad.org/2436891](http://Chabad.org/2436891).

## WHAT DO ALIENS LOOK LIKE?

Some insights on the appearance of life on other planets can be gleaned from *Sefer HaBris*, authored by R' Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz of Vilna (1765–1821).<sup>17</sup>

R' Pinchas writes that according to the belief of certain scientists, the stars and planets are quite similar to Earth, featuring mountains, valleys, and oceans, and inhabited by humans, animals, and plants. In particular, he cites the view of astronomer Johannes Hevelius (1611–1687) in his work *Selenographia*, who portrays the moon as appearing much the same way as Earth.

R' Pinchas dismisses this notion. He describes the foolishness of this view by way of a *mashal*: A European merchant once traveled to a distant land. While there, he left a mirror near a mountain adjacent to a vast forest and forgot to reclaim it. Some time later, a tribesman discovered the mirror and looked inside. To his great surprise, he saw a forest in the background and a dark-skinned man who looked just like him! He foolishly concluded that the mountain was hollow and contained a large forest within it, inhabited by men similar in appearance to him!

If the inhabitants of these worlds are exactly like us, argues R' Pinchas, why did Hashem create them on separate planets and not on our world? Hashem surely could have created a single world large enough to encompass them all! Since Hashem created numerous stars and planets, we must say they are each unique, and their inhabitants are likewise distinctive and vastly different from those on this planet. Even ocean creatures and land creatures are worlds apart; how much more so life on other planets!

[Interestingly, R' Pinchas also proves this from the following: If life on other planets is similar to life on Earth, the creatures

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17 Section 1, 3:2–4.

For more on this author, see the accounts of the Friediker Rebbe (*Sefer HaToldos Admor Hazaken*, Vol. 2, p. 541) and R' Itche der Masmid (*Reb Mendel*, p. 202).

of Mercury, the closest planet to the sun, would die from the intense heat or become blind from the sun's rays. The creatures of Saturn, the farthest visible planet from the sun, would expire from the extreme cold. It should be noted that modern science has yet to discover life on these planets, although there is speculation that life may exist on one or more of Saturn's many moons.]

R' Pinchas concludes that creatures on other worlds are fashioned from a type of form and matter superior to our own. In direct contrast to worldly creatures, where each individual passes on and only the species is perpetuated, these creatures do not expire and enjoy a continued existence.

So much for the physical appearance of extraterrestrial life. But what about their mental and emotional makeup? Are they intelligent creatures with free will and the ability to make decisions? Were they given commandments to fulfill, just as we must follow Torah and *mitzvos*?

## EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE

The first to mention these questions was R' Yehudah ben Barzilai of Barcelona. In his commentary to Sefer Yetzirah, he elaborates on the possibility of the existence of other worlds, and he mentions that "perhaps Hashem did not give a Torah in these worlds." He also remains uncertain as to whether the creatures inhabiting these worlds possess a *yetzer hara* and the possibility to sin, or if they are angels, spirits, or similar entities.<sup>18</sup>

(It should be noted that according to R' Yehudah, these other worlds are not planets or stars in the heavens surrounding our world. Rather, they are distinct universes, each world surrounded by seven heavens, just like ours.)

R' Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz of Vilna also addresses this question.<sup>19</sup> In his opinion, although extraterrestrial creatures

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18 *Pirush Sefer Yetzirah LeRebbi Yehudah Bartzeloni* (new ed., pp. 226–228).

19 *Sefer Habris*, Section 1, 3:4.

may possess intellect, they are not bestowed with free will. Accordingly, they were not given the Torah either. They do not serve Hashem, and Hashem does not derive pleasure from their actions. Just like everything else in the universe, including the loftiest and most spiritual worlds, they were created solely for us, the inhabitants of this physical and mundane world.

R' Pinchas quotes the statement of Chazal in Berachos:<sup>20</sup> “Hashem said to Knesses Yisroel: ‘My daughter! I have created twelve *mazalos* in the heavens. Each *mazal* is comprised of thirty *chayil*. Each *chayil*, in turn, consists of thirty *ligyon*. Each *ligyon* includes thirty *rahaton*; each *rahaton*—thirty *karton*, and each *karton*—thirty *gastera*. Within each *gastera* I suspended 3,650,000,000 stars. And the only reason I created all of these heavenly bodies was for you!!!”

In a conversation with Professor Branover, the Rebbe elaborated on the idea that extraterrestrial creatures do not possess free will. The concept of free will, the Rebbe explained, is a paradox. Since everything that occurs below is orchestrated from Above, seemingly no creature should have the ability to choose how to act. The credit for this incredible ability is thanks to Torah. Hashem wants us to fulfill the Torah’s directives on our own accord, and He therefore granted us free will. This leads us to conclude that the existence of free will is contingent on being given the Torah.

Can we posit that other worlds were given a Torah as well? No, said the Rebbe; that would be impossible. We cannot say they were given a different Torah, because Torah is truth, and there can only be a single truth. Neither can we say they were given the same Torah as us. The Torah describes the giving of the Torah in great detail, and these details are essential to the Torah itself. This leaves no room for doubt as to the location—the only location—where it took place. And since Torah was not given elsewhere, free will does not exist elsewhere either.

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20 32b.

All this was said in response to Professor Branover's question: "According to the Torah, is it possible that other civilizations exist outside of Planet Earth?" For a civilization to exist, the Rebbe answered, it must be comprised of intelligent creatures who possess free will. As stated above, free will cannot exist anywhere outside of our planet. Therefore, although there are sources in Torah indicating that extraterrestrial life may exist, otherworldly civilizations with intelligent creatures do not.<sup>21</sup>

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21 *Mah Rabu Maasecha Hashem*, pp. 213–214.





# Aseres Hashevatim

The Aseres Hashevatim have long fascinated the minds and hearts of Klal Yisroel. As children, we were spellbound by the stories of the lost tribes and their location beyond the Sambatyon River. Over the ages, many Jewish explorers led expeditions to locate our long-lost brothers and sisters, coming back with a wide range of reports, some more incredible than others.

Where were the Aseres Hashevatim exiled? What happened to them over the ages? Is there any truth to the various identifications that have been given? And where is the fascinating Sambatyon River?

Before exploring these questions, let's start with the basics, and review the story of the exile of the Aseres Hashevatim during the era of the first Beis Hamikdash.

## THE EXILE

As is known, in the days of Rechavam, son of Shlomo Hamelech, the Jewish kingdom split. Ten tribes followed Yeravam ben Nevat, creating the Kingdom of Yisrael, and only the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin remained faithful to the kings of Yehudah.<sup>22</sup>

The Kingdom of Yisrael was conquered by Shalmaneser, king of Ashur, 133 years before the Kingdom of Yehudah was conquered by Nevuchadnetzar, king of Bavel. However, the exile of the ten tribes did not happen at once. In fact, it took place in three stages: first two tribes were exiled, then another two-and-a-half, and finally the rest of the Aseres Hashevatim.

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22 *I Melachim* ch. 12.

Here's a timeline of what happened:<sup>23</sup>

**Stage one:** In the year 3187, King Tiglas Pileser of Ashur attacked the land of Naftali, taking the tribes of Naftali and Zevulun as captives. These tribes were brought to the land of Ashur.<sup>24</sup>

**Stage two:** Eight years later, in the year 3195, the king of Ashur attacked again. This time, the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menasheh were taken into exile, and they were brought to Chalach, Chavor, Hara, and the river Gozan.<sup>25</sup>

**Stage three:** Eight years later, King Shalmaneser of Ashur laid siege to Shomron, the capital of the kingdom of Yisrael. After three years—in the year 3205—the city fell, and the remaining tribes were taken captive to Ashur. From there, they were brought to Chalach, Chavor, the river Gozan, and the cities of Madai.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, eight years later, King Sancheriv of Ashur attacked the land of Yehudah, capturing all the fortified cities. He then tried to conquer Yerushalayim, but suffered a miraculous downfall, thanks to the heartfelt prayers of King Chizkiyahu.<sup>27</sup>

According to the Midrash, when King Sancheriv captured these fortified cities, he took their inhabitants—from the tribes of Yehudah and Shimon—captive. He wanted to exile them to Chalach and Chavor as well, but then he heard that the king of Cush had rebelled against him. Changing his plans, he took the captive Jews with him to wage war against Cush. While there, Hashem concealed the Jewish captives within the *Harei Choshech*, the mountains of darkness.<sup>28</sup>

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23 This timeline is based on *Rashi* to *II Melachim* 17:1 and *Yeshayahu* 8:23, based on *Seder Olam*. It should be noted that there are other opinions in this matter.

24 *II Melachim* 15:29. Shevet Zevulun is mentioned in *Yeshayahu* 8:23.

25 *I Divrei Hayamim* 5:26.

26 *II Melachim* 17:5–6. *Ibid.* 18:9–11.

27 *II Melachim* 18:13–19:37.

28 *Midrash Eser Galuyos* (printed in *Otzar Hamidrashim* vol. 2, p. 434, and cited in the introduction of the *Abarbanel* to *Melachim*).

## WILL THEY RETURN?

Will the ten lost tribes eventually return and join with the rest of *Klal Yisroel*?

The Mishnah records an argument on this matter: According to R' Akiva, the ten tribes will not return, while according to R' Eliezer, they will.<sup>29</sup>

Now, the opinion of R' Akiva is difficult to understand. There are prophecies foretelling the union of the kingdoms of Yehudah and Yisroel in the days of Moshiach, and describing how all the tribes will live together in Eretz Yisroel.<sup>30</sup> How can this be reconciled with R' Akiva's opinion, that the ten tribes will never return?

According to one approach, R' Akiva was only referring to the original members of these *shevatim* who were actually sent to exile. Due to their wickedness, they will not get up at *Techiyas Hameisim*. Their descendants, however, will certainly be gathered and brought to Eretz Yisroel, where they will serve Hashem along with their brethren.<sup>31</sup>

Others disagree, saying that according to R' Akiva, the *shevatim* who were exiled will never return, including their offspring. If so, what are the prophecies that mention these *shevatim* referring to?

When the king of Ashur conquered the Aseres Hashevatim, many people escaped and joined their brothers in the Kingdom of Yehudah. Others made their way to other lands—such as Amon, Moav, and Mitzrayim—where they remained for close to one hundred years. In the year 3303, Yirmiyahu traveled to these locations and brought them back to Eretz Yisroel.<sup>32</sup> (Indeed, until today, there are many Jews among us

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29 *Sanhedrin* 110b.

30 See *Yechezkel* chs. 37, 47–48.

31 *Ran* to *Sanhedrin* ad loc.

32 *Megilah* 14b. *Erchin* 33a.

who descend from these *shevatim*.) It is regarding these Jews that the *nevi'im* prophesized.<sup>33</sup>

However, even according to this approach, the *halachah* follows R' Eliezer, who holds that all the ten *shevatim*—including those exiled by the Assyrians—will eventually return and join with the rest of *Klal Yisroel*.<sup>34</sup>

## WHERE WERE THEY EXILED?

Where were the ten tribes brought when they were exiled?

The *possuk* mentions four locations: Chalach, Chavor, the river of Gozan, and the cities of Madai.<sup>35</sup> Another *possuk* adds a fifth location called Hara.<sup>36</sup>

Where are these locations? The Abarbanel writes that they were part of the Assyrian Empire,<sup>37</sup> which ruled sections of what is now Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Similarly, the Kingdom of Madai (“the cities of Madai”) was located in present-day Iran.

The identity of these locations is provided in the Gemara:

Chalach is Chalazon; Chavor is Chadayev; the river of Gozan is Ginzak; the cities of Madai are Chamdan and its neighboring towns. Some say [the cities of Madai are] Nihar and its neighboring towns. What are the neighboring towns? Shmuel said: the cities of Mushchi, Chidki and Dumkaya.<sup>38</sup>

It is difficult to know what these places are in modern-day geography, although there are those who identify some of them with specific locations found within the borders of present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.<sup>39</sup>

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33 *Abarbanel* in *Yeshuos Meshicho* 2:1:4. *Maharal* in *Netzach Yisroel* ch. 34.

34 *Maharal* and *Abarbanel*/loc. cit.

35 *II Melachim* 17:5–6. *Ibid.* 18:9–11.

36 *I Divrei Hayamim* 5:26.

37 *Yeshuos Meshicho* 2:1:4.

38 *Yevamos* 16b–17a. See also *Kiddushin* 72a.

39 *Shivtei Yisrael Ha'ovdim Vehanidachim*, pp. 84–85. See also <http://www.chabad.org/2500863> notes 3–7.

Another Gemara provides additional locations:

Where did [the king of Ashur] exile them? Mar Zutra said to Afriki. R. Chanina said to the mountains of Selug.<sup>40</sup>

“Afriki” would seem to refer to the continent of Africa. However, the Maharal writes<sup>41</sup> that this is not the Africa we are familiar with, rather it is identical with the Afriki mentioned in a different Gemara: Alexander the Great once wanted to travel to Afriki. He consulted with the elders of the south, who tried to dissuade him, saying that the way was obstructed by the Mountains of Darkness.<sup>42</sup> Some identify this as a region beyond the Taurus Mountains in southern Turkey.<sup>43</sup>

But then there is another area where the Aseres Hashevatim are said to reside: beyond the Sambatyon River.

## THE SAMBATYON RIVER

The Sambatyon (or Sabatyon) River is first mentioned in the Gemara, in the context of a conversation between R' Akiva and the evil Turnusrufus, the Roman governor of Eretz Yisroel. Turnusrufus asked R' Akiva, “How do you know that the day you keep as Shabbos is indeed the day when Hashem rested? Perhaps it is another day of the week?” “The Sambatyon River will prove it,” R' Akiva replied. “Throughout the week it throws rocks, and on Shabbos it rests.”<sup>44</sup>

(Indeed, this is the reason the river is known as Sambatyon, as Shabbos is referred to as *Sabat* in certain languages.<sup>45</sup>)

Other sources add another interesting detail: If one were to take some of the sand of the Sambatyon River and place it in a vessel, throughout the week it will churn, and on Shabbos it

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40 *Sanhedrin* 94a.

41 *Netzach Yisroel* ch. 34.

42 *Tamid* 32a.

43 *Tevuos Ha'aretz* 2:5.

44 *Sanhedrin* 65b and *Rashi* there.

45 *Ramban, Devarim* 32:26.

will lie still.<sup>46</sup> It is related that around the year 1600, an Ethiopian non-Jew in Lisbon possessed a glass jar with such sand. Every Friday he would visit a street that was inhabited by Jews who had been forcibly converted. He would show them how the sand would stop rattling, exhorting them to close their stores in honor of Shabbos.<sup>47</sup>

Although the Gemara doesn't connect the Sambatyon River with the Aseres Hashevatim, a number of Midrashim state that at least part of these tribes were exiled beyond the Sambatyon River.<sup>48</sup> But where exactly is this river?

The Ramban<sup>49</sup> identifies the Sambatyon as the Gozan River, one of the places mentioned in Tanach<sup>50</sup> where the king of Ashur exiled the Aseres Hashevatim. The Gemara<sup>51</sup> identifies the Gozan River as Ginzak, which some say is the name of an ancient settlement in present-day northwestern Iran.<sup>52</sup> Others say the Gozan River is the Amu Darya River, found along the border of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan<sup>53</sup> (although no testimonies have been recorded to date of the river resting on Shabbos). Many other conjectures have been offered.

Alternatively, perhaps the Sambatyon River is still waiting to be discovered. Is it possible that in the present day and age, there are still areas on the planet that have not yet been properly explored?

## IS THE WORLD FULLY EXPLORED?

Can it be that the Aseres Hashevatim are hiding beyond a river that has yet to be discovered?

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46 *Mikveh Yisroel* (Menasheh ben Yisroel), ch. 10.

47 *Ibid.*

48 See, for example, *Bereishis Rabbah* 73:6. *Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 10:5. *Pesikta Rabbasi* §31.

49 *Devarim* 32:26.

50 *II Melachim* 17:5–6. *Ibid.* 18:9–11.

51 *Yevamos* 17a.

52 See <http://www.chabad.org/2500863> note 5.

53 *Shivtei Yisrael Ha'ovdim Vehanidachim*, p. 84.

The first one to ask this question was the Maharal. In his *sefer Netzach Yisroel*,<sup>54</sup> printed in 1599, he writes: “Some claim that the wise men have already described every area of the world in their books, and there is no place that is known to be the location of the Aseres Hashevatim. However, this is not true; it is certainly possible that there is a place they do not know about, because it is separated by mountains or the like. Indeed, they recently discovered a new land they call ‘The New World’ [i.e., America] which they did not know about beforehand. Similarly, it is possible that they will find another place inhabited by humans that cannot be reached.”

Fifty years later, R’ Menashe ben Yisroel voiced a similar sentiment in his *sefer Mikveh Yisroel*.<sup>55</sup> “People ask, ‘If it is true that the Aseres Hashevatim exist, how can it be that we do not know about them?’ This is not a question. We don’t even know what is behind the things we do know about; for example, we don’t know the source of the four rivers—the Nile, the Ganges, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. There are many regions concealed in Arabia and in America...and the other countries of the West, which are larger than the countries revealed to us.”<sup>56</sup>

Did this change in the next three centuries? In 1964, someone asked the Rebbe if the Midrash about the Sambatyon River and the Aseres Hashevatim should be taken literally, or perhaps it is a metaphor for some spiritual idea. The Rebbe replied: “There are *many large* portions of Planet Earth that have not yet been explored, and we do not know *at all* what transpires there, as is well known.”<sup>57</sup>

Has Google Maps made a difference? That is up to the reader to decide. But maybe another route should be taken in approaching this issue. Perhaps the Aseres Hashevatim have already been discovered!

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54 Ch. 34.

55 Ch. 10, sec. 42.

56 See also *Midbar Kedeimos* (from the Chida), *erech* “*chachmos*.”

57 Letter of 26 Tammuz 5724, printed in the *hosafos* to *Kuntres Shabbos Parshas Nitzavim 5776* (Lahak).

## ELDAD HADANI

In the ninth century, a mysterious traveler visited the Jews of Kairouan (in what is now Tunisia). His name was Eldad HaDani.

Eldad related that he was from the tribe of Dan (hence the name “HaDani”). According to his testimony, he hailed from somewhere deep in Africa, where the tribe of Dan resided together with the tribes of Asher, Gad, and Naftali. Near them resided the descendants of Moshe, who were encircled by the Sambatyon River.

Eldad described at great length the way of life of these tribes, and their dedication to Torah and *mitzvos*. They only spoke Lashon Hakodesh, and they possessed the entire Tanach. However, they did not read Megillas Esther, as they had not been part of that miracle, as well as Megillas Eichah, due to its heartbreaking content. When transmitting the teachings of Torah Shebaal Peh, each statement began as follows: “So said Yehoshua, in the name of Moshe, in the name of Hashem.” Eldad conveyed a number of these teachings to his listeners, most of them pertaining to the laws of *shechitah* and *treifos*.

Eldad went on to relate how he had journeyed from his land by boat, only to be shipwrecked at sea and captured by cannibals. After many harrowing adventures, he arrived safely in Kairouan.

The Jews of Kairouan were unsure how much credence to give to Eldad’s account. They wrote a letter to R’ Tzemach, the Gaon of those days in Bavel, relating what Eldad had said. They pointed out that a number of the *halachos* he had repeated differed from what is mentioned in our Gemara. R’ Tzemach replied that these differences may have been the result of Eldad’s stressful journey, which may have caused him to forget certain details.<sup>58</sup>

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58 *Eldad Hadani* (A. Epstein, Pressburg 5651). Printed also in *Shneim Asar Shivtei Yisroel* (Yerushalayim 5716). See also [chabad.org/112285](http://chabad.org/112285).



In fact, many Rishonim quote the *halachos* brought by Eldad (often referring to them as *Hilchos Eretz Yisroel*), although in most instances they disagree, saying that many of them are merely stringencies. Among the *halachos* they cite in his name are that a woman may not *shecht*, and that if the *shochet* did not make a *berachah*, the *shechitah* is invalid.<sup>59</sup> However, in general it appears that Eldad's words were taken into consideration by the majority of Rishonim. One notable exception is the Ibn Ezra, who states that his account should not be believed.<sup>60</sup>

## STORIES THROUGH THE AGES

Over the course of the ages, numerous stories have spread about the Aseres Hashevatim and their location.

One of the most famous travelers in history was R' Binyamin of Tudela, who spent many years (c. 4925–4933/1165–1173) traversing through France, Italy, Greece, Syria, Eretz Yisroel, and Persia. When describing the Jewish communities of Arabia, R' Binyamin mentions a city named Khaybar (an oasis in present-day Saudi Arabia), inhabited by 50,000 Jews, including *talmidei chachomim* and mighty soldiers who waged war with the surrounding nations. R' Binyamin states that “people say they are from the tribes of Reuven, Gan, and half of the tribe of Menashe, who were taken captive by Shalmaneser king of Ashur.”

In Persia, R' Binyamin mentions the mountains of Naisabur (Nishapur, in present-day Iran) near the Gozan River. He describes that according to rumors, among these mountains live the tribes of Dan, Zevulun, Asher, and Naftali, who were exiled there by Shalmaneser.<sup>61</sup>

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59 See, for example, *Tosfos, Rosh*, and *Mordechai to Chulin 2a. Tosfos to Zevachim 31b*.

60 *Ibn Ezra to Shemos 2:22*.

61 *Masaos Rabbi Binyamin*. The identity of these locations is based on *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (Adler, London 1907).

Another traveler who spoke about the whereabouts of the Aseres Hashevatim was R' Ovadyah of Bartenura, who journeyed to Eretz Yisroel in 5248 (1488). In a letter to his family in Italy, R' Ovadyah relates that a contingent of Jews had recently arrived in Yerushalayim from Aden, Yemen. They related that the river Sambatyon was located a fifty-day journey from their hometown. The river encircled the descendants of Moshe Rabbeinu, and beyond the river resided numerous other Jews.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to stories such as these, there were times when people attempted to make contact with the Aseres Hashevatim. One example concerns R' Yisroel of Shklov, a student of the Gra. In 5591 (1831), he sent a letter with a messenger who had set out on a journey to Yemen to try to locate the Aseres Hashevatim. He instructed the messenger to deliver the letter to them if he would succeed in finding them. (The results of the search were inconclusive.)<sup>63</sup>

Will any attempts at locating them succeed? The Maharal writes that Hashem decreed that the Aseres Hashevatim will remain concealed until Moshiach comes, and will not be discovered beforehand (at least not completely).<sup>64</sup> If we want to meet them, the best way is to add in our efforts to bring Moshiach, may he be revealed speedily in our days!

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62 *Darchei Tziyon*.

63 For the complete story and text of the letter, see *Shneim Asar Shivtei Yisroel*, pp. 109ff.

64 *Netzach Yisroel*, ch. 34.

# Sheidim

We've all heard about sheidim—demons and evil spirits that have the capacity to harm and inflict damage. We may have been told that certain things should be avoided so as not to start up with sheidim. We've also heard “*shin-daled* stories,” more often than not ending with an account of how a certain *tzaddik* chased them away.

What exactly are sheidim? What do they look like and how do they behave? Are we supposed to be wary of them? And is it true that today they aren't around anymore?

A careful look reveals that sheidim are mentioned numerous times throughout Gemara, including various details about their appearance and behavior.

## WHEN WERE SHEIDIM CREATED?

When reading Parshas Bereishis, no mention is made of sheidim. However, the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos<sup>65</sup> states that according to one opinion, *mazikin*—sheidim—were created on *erev Shabbos* just before nightfall.

The Midrash<sup>66</sup> gives some additional details. Hashem created the souls of the sheidim right before Shabbos, but before he had a chance to finish creating their bodies, Shabbos arrived, and He stopped in the middle. This is why sheidim do not have physical bodies like humans.

The Midrash learns a lesson from this: If a person is holding a valuable object outdoors and it becomes Shabbos, he should not hesitate and throw it down, just like Hashem stopped creating the sheidim when Shabbos arrived. (Some *mefarshim*

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65 5:6.

66 Bereishis Rabbah 7:5.

add that Hashem specifically created the sheidim in this way, to teach us the greatness and importance of Shabbos.<sup>67)</sup>

Apparently, in addition to the sheidim created during the Six Days of Creation, more sheidim came into existence later. The Gemara<sup>68</sup> relates that during the 130 years from the *chet eitz hadaas* until the birth of Sheis, the seed involuntarily released by Adam Harishon formed “spirits (*ruchos*), demons (sheidim), and *lilin*.”

Elsewhere, the Gemara<sup>69</sup> explains that a portion of the *dor haflagah* were transformed into “monkeys, spirits, demons, and *lilin*.”

What is the difference between sheidim, *ruchos*, and *lilin*? Rashi<sup>70</sup> explains that sheidim have the form of humans and eat and drink like humans (more on that below). *Ruchos*, by contrast, are spirits without body and form, and *lilin* have a human form, but with wings.<sup>71</sup>

## WHAT DO SHEIDIM LOOK LIKE?

Do Chazal provide us with any details of the appearance of sheidim?

The Gemara relates at length the story of how Ashmedai, the king of the sheidim, once impersonated Shlomo Hamelech. When the Sanhedrin realized that something was amiss, they asked the queens to check the king’s feet, as the feet of sheidim look like chicken feet. The queens reported that whenever the “king” visited them, he would wear socks.<sup>72</sup>

The Gemara also tells us that sheidim have wings and can fly, just like angels.<sup>73</sup>

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67 *Eitz Yosef* to Bereishis Rabbah ad loc., from *Neizer Hakodesh*.

68 Eiruvim 18b.

69 Sanhedrin 109a.

70 To Sanhedrin ad loc.

71 See Eiruvim 100b that they also have long hair.

72 Gittin 68b and Rashi. See Berachos 6a.

73 Chagigah 16a.

The *possuk* refers to sheidim as “*se’irim*.”<sup>74</sup> Some explain that this is because people who saw sheidim reported that they appeared like goats (*sa’ir* in Hebrew).<sup>75</sup> (Another explanation is that upon seeing them, one’s hair—*sei’ar* in Hebrew—stands on end from fright.<sup>76</sup>)

The Gemara also states that sheidim sometimes appear like humans. To determine the difference, the suspected person’s shadow should be inspected. If he has a “shadow of a shadow,” he is a human and not a demon.<sup>77</sup>

The Ramban explains that most creations are formed from all four elements of fire, air, water, and earth. By contrast, the body of sheidim is formed only from fire and air. This is why we cannot perceive them with any of our five senses.<sup>78</sup>

## SHEIDIM BEHAVIORS

What does a typical day look like in the life of a sheid?

The Gemara states: “Sheidim are similar to angels in three ways, and they are similar to humans in three ways. They have wings like angels; they fly from one end of the world to another like angels; and they know the future like angels. They eat and drink like humans; they procreate like humans; and they die like humans.”<sup>79</sup>

We find other areas in which they are similar to humans: they sleep and they release excrement like humans.<sup>80</sup>

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74 Vayikra 17:7. Yeshayahu 13:21.

75 Ibn Ezra to Vayikra ad loc. See also Radak to Yeshayahu ad loc.

76 Ibn Ezra *ibid*.

77 Gittin 66a. Yevamos 122a. For the definition of “shadow of a shadow,” see Rashi to Avodah Zarah 48b. See also Tur (Yoreh Dei’ah §17) that today we do not know how to determine a shadow of a shadow.

78 Ramban to Vayikra 17:7.

79 Chagigah 16a.

80 Tosfos to Chagigah 16a s.v. *kivnei adam*. See Maharsha ad loc. that the fact that they sleep can be deduced from the story (Gittin 68a) in which Ashmedai drank the wine Benayahu had hidden in his well and fell asleep.

The Sforno elaborates on the eating habits of sheidim. As opposed to humans, who are created from coarse elements, sheidim are formed from refined, spiritual elements. Therefore, the food they eat must be refined as well. The most refined “food” that exists is blood, as it carries the life-force of created beings, and thus it is from this that they derive their sustenance.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, the Maharsha writes that sheidim eat the same food as humans.<sup>82</sup>

Sheidim are commonly referred to in the Gemara as “*mazikin*,” destructive forces. Indeed, the Gemara relates a number of incidents in which sheidim inflicted damage.<sup>83</sup>

Rashi writes that sheidim do not keep Shabbos.<sup>84</sup> Conversely, R' Yehudah Hachossid was of the opinion that sheidim follow Torah and mitzvos, including directives that are sourced in Torah She'baal Peh (such as the prohibition of *techumin*, traveling 2000 *amos* past the outskirts of a city on Shabbos).<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the Maharsha writes that perhaps sheidim can even merit to be rewarded for their good behavior after their death.<sup>86</sup>

## ARE SHEIDIM FOR REAL?

Do sheidim really exist, or is it just a figment of our imagination?

This is a longstanding *machlokes* that has been around since the age of the Rishonim.

One of the most famous Rishonim who stated that *sheidim* do not exist is the Rambam. He explains that the existence of

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81 Sforno to Vayikra 17:7.

82 Maharsha to Chagigah 16a.

83 See, for example, Chulin 105b.

84 Rashi to Eiruvim 43a s.v. *Yosef shida*.

85 Cited in Or Zarua, *eiruvim* §147.

86 Maharsha to Chagigah 16a.

demons, along with sorcery and astrology, is a false idea that was fabricated by the idol worshippers.<sup>87</sup>

Many other Rishonim disagreed. Among them are the Ramban,<sup>88</sup> Rashba,<sup>89</sup> and Rabbeinu Bechayei.<sup>90</sup>

Mefarshim explain that it is clear from Chazal that sheidim exist. The Gemara and Midrash discuss sheidim numerous times and relate many stories involving them (see below).<sup>91</sup>

If they do indeed exist, the next question is: Why? Why did Hashem create *sheidim*, forces of damage and destruction?

The Rebbe explains that *sheidim* are unlike everything else in the world. As a rule, our task is to elevate the world around us by revealing the *kedushah* hidden inside. *Sheidim*, however, were created as a result of the *chet etz hadaas*. Therefore, the goal is not to elevate them but to destroy them.

The Rebbe continues that this does not mean we must destroy them so they should cease to exist. Rather, we must “destroy” their current status and transform them into new entities, so that instead of forces of evil they should become forces of good.<sup>92</sup>

## SHEIDIM IN TANACH

We will now explore some incidents where sheidim appear throughout history, beginning with Tanach.

Among the pairs of creatures that entered the *teivah* to be saved from the *mabul* were sheidim.<sup>93</sup>

The Egyptian sorcerers used sheidim to turn water into blood and to produce frogs. They wanted to use them to produce lice

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87 *Pirush Hamishnayos, Avodah Zarah 4:7*. See also *Abarbanel* to Devarim 18:9–13.

88 See *Ramban* to Vayikra 17:7.

89 See *Shu"t HaRashba* 1:413.

90 See *Rabbeinu Bechayei* to Vayikra 17:7.

91 See *Yefeh Toart Bereishis Rabbah* 7:5.

92 *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p. 383.

93 Rashi to Bereishis 6:19.

but were unable to do so, because sheidim have no control over creatures smaller than a grain of barley.<sup>94</sup>

Shlomo Hamelech was given control over the sheidim. When he needed to find the *shamir* to cut the stones of the Beis Hamikdash, he summoned the sheidim to help him. They told him that they didn't know the *shamir's* whereabouts, but perhaps their king, Ashmedai, knew.

Shlomo sent his general Behayahu to capture Ashmedai, and he succeeded in the daring mission using a clever plan involving wine and wool. On the way back to the palace, Ashmedai did many puzzling acts, which he later explained to Benayahu. Ashmedai told Shlomo the whereabouts of the *shamir*, and Shlomo was able to locate it and use it for the Beis Hamikdash.

The entire time Ashmedai was kept in the palace, he was bound with a chain upon which was inscribed Hashem's name, and Shlomo wore a ring with Hashem's name to protect him from harm. Once, Shlomo asked Ashmedai to demonstrate how sheidim are more powerful than humans. Ashmedai agreed on condition that he remove the chain and give him the ring. As soon as Shlomo did so, he tossed Shlomo 400 *parsa* away from the palace. Shlomo was forced to wander as a beggar for a long time until he was finally able to regain his throne.

(For the fascinating details of this lengthy story, see Gittin 68a–b.)

## SHEIDIM IN GEMARA

The Gemara and Midrash relate numerous stories involving sheidim. Here are a few of them.

The Romans once decreed that the Jews were forbidden to keep the laws of Shabbos, *bris milah*, and *taharas hamishpachah*. R' Shimon bar Yochai and R' Eliezer bar R'

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94 Shemos 7:22 and Rashi; ibid. 8:3; ibid. 8:14 and Rashi.



Yossi made their way to Rome, seeking to annul the evil decree. On the way, a sheid named Ben Tamalyon<sup>95</sup> approached them and offered to help them.

Ben Tamalyon entered the body of the caesar's daughter, causing her to act crazy. When the *chachomim* arrived, they cured the princess by removing the spirit from her body. Overjoyed, the emperor allowed them to enter his royal treasury and take whatever they wanted. They entered, found the decree, and tore it to shreds.<sup>96</sup>

The Roman emperor Diocletian once sent a messenger to R' Yehuda Hanassi,<sup>97</sup> summoning him and the other rabbis of Teveria to appear before him immediately after Shabbos. The emperor instructed the messenger to deliver the letter right before Shabbos, so it would be impossible for them to come on time and he would be able to incriminate them.

As R' Yehuda Hanassi and R' Shmuel bar Nachman were bathing before Shabbos, one of the sheidim of the bathhouse asked them what was the matter. After hearing their story, he calmed them down, reassuring them that Hashem would make a miracle for them. After Shabbos, the sheid carried them instantly to the emperor's palace.<sup>98</sup>

Another interesting anecdote describes a group of porters who were carrying a barrel of wine and decided it was time to take a break. They placed the barrel beneath a gutter, not realizing that a sheid was lying there. Angry at having been disturbed, the sheid broke the barrel. The matter was brought before Mar bar Rav Ashi, and he required the sheid to pay for the damage.<sup>99</sup>

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95 Some translate Ben Tamalyon as "elf" (See Tosfos to Me'ilah 17b s.v. *yatza*, *Otzar Laazei Rashi* [Katan], p. 175).

96 Me'ilah 17a–b.

97 Some say that this story took place with R' Yehuda Nessiah, R' Yehuda Hanassi's grandson (Midrash Rabba, ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. 2, p. 691, note).

98 Yerushalmi, Terumos 8:4 and Pnei Moshe there.

99 Chullin 105b.

## SHEIDIM IN SHULCHAN ARUCH

There are quite a few halachos and minhagim we do that are associated with the existence of sheidim. Here are a few of them.

- One of the reasons we say Shema before going to sleep is to protect us from sheidim.<sup>100</sup> For this reason, on the first night of Pesach, when we are protected from destructive forces, there is no need to say (most of the) Shema.<sup>101</sup>
- Although usually there is no *chazaras hashatz* during Maariv, on Friday night, the *chazzan* says a short version of *chazaras hashatz* known as *berachah achas me'ein sheva*. The reason for this is that in those days, the shuls were located outside the city, in the fields, where sheidim were prevalent. The *chachomim* were concerned that someone might come late and stay in shul after everyone had already left, putting him in danger of being hurt by the sheidim. They therefore instituted that this *berachah* be said so latecomers would have time to catch up.<sup>102</sup>
- The reason we pour a drop of water from a cup before drinking it is because a sheid may have drunk some of the water.<sup>103</sup>
- One may not sleep alone in a house at night, lest he be endangered by a female sheid named Lillis.<sup>104</sup>

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100 Berachos 5a. This is why we say the first half of *kapitel* 91, called *shir shel pega'im*—a song that protects us from sheidim who attempt to inflict harm (see Shevuos 15b).

101 Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch 481:2.

102 Shabbos 24b. Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch 268:13.

103 Chullin 105b. Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, *Hilchos Shemiras Guf Venefesh* §4.

104 Shabbos 151b. Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, *Hilchos Shemiras Guf Venefesh* §6.

- One of the reasons a *chosson* and *kallah* need to be escorted by others is to protect them from sheidim, who may be jealous of their good fortune.<sup>105</sup>

## SHEIDIM TODAY

Were sheidim around in more recent times? Are they still around today? And is it true that they were banished from civilization?

The truth is that sheidim were never meant to be around people to begin with. The Gemara relates that R' Chanina ben Dosa decreed that sheidim (to be more specific: "Agras bas Machalas [a female demon] along with 180,000 angels of destruction") should not frequent civilization, except for Tuesday and Friday nights. Abayei further decreed that they should never frequent civilization (any night of the week). Even so, they would still sometimes visit the city (to quote the Gemara, "to bring back their horses that had escaped").<sup>106</sup>

Elsewhere, the Gemara relates that when a certain sheid inflicted damage, Mar bar Rav Ashi ruled that he must pay, explaining that he should not have been in a place frequented by people.<sup>107</sup>

The Ramban explains that this is the meaning of the word *sheid*. *Sheid* is related to the word *shadud*, desolate, because they dwell in desolate places such as deserts. They primarily dwell in areas such as the far north, where no one lives due to the extreme cold.<sup>108</sup>

Rabbeinu Bechaye elaborates on the residence of sheidim, dividing them into three categories: One group resides in the atmosphere; they are the demons that make us have bad dreams. A second group dwells between us, and they incite us

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105 Berachos 54b.

106 Pesachim 112b–113a. See also Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat, *shemiras guf v'nefesh* §6 and *kuntres acharon* there.

107 Chulin 105b.

108 Ramban to Vayikra 17:7.

to sin. The third group lives deep in the oceans; if they would be allowed to emerge, they would destroy the world.<sup>109</sup>

In more recent times, there is a well-known story in which sheidim inhabited a certain house in the city of Posen. R' Yoel Baal Shem summoned them to a *din torah*, maintaining that they belonged in uninhabited locations such as deserts, empty fields, and forests. They responded that they were created from the evil deeds and curses of the deceased owners of the house. Ultimately, R' Yoel Baal Shem succeeded in removing them.<sup>110</sup>

The Frierdiker Rebbe says in a *sichah* that even sheidim listened to the Baal Shem Tov's commands.<sup>111</sup> The Munkatcher Rebbe similarly writes that initially the Baal Shem Tov would send sheidim on various missions. However, at one point he stopped doing so due to their unreliability, and he banished them completely from civilization.<sup>112</sup>

In conclusion, there is no reason at all to be concerned about sheidim. When people would write to the Rebbe about negative events they believed were associated with *sheidim*, the Rebbe would categorically answer that this was not the case, and he would advise them to check their *mezuzos*, give *tzedakah*, and be careful in other areas of *mitzvah* observance.<sup>113</sup>

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109 Rabbeinu Bechaye to Shemos 20:4.

110 *Sefer Hazichronos*, vol. 2, chs. 80–82.

111 *Sefer Hasichos* 5701, p. 101.

112 *Divrei Torah, mahadura teshia'ah* §89.

113 See *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 11, p. 303. *Ibid.*, vol. 12, p. 64.



מוקדש  
להבחור הבר מצוה  
לזוי יצחק שי'

על ידי הוריו  
יהודה ליב וחיענא שיחיו

ועל ידי אחיו ואחיותיו  
ישראל מאיר, חי' מושקא, יוסף,  
פינחס שמואל, וחנה שיחיו  
אלטיין

יהי רצון מהשי"ת שתגדל להיות חסיד ירא שמים  
ולמדן, ותגרום נחת רוח רב לכ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו