

Fascinating Torah Topics



Teshurah from the bar mitzvah of

**YISROEL MEIR
ALTEIN**

5 Adar I, 5784

FASCINATING TORAH TOPICS

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2024

Comments and feedback can be emailed to the author at
translator@prolifictranslations.com

Foreword

It is our pleasure to present this *teshurah* in honor of the bar mitzvah of our son Yisroel Meir, 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
5 Adar I, 5784

Introduction

In 5777-5780, I had the merit of preparing a bi-weekly column titled “Fascinating Torah Topics.” The articles were prepared under the auspices of Yagdil Torah of Crown Heights led by Rabbi Levy Browd, and were printed in the *Yagdil Torah Bulletin*. 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 several such topics and discussed what Torah sources have to say about them.

In total, eleven topics were covered. This *teshurah* presents three of them: *livyasan*, *kefitzas haderech*, and two-headed creatures. Three additional topics—extraterrestrial life, the Ten Shevatim, and *golems*—were featured in a previous *teshurah*. The five remaining topics are animal speech, *gilgulim*, *golems*, hidden *tzaddikim*, and *malachim*.

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

Rabbi Yehuda Altein

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The Livyasan

Two-thirds of the Earth's surface is covered with water. Somewhere inside this great expanse of ocean lives the livyasan, a huge fish that was created before Adam Harishon, and will be eaten by the *tzaddikim* at the meal that will be served in the time of Moshiach.

What type of fish is the livyasan? What does it eat and where does it live? Has it ever been spotted throughout the ages? And what exactly will happen to it when Moshiach comes?

CREATION OF THE LIVYASAN

The Torah states¹ that on the fifth day of Creation, Hashem created the “large *taninim*.” Rashi explains that on a simple level, this refers to the large fish found in the ocean. Rashi continues by quoting the Midrash that explains this to be referring to the livyasan.

The Gemara² provides some more elaboration. The *possuk* in Yeshayahu³ mentions two types of livyasans. The first is the *livyasan nachash bariach*, the straight livyasan, referring to the male, and the second is the *livyasan nachash akalason*, the curved livyasan, referring to the female. Based on this, the Gemara explains that Hashem actually created two livyasans, one male and one female.

However, Hashem did not want them to reproduce, because if they would have many large offspring, they

1 *Bereishis* 1:21.

2 *Bava Basra* 74b.

3 *27*:1.

would destroy the world. Instead, He removed the male's desire to mate and killed the female, salting its meat to be eaten by the *tzaddikim* in the future.

Why was it necessary to kill the female? Couldn't Hashem have left it alive and simply removed its desire to mate, as He did with the male? The Gemara explains that fish mate and reproduce prolifically, and if both would be left alive, even if their desire to mate would be removed, they would still reproduce, with dire consequences.

Another question: Since the female was to be killed, why was it necessary to remove the male's desire to mate? Rashbam⁴ gives two answers: (1) So that it would not mate with other fish, and (2) due to *tzaar baalei chaim*, so that it should not have a desire it would be unable to meet.

One final question: Why didn't Hashem do the opposite, to kill and salt the male and remove the female's desire to mate? The Gemara gives two answers. The first answer is that the salted meat of a female fish is tastier than the salted meat of a male fish.

The second answer is based on the *possuk* in Tehillim⁵ that states, "You have created the *livyasan* to play with it." Indeed, when describing the "daily schedule" of Hashem, the Gemara says⁶ that during the last three hours of the day, Hashem plays with the *livyasan*. Since it would not be fitting to play with a female, it was the male that Hashem allowed to remain alive.

When discussing this Gemara about the creation of the *livyasan*, the Maharsha concludes: "Know that we should believe that all these things are to be understood literally. Although the *mefarshim* give deeper explanations, the simple meaning should still be retained."

⁴ *Bava Basra* ad loc.

⁵ 104:26.

⁶ *Avodah Zarah* 3b.

WHAT DOES THE LIVYASAN LOOK LIKE?

You may not know it, but there is actually an entire chapter-and-a-half in Tanach that discusses the livyasan, giving a detailed description of what it looks like.

In the *sefer* of Iyov, when describing Hashem's greatness, Hashem tells Iyov all about the livyasan, which is but one of His creations. The following is a sampling from these *pesukim*:

Can you pull the livyasan with a hook? Can you lower a rope in its tongue?... Who can open the doors of its mouth? Surrounding its teeth is fear. It prides itself in the strength of its shields [i.e., its scales]; they are firmly closed shut. Each [scale] joins with the other, and there is no empty space between them... Smoke comes out of its nostrils like a boiling pot. Its breath is hot like coals, and a flame emerges from its mouth... Mighty ones are frightened of its greatness; the waves recede [when it swims through the water]. Those who pursue it with a sword do not succeed, [as well as those with] a heavy spear and armor. It considers iron as straw and copper—as rotten wood... It looks down on all those who are high; it is the king over all who are arrogant.⁷

What exactly is this fearsome creature? On the level of *peshat*, many of the *pesukim* seem to match the description of a crocodile, a mighty animal with sharp teeth and covered with a thick layer of scales. (Regarding the fire coming out of its mouth, some *mefarshim* explain this to mean that it is so powerful that it is *as if* its breath is fire.⁸)

⁷ Iyov 40:25–41:26.

⁸ See *Metzudas Dovid* to Iyov 41:10–13.

Chazal, however, using the method of *derush*, interpret these *pesukim* as referring to the large fish known as the livyasan that we are discussing here. As we will see, Chazal explain many of these *pesukim* as hinting to the wondrous characteristics of the livyasan fish. The Gemara further states that the livyasan is a kosher fish, quoting two *pesukim* from Iyov as proof that it has both fins and scales.⁹

LIVYASAN FACTS

The Gemara and Midrash relate numerous wondrous characteristics of the livyasan.

(It should be noted that some of these phenomena should not be taken literally, and represent deep, mystical concepts.¹⁰)

The Gemara states that when the livyasan is hungry, it releases vapor from its mouth, causing the waters of the depths to bubble like water in a pot. When it is thirsty, it drinks so much water that furrows are created in the sea, and it takes the depths seventy years to return to their previous strength.¹¹

When the livyasan wishes to eat, it creates a wave in the sea. The fish think this is a sign of food and swim toward it. It then opens its mouth and consumes them all, and not one escapes.¹²

Another Midrash gives a different description of how the livyasan eats: “The great creatures of the sea are the food of the livyasan. The livyasan opens its mouth, and the great

9 *Chullin* 67b.

10 See *Chiddushei Aggados* (Maharal) to *Bava Basra* 74b.

11 *Bava Basra* 75a.

12 *Tanchuma, Nitzavim* 4.

creature whose turn it is to be eaten that day swims inside.”¹³

Another Midrash states that the entire world rests on the fins of the livyasan.¹⁴

Despite the livyasan’s great might, there is one creature from which it fears: the small *kilbis* fish, which enters the livyasan’s ear and gives it great pain.¹⁵

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE LIVYASAN

Has anyone ever encountered the livyasan throughout the ages?

The first person we know of who met the livyasan was Yonah. When he was swallowed by a fish and was in its stomach, the fish said to him, “Today is my turn to be consumed by the livyasan.”

“Bring me to him,” Yonah replied.

When they arrived, Yonah said: “When Moshiach comes, I will draw you out of the water and prepare you to be eaten by the *tzaddikim*. That is the reason I descended to the sea—to find out where you live, so I will be able to catch you then!” The livyasan was so frightened from Yonah that it swam away, and the fish was saved.¹⁶

Once, R’ Eliezer and R’ Yehoshua were traveling in the ocean. R’ Eliezer was sleeping, and R’ Yehoshua was awake. All of a sudden, R’ Yehoshua trembled, causing R’ Eliezer to wake up.

“What happened, Yehoshua?” asked R’ Eliezer. “Why have you trembled?”

13 *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer*, ch. 9.

14 *Midrash Kohen*. See *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra* 18c.

15 *Shabbos* 77b and *Rashi* there.

16 *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer*, ch. 10.

“I saw a large luminary in the sea,” R’ Yehoshua answered.

“Perhaps,” said R’ Eliezer, “what you saw were the eyes of the livyasan.”¹⁷

Rav Safra related: “I was once traveling in a ship, and I saw a fish sticking its head out of the water. The fish had horns, and on them was inscribed as follows: ‘I am merely a small creature of the sea, and I am three hundred *parsa’os* long. I am on my way to be consumed by the livyasan, as it is my turn to be eaten by it today.’”¹⁸

However, before you decide to arrange a livyasan-discovery expedition, keep in mind that as mentioned above, some of these stories should not be taken literally, and represent deep, mystical concepts. In fact, the Radak writes that no one ever saw the livyasan.¹⁹

On the other hand, we will all merit to see the livyasan very soon—during the famous fighting match between the livyasan and the shor habar when Moshiach comes.

THE SHOR HABAR

Before we discuss the details of this grand duel, let’s talk about the second contender in the fight—the shor habar.

The literal translation of shor habar is “wild ox.” One of the seven types of kosher wild animals listed in Parshas Re’eih²⁰ is the *te’o*, which Targum Onkelos translates as *torbela*, “ox of the forest.” Indeed, in addition to the well-known cows we see at farms, certain types of oxen live in the wild.

17 *Bava Basra* 74b.

18 *Bava Basra* 74a.

19 *Tehillim* 104:26.

20 14:5.

(The Mishnah records a *machlokes* regarding the status of these oxen: The Chachomim hold they are classified as domesticated animals, while R' Yossi holds they are classified as wild animals.²¹ The difference is whether or not their *cheilev* may be eaten, and whether or not their blood must be covered when slaughtered.²²)

However, the term “shor habar” has also come to refer to a tremendously large beast that will be part of the great meal of the future.

(It should be noted that some of the following phenomena should not be taken literally, and represent deep, mystical concepts.²³)

The Midrash adds some details about this amazing creature:

On the sixth day of Creation, Hashem created an animal that crouches on a thousand hills, and each day it grazes a thousand hills. [This is based on a *possuk* in Tehillim,²⁴ “*Beheimos b’harerei alef – beheimos* upon a thousand hills.”] At night the hills grow vegetation once again, as if they had not been touched... It drinks the waters of the Yarden... It is prepared for the great meal of the *tzaddikim*.²⁵

Another Midrash adds that according to R' Yochanan, the shor habar can drink the Yarden's output of six months in one gulp. According to Resh Lakish, in one gulp it drinks twelve months' worth of the Yarden's water.²⁶

The Gemara states that Hashem actually created two of these animals, one male and one female. To make sure

21 *Kilayim* 8:6.

22 *Raav* on the Mishnah there.

23 See *Chiddushei Aggados* (Maharal) to *Bava Basra* 74b.

24 50:10.

25 *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer*, ch. 11.

26 *Vayikra Rabbah* 22:10.

they wouldn't reproduce, he removed their ability and desire to mate, and saved them for the *tzaddikim* in the future.²⁷

LIVYASAN VERSUS SHOR HABAR

The Midrash describes the fighting match that will take place between the livyasan and the shor habar when Moshiach comes:

In the future, the shor habar and the livyasan will make a show before the righteous. Whoever did not attend animal fights in this world will merit to see this spectacle in the World to Come. How will they be slaughtered? The shor habar will pierce the livyasan with its horns and tear it apart, and the livyasan will pierce the shor habar with its fins and kill it.

The Midrash continues by asking: How is it possible that we will eat from such a *shechitah*? The *halachah* is that a *shechitah* is only valid if it is done with a smooth blade. The livyasan's fins are ridged and invalidate the *shechitah*! (Another problem is that *shechitah* is only kosher when done through a human, not through an animal!²⁸) The Midrash answers that in the times of Moshiach, Hashem will reveal a "new Torah," and such a *shechitah* will be permissible.²⁹

Of course, the Torah will never change, even in the days of Moshiach. A *shechitah* that is invalid today will remain that way then, too. How can it be that such a *shechitah* will be allowed?

²⁷ *Bava Basra* 74b.

²⁸ See *Rashash* to *Vayikra Rabbah* referenced below.

²⁹ *Vayikra Rabbah* 13:3.

Some *mefarshim* explain that this will be allowed as a *hora'as sha'ah*, a temporary measure.³⁰ However, if so, this *heter* is not a “new Torah.” Even today, if a prophet allows a certain *issur* to be done as a *hora'as sha'ah*, we are commanded to listen to him!

Others explain that the reason a blemished knife cannot be used is because it might tear the windpipe or esophagus instead of cutting it smoothly. Theoretically, if we were able to cut with a blemished blade and ensure a proper incision, it would be kosher. Practically, a human being cannot ensure this, but Hashem is the One who will slaughter the *shor habar* with the livyasan's fins, and He will make sure the cut is smooth.³¹

However, according to this explanation as well, the *heter* is based on Torah law as we know it today, and is not a “new Torah.”

The Rebbe explains that Hashem will reveal a new *chiddush* according to which the regular laws of *shechitah* never applied to this particular case. Moshiach will proceed to explain this *chiddush* to the members of the Sanhedrin until they will *understand logically* (based on the principles of Torah) that in this particular instance, such a *shechitah* is permitted.³²

SEUDAS LIVYASAN

The Gemara tells us that in the future, Hashem will make a meal for the *tzaddikim* from the meat of the livyasan. Whatever is left over will be sold by merchants in the markets of Yerushalayim.³³

30 *Radal* to *Vayikra Rabbah* ad loc. *Maharatz Chayus* to *Chullin* 67b and *Niddah* 61b.

31 *Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deiah* §19.

32 *Sefer Hasichos* 5751, vol. 2, pp. 566ff.

33 *Bava Basra* 75a.

Mefarshim ask: How does this statement fit with what Chazal say that in the future there will be no eating and drinking?³⁴

Perhaps we can answer based on the Rambam who says that this “meal” is a *mashal* for the tremendous good awaiting the souls of *tzaddikim* in *Olam Haba*.³⁵ The Rambam’s son, R’ Avraham, explains that the livyasan is a *mashal* for the *yetzer hara*. The “consumption” of the livyasan refers to the elimination of the physical desires that stem from the *yetzer hara*.³⁶

However, the Raavad questions the Rambam, as it appears from the Gemara that the meal will be a physical one.³⁷ Indeed, it seems that even the Rambam agrees that in addition to being a *mashal*, there will be an actual meal too.³⁸

Another possible answer is that the meal will be in the beginning of the times of Moshiach, and the statement of Chazal that there will be no eating applies to a later stage, after *Techiyas Hameisim*. However, it appears from the Alter Rebbe in *Likkutei Torah*³⁹ that the meal will occur in the era of *Techiyas Hameisim*.

The Rebbe explains that when Chazal say that in the future there will be no eating and drinking, they mean that there will be no *need* to eat and drink. Our bodies will receive its sustenance from the *Shechinah*, and there will be no need for food and drink to survive. However, there will still be a meal for the *tzaddikim*, not to give them physical energy, but for other reasons.⁴⁰

34 *Berachos* 17a.

35 *Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah* 8:4.

36 *Milchamos Hashem*.

37 *Raavad* on *Rambam* there.

38 See *Ramban* in his *Iggeres Hisnatzlus to Moreh Nevuchim*.

39 *Vayikra* 7c.

40 *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 2, p. 77, fn. 23.

Not only the livyasan's meat will be enjoyed by the *tzaddikim*. The Gemara continues that they will also merit to sit in *sukkos*, booths, fashioned from the livyasan's hide. Those who are less meritorious will be given lesser livyasan-skin items—either a canopy, necklace, or amulet.⁴¹ Some have the custom, when leaving the *sukkah* on Sukkos for the last time, to say a *tefillah* asking Hashem that they merit to sit in the *sukkah* made from the livyasan's hide.⁴²

THE LIVYASAN AL PI CHASSIDUS

Chassidus discusses at length the inner meaning of the livyasan and the shor habar.

In Likkutei Torah⁴³ the Alter Rebbe explains that the livyasan and shor habar represent two types of *tzaddikim*.

One category consists of “concealed” *tzaddikim*, whose *avodah* is focused mainly on spirituality and not as much on the physical world. These *tzaddikim* are compared to fish that are concealed within the water.

More specifically, these *tzaddikim* are called “livyasan.” The word livyasan can be translated as *connect*. (This is similar to the name Levi, which also means *connect*, as Leah said when Levi was born, “Now my husband will *connect* to me.”⁴⁴) This is because the *avodah* of these *tzaddikim* consists of initiating supernal *yichudim* and *connecting* the higher worlds to Hashem.

The second category consists of “revealed” *tzaddikim*, whose *avodah* is focused on physical actions. These *tzaddikim* are called “shor habar.” Although the simple

41 *Bava Basra* 75a.

42 *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 667:1.

43 *Vayikra* 18a–d.

44 *Bereishis* 29:34.

translation of *shor habar* is *wild ox*, the word *bar* can also mean *refine* (similar to the word *birur*). These *tzaddikim* elevate and refine (“bar”) the physical aspects of the world (“shor”).

Each type of *tzaddik* has an advantage over the other. The “concealed” *tzaddikim* reach a much higher level, while the “revealed” *tzaddikim* have the advantage of elevating physicality.

When Moshiach comes, the *livyasan* and *shor habar* will *shecht* each other. Chassidus explains that when *shechting* an animal, it becomes elevated. Similarly, the two groups of *tzaddikim* (*livyasan* and *shor habar*) will elevate each other and help them achieve the advantage they are missing.

In another *maamar*,⁴⁵ the Alter Rebbe explains why the *tzaddikim* will eat the meat of the *livyasan* and the *shor habar*. The *neshamos* of the future will be much higher than the *neshamos* of today. In order to elevate ourselves to that higher level, a spark from our *neshamos* will enter the meat of the *livyasan* and *shor habar*, and through being eaten by those *tzaddikim*, we will become elevated.

The Rebbe says that we should want Moshiach so strongly that even after eating a full meal, we are still hungry, as we are anticipating the *seudah* of the *livyasan* and *shor habar*.⁴⁶ May we partake of it *teikef umiyad mamosh!!*

45 *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra 7c.*

46 *Sefer Hasichos 5752*, p. 96.

Kefitzas Haderech

We have all heard many stories in which a *tzaddik* was able to reach his destination in a flash, using *kefitzas haderech* to travel with great speed. The Baal Shem Tov, for example, would often travel great distances in an extremely short amount of time, allowing him to accomplish various missions in far-flung locations.

Which individuals in Tanach experienced this supernatural feat? What about in more recent history? How exactly does *kefitzas haderech* work, and what can be done to achieve it?

KEFITZAS HADERECH IN TANACH

When examining the various sources, a list can be compiled of at least five biblical individuals who experienced this miraculous phenomenon:

1. When Avraham Avinu chased the four kings, he miraculously caught up to them in a very short amount of time. The Midrash quotes several opinions regarding the distance that passed with each step Avraham took: some say three *milin*, some say two *milin*, and some say one *mil*.⁴⁷ (To illustrate this more tangibly, a *mil* is 960 meters, over half a mile.)
2. When Eliezer left Chevron to find a wife for Yitzchak, he miraculously arrived in Charan that

⁴⁷ *Bereishis Rabbah* 43:3. *Midrash Tehillim* 110.

same day, despite the great distance between the two cities. A journey usually requiring seventeen days took him a mere three hours.⁴⁸

3. Yaakov left his parents and traveled all the way to Charan. Upon arriving, he said to himself: “Can it be that I passed the spot where my ancestors prayed, and I did not pray?” As soon as these thoughts passed through his mind and he turned around to retrace his steps, he found himself at Har Hamoriyah, as hinted to in the *possuk*, “*Vayifga bamakom* – He encountered the place.”⁴⁹
4. When Yosef told his brothers that he was planning to take Binyamin as a slave, Yehudah roared like a lion, and his voice was heard throughout the land of Mitzrayim. Chushim the son of Dan heard the cry from Eretz Canaan, and he arrived to assist his uncle, traveling to Mitzrayim with *kefitzas haderech*.⁵⁰
5. One Friday afternoon, Dovid was in danger of death at the hand of Yishbi, brother of Golyas, who wanted to avenge his brother’s blood. At that time, Avishai son of Tzeruyah, one of Dovid’s strongest warriors, was bathing in honor of Shabbos, and he noticed stains of blood in the water. According to another opinion, he noticed a dove pulling out its feathers and cooing frantically. Realizing that Dovid’s life must be in danger, he immediately made his way to the land of Pelishtim to help him, traveling there via *kefitzas haderech*.⁵¹

48 *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer*, ch. 16.

49 *Chullin* 91b.

50 *Bereishis Rabbah* 93:7 and *Pirush Maharzav* ad loc.

51 *Sanhedrin* 95a.

KEFITZAS HADERECH IN THE POST-TANACH ERA

Let us now examine the post-Tanach period and identify some of the individuals who accomplished the feat of *kefitzas haderech*.

One of the Geonim in Bavel was named R' Natrunai Gaon. The Jews of Spain had a *mesorah* that R' Natrunai traveled from Bavel to Spain with *kefitzas haderech*, where he taught them Torah, transcribing the entire Talmud for them from memory. He then returned to Bavel in the same way. (However, when the Jews of Kairouan, Tunisia, asked R' Hai Gaon about this tradition, he replied that it was false. In all probability, wrote R' Hai, an imposter had fooled them, stating that he was R' Natrunai.)⁵²

R' Elazar of Worms, author of the Rokei'ach, used a cloud to travel to Spain in just a few hours, so that he could teach the Ramban Kabbalah and bring about the death of the evil nobleman who ruled the city.⁵³ In another account, the Ramban used *kefitzas haderech* to escape from the king of Barcelona.⁵⁴

When R' Chaim Vital was in Yerushalayim, an Arab minister commanded him to open up the waters of Gichon which Chizkiyahu Hamelech had covered up. To escape his wrath, he fled to Damascus using *kefitzas haderech*.⁵⁵

Chassidim of the Alter Rebbe once asked Simchah the wagon driver if the Alter Rebbe would travel with *kefitzas haderech* like the Baal Shem Tov. "Fools!" Simchah replied. "With him, it was something obvious!"⁵⁶

52 *Otzar Hagedolim* vol. 7, pp. 213–214.

53 R' Yuzpa Shamash in *Maaseh Nissim*.

54 *Seder Hadoros*, year 4954.

55 *Shem Hagedolim*, entry on R' Chaim Vital.

56 *Sefer Hasichos* 5702, p. 106.

KEFITZAS HADERECH IN HALACHAH

Although *kefitzas haderech* is a miraculous phenomenon, there are actually a few times where *halachah* takes this feat into account.

The Gemara records an incident where a *get* was found in the city of Sura. In the *get* was written as follows: “On this-and-this date, I, Anan bar Chiya of Naharda’a, divorced my wife, Mrs. So-and-So, in the city of Sura.” The woman whose name appeared in the *get* claimed it had been given to her by her husband, who was in Sura on that date. After a thorough search of the city of Naharda’a, another person named Anan bar Chiya was discovered; however, he was not in Sura on the date mentioned in the *get*. Must we be concerned that this document was written (not by the woman’s husband, but) by the other person with the same name?

Abaye says this is of no concern. After all, he was not in Sura at that time; he could not have been the one to write the *get*, and it must have been written by the woman’s husband. Rava, however, disagrees, stating that we must be concerned it was written by the other Anan bar Chiya. As to the fact that he was not in Sura, Rava offers several possibilities, one of them being that perhaps he traversed that great distance with *kefitzas haderech*, using one of Hashem’s names to accomplish this feat.⁵⁷

Another area where *kefitzas haderech* plays a role in *halachah* is in the *sugya* of *techumin*. The *halachah* is that one may not travel more than 2000 *amos* outside a city on Shabbos or Yom Tov. However, this restriction does not apply above ten *tefachim*. One of the ways it is possible to travel at this height is by traveling via *kefitzas haderech*

57 *Yevamos* 116a.

using Hashem's name.⁵⁸ (Apparently, when traveling with *kefitzas haderech*, the traveler is not quite on the ground!)

Interestingly, some use this *halachah* to explain why Eliezer merited to travel with *kefitzas haderech* when journeying to Charan to find a wife for Rivkah. That day happened to be the Yom Tov of Sukkos (as it was three days after Rivkah's third birthday, which was on 13 Tishrei). The only way to travel the great distance between Chevron and Charan on Yom Tov without transgressing the *issur of techumin* was by traveling above ten *tefachim*, via *kefitzas haderech*.⁵⁹

THE PHYSICS OF KEFITZAS HADERECH: HOW EXACTLY DOES IT WORK?

How exactly does *kefitzas haderech* work? Imagine a scientist being present when Yaakov returned to Har Hamoriyah, or when the Baal Shem Tov journeyed to a far destination in the blink of an eye. The scientist analyzes what is occurring with scientific instruments and calculations, and publishes a paper revealing his discovery. What would his conclusions be?

The common understanding of *kefitzas haderech* is that the person travels at a speed much quicker than can usually be attained by a human. This can be compared to a speeding car or jet that can travel much faster than a person walking by foot. According to this explanation, the word *kefitzah* means to jump: the person "jumps" and covers great distances in a very short amount of time.

Interestingly, however, Rashi translates the word *kefitzah* in *kefitzas haderech* differently. Rashi quotes the *posuk* "*Lo sikpotz es yadcha* – Do not close your fist from your

⁵⁸ See *Eiruvin* 43b.

⁵⁹ *Yedei Moshe* to *Bereishis Rabbah* 59:11.

poor brother [and refrain from giving him *tzedakah*].” In this verse, the term *kefitzah* (*sikpotz*) means to close the hand, causing it to take up less space than usual. According to this understanding, *kefitzas haderech* means that the physical earth compresses and takes up less space, causing the traveler to reach his destination quickly. Although he is traveling at his usual speed, the space between him and a distant city is now identical to the space between a regular person and the *shul* around the corner.⁶⁰

In his commentary on the story of Yaakov in Parshas Vayeitzei,⁶¹ Rashi provides yet another understanding. He explains that when Yaakov retraced his steps from Charan to Beis El, Har Hamoriyah was uprooted from Yerushalayim and relocated to Beis El.⁶² According to this understanding, the person is walking at a usual speed, and the earth does not compress; instead, it is the *destination* that is approaching him. This would be equivalent to someone approaching a car driving toward him. An hour ago, when the car was many miles away, it would have been a five-hour walk to reach the car; now that the car is coming closer, it can be reached in just five minutes.

On a deeper level, *kefitzas haderech* can be explained as follows. Chassidus explains that time and place are created entities that Hashem ingrained within physicality. Thus, the more a person elevates himself from physicality and reaches higher levels of spirituality, the less value time and space possess in his reality. For a true *tzaddik* who lives a completely spiritual life, time and space play a very different role, and great distances can be traversed in extremely short amounts of time.⁶³

60 *Rashi* to *Sanhedrin* 95a and *Chullin* 91b.

61 28:17.

62 See, however, *Ramban* to Parshas Vayeitzei ad loc.

63 See *Maharal* in *Chiddushei Aggados* to *Sanhedrin* 95a.

DO-IT-YOURSELF KEFITZAS HADERECH: A (NOT SO) PRACTICAL GUIDE

Are there any practical guidelines on how to travel with *kefitzas haderech*?

One hint can be gleaned from Rashi's explanation of Eliezer's words, "*I arrived today at the well*": "I left today and I arrived today. *From here* [we learn] that he traveled with *kefitzas haderech*."⁶⁴ The Baal Shem Tov explains that Rashi is hinting that Eliezer's ability to travel with *kefitzas haderech* came "from here"—from these very words, because the Divine Name used to accomplish this feat is hinted to in this very *possuk*.⁶⁵ Others add that this Name is comprised of the four letters *alef, hei, vov, and hei*, the first letters of these words in Hebrew – וַאֲבוֹא הַיּוֹם אֶל הָעֵיִן.⁶⁶

Although some sources seem to imply that *tzaddikim* would accomplish *kefitzas haderech* by reciting this Name, others mention this name being written on a piece of parchment and placed on the vehicle being used to travel (such as a ship⁶⁷). Yet others relate stories where a Divine Name was engraved on a reed upon which the *tzaddik* would ride, flying through the air.⁶⁸ In fact, in a work from R' Chaim Vital dedicated to practical *kabbalah* (presently unpublished), he gives a lengthy description of how one can travel with *kefitzas haderech* by inserting a piece of parchment containing various Divine Names inside a hollow reed.

(It is well known that playing around with practical *kabbalah* can have negative effects on those who are not qualified to do so.)

64 *Rashi to Bereishis 24:42.*

65 *Avodas Yisroel to Bereishis, ibid.; Kesser Shem Tov §32.*

66 *Hashmatos to Ohev Yisroel.*

67 See *Seder Hadoros*, year 4954.

68 *Toldos Chachmei Tunis* pp. 114, 179.

We will conclude by quoting the Rebbe's words: May we merit to experience *kefitzas haderech* and quickly make our way out of this last stretch of *golus*, with the coming of Moshiach, immediately!⁶⁹

69 *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25, p. 339.

Two-Headed Creatures

The phenomenon of double-headed organisms, known in science as polycephaly, is extremely rare. However, there are several documented cases where animals and even humans were born with two heads, and such occurrences exist even today.

Polycephaly is caused by a malformation of twin fetuses in the mother's womb, which results in the two newborns being born fused together. This deformity can result in a variety of forms: sometimes the twins are born as two complete bodies joined together by a piece of cartilage (such twins can easily be surgically separated nowadays), and in more severe cases, the result is a single body with two heads.

Are there any sources in Torah for this phenomenon? Are any such people recorded in *sefarim*? And what halachos apply to these extraordinary creations?

TWO-HEADED ANIMALS

When going through the sources, a surprising *makor* comes up: Apparently, such a creature is mentioned in a *possuk* in Chumash!

The Torah lists the animals that are not kosher in Parshas Shemini, and again in Parshas Re'eih. Why does the Torah list them twice? The Gemara explains that there are a couple of new *dinim* we learn from Parshas Re'eih. One of

them is the *din* that an animal called a *shesua* may not be eaten.⁷⁰

What is a *shesua*?

The Gemara quotes Rav Chanin bar Aba, who identifies the *shesua* as a creature with two backs and two spines.⁷¹ This description itself is a matter of dispute between Rav and Shmuel:⁷² According to Shmuel, a *shesua* is a unique type of animal with two backs and spines, while Rav is of the opinion that a *shesua* is a two-backed calf (or other type of otherwise kosher animal) born to a regular cow.

[Interestingly, some posit that the two-backed species the Torah is referring to (according to Shmuel) is the peccary, a South American pig-like animal that has a groove along its back, giving it the appearance of two backs.⁷³]

Having two backs and two spines does not necessarily equal having two heads. However, Targum Yonasan ben Uziel translates a *shesua* as an “unborn fetus that possesses two *heads* and two spines,” giving us a clear source in Torah for a two-headed creature.

Targum Yonasan explains that the reason such a fetus is forbidden is because it cannot survive. Indeed, although there are recorded instances of animals that were born with two heads, most of them died within a few days. (One such instance, of an unborn two-headed calf discovered in its mother’s stomach in London in the year 5630/1870, was recorded by a *shochet* named R’ Avraham Zusman.⁷⁴)

70 *Chullin* 63b.

71 *Nidah* 24a, cited in *Rashi* to *Re'eih* *ibid.*

72 *Nidah* *ibid.*, as explained by *Rashi*.

73 See *Malbim* to *Shemini* 11:4.

74 In his *sefer Vayaas Avraham*, p. 118.

According to one explanation, this was also the form of the *egel hazahav*: an animal with two backs and two heads, one that appeared like a calf and the other like a donkey.⁷⁵

In the ninth century (during the era of the Geonim), an individual named Eldad HaDani arrived in the city of Kairouan, Tunisia. He claimed he hailed from the tribe of Dan (hence his name, HaDani), who lived with the tribes of Naftali, Gad, and Asher near the river Sambatyon. He repeated several *halachos* kept in his hometown, each one reputed to have been stated by Yehoshua bin Nun in the name of Moshe Rabbeinu. Some of these *halachos* are cited (and sometimes refuted) by the Rishonim, with varying approaches as to whether or not his story was credible.⁷⁶

One of these *halachos* reads as follows: “How should an animal or bird with two heads be slaughtered? The right head should be placed above, and the left head below. If the right head was slaughtered incorrectly, it is unfit, but if the left head was slaughtered incorrectly, it is kosher.”⁷⁷

Assuming this *halachah* is correct, how can it be reconciled with Targum Yonasan who states that a two-headed animal may not be eaten? A possible answer is that only an animal with two heads and *two* spines is forbidden, but an animal with two heads and *one* spine is permitted.

TWO-HEADED INHABITANTS OF SUBTERRANEAN WORLDS

Now that we have seen what the Torah has to say about two-headed animals, let's see what the Torah says about two-headed *people*.

75 R' Chaim Vital in *Etz Hadaas Tov*, *Chukas* 19:2.

76 See, for example, *Ibn Ezra* to *Shemos* 2:22.

77 *Eldad HaDani* (p. 87 in the Epstein edition).

The existence of people with two heads can be traced back to the first years of Creation, when Kayin sinned by murdering his brother Hevel.

The Zohar tells us that there are seven lands, one above the next: *Eretz, adamah, arka, gei, neshiyah, tziyah*, and *tevel*. The outermost land, *tevel*, is where we dwell; all the others lie beneath us, with *eretz* being the lowest of them all. When Kayin sinned, he was sent to the lowermost land of *eretz*, and when he did *teshuvah*, he ascended to the land known as *arka*. While he was there, he gave birth to children with two heads, who grew up and had similar children of their own.⁷⁸

Elsewhere, the Zohar describes the creatures of these subterranean worlds as “some having four faces, some two, and others, one.”⁷⁹ Another source describes the creatures of the land called *tevel*:⁸⁰ “There are 365 types of creatures in *tevel*...Some of them have two heads, four hands, one body, one stomach, and two feet...When they eat, they argue with each other and say, ‘You ate more than me! You drank more than me!’”⁸¹

Although these creatures do not dwell in our world, there were times when they paid us a visit. One such instance is recorded in a Midrash,⁸² which relates that Ashemdai once withdrew a person with two heads⁸³ from under the earth—a descendant of Kayin—and presented him to Shlomo Hamelech. The man married and had seven sons, six of whom had one head and one who had two.

78 *Zohar* I 253b–254a.

79 *Zohar* III 10a.

80 According to this source, *tevel* is also one of the lower worlds, unlike the *Zohar* cited above—see the *Chesed L’Avraham* cited in the next footnote.

81 *Beraysa D’Maaseh Bereishis*, cited in *Chesed L’Avraham* 2:4 (in the 1996 edition).

82 *Beis Hamidrash* (Yellinek), vol. 4, p. 151–152. A shortened version of the story is cited in *Tosafos to Menachos* 37a s.v. *O kum* and *Shitah Mekubetzes* ad loc.

83 According to one version, he possessed seven heads—see *Pirush Sefer Yetzirah L’Rebbi Yehudah Bartzeloni* (p. 228 in the new edition).

When the father died, the two-headed son claimed that he should be given a double portion, as he was actually two people, while the other sons argued that he was a single person and deserved just one portion. Shlomo Hamelech instructed that one head be covered, and hot water be poured on the other. This was done, and both heads started shouting from pain. “Since one head felt what happened to the other,” Shlomo said, “it must be that you are a single person!”

Another instance is recorded in the Zohar. R’ Chiya and R’ Yossi were once sitting on a mountain when a person suddenly emerged from a crack in a nearby rock. “Who are you?” they asked. “I am from the land called *arka*,” he replied, “and I have ascended to find out the name of the land you dwell in.” After a short conversation, the person re-entered the crack and disappeared.⁸⁴

[The famous *mekubal* R’ Avraham Azulai proves from this episode that the inhabitants of these underground lands are not physical creatures, but rather are similar to demons. If they were physical creatures like us, they would not be allowed to ascend to our world, just as we may not descend to theirs.⁸⁵]

TWO-HEADED PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD

Let us now continue and see if there are any recorded instances in Chazal and other *sefarim* of two-headed people who lived in *our* world.

The first recorded instance of such a person is mentioned in Gemara.⁸⁶ The Gemara states as follows:

⁸⁴ *Zohar* 1157a.

⁸⁵ *Chesed L’Avraham*, *ibid*.

⁸⁶ *Menachos* 37a.

A sage named Plimu once asked Rebbi: “If someone possesses two heads, upon which one does he lay *tefillin*?” Thinking he was making fun of him, Rebbi responded, “Either get up and go into exile or accept a *niduy*!” As they were talking, a person entered the room. “I would like to ask a halachic question,” he said. “My wife just gave birth to a firstborn boy with two heads. How many *shekalim* must I give the Kohen, five or ten?”

The Ralbag’s father, R’ Gershon ben Shlomo, records an account as told by the Muslim scholar Ibn Sina:⁸⁷

An Arabian woman once gave birth to twin girls. Both possessed a complete body with a head, hands, and feet, but their bodies were attached at the hip.

When they grew older, one of the women wanted to get married. However, the other did not want to do so.

Together, they came to the judge. The judge asked them to sit down, and then he asked the second sister to stand up. Slowly and with much effort, she stood up, while her sister remained stationary.

Next, the judge asked the first sister—the one who wanted to get married—to stand up. Unlike her twin, she stood up immediately, forcing her sister to move as well.

“I rule that you may marry,” the judge stated. “It is obvious that you are the main person, and your sister is subordinate to you.”

In his commentary to the above-mentioned Gemara, the Ben Ish Chai writes:⁸⁸

87 *Shaar Hashamayim*, ch. 8.

88 *Ben Yehoyada to Menachos* 37a.

Here in Baghdad, a woman once gave birth to a child with two heads, but she was too embarrassed to show him to others. She brought him to a European doctor; however, three days later, the child died.

Although I myself did not see him, I was told about it by the woman's relatives who saw him. I also asked the midwife directly, and someone else asked the doctor on my behalf, and they both verified it.

If such a phenomenon does exist, why did Rebbi react angrily to Plimu's question? The Ben Ish Chai offers two explanations. One reason is that he had asked a question about an extremely uncommon scenario. Alternatively, although such a person can exist, Rebbi supposed he could not survive to the age of thirteen when he is obligated to don *tefillin*.

WHICH HEAD DOES MITZVOS?

Let us now explore some of the halachic questions that have been raised regarding a person with two heads.

As mentioned above, the Gemara records a case where a father approached the *Chachomim* with a halachic question. "My wife just gave birth to a two-headed firstborn boy," he asked. "How many *shekalim* must I give the Kohen, five or ten?"

The Gemara continues by citing a *beraysa* that says he must give the Kohen ten *shekalim*. In a regular case of twins, Rashi explains, the father gives the Kohen just five *shekalim*. The reason is that only one of the twins is the true firstborn; it is impossible that they were both born at the exact same moment. However, in this case, since the twins possess a single body, they were both born at the same moment and are both the true firstborn.

One can argue that since they share a single body, perhaps five *shekalim* should be enough to redeem both of them. The Gemara explains that this is not the case. Regarding the redemption of the firstborn, the Torah clearly states that “You shall take five *shekalim* for each *head*.”⁸⁹ To redeem a firstborn with two heads, ten *shekalim* is required.

The Gemara also records a question raised by the sage Plimu: “If someone possesses two heads, upon which one does he lay *tefillin*?” The Gemara does not offer an answer, presumably because it is assumed that such a person will not survive to the age of thirteen.

What is the *din* if such a boy is born to Jewish parents and does, indeed, reach the age of bar mitzvah?

R’ Chaim Elazar Schapiro, the Munkatcher Rebbe, addresses a similar question. He recalls a pair of nine-year-old gentile twins he had seen as a child in Vienna who were split from the waist and above (each possessing a head, a set of hands, and a heart) and joined from the waist and below (together possessing a single set of legs). Such twins, says R’ Schapiro, are to be viewed as two distinct individuals. If such children were born to Jewish parents, they would each be required to don *tefillin* on their head and left arm.⁹⁰

It is questionable, however, what the *din* would be if the twins shared one body and a single set of hands, but possessed two heads. Are they regarded as a single entity, and only one head must don *tefillin*? If yes, which one? And if *tefillin* must be worn on both heads, must *tefillin* similarly be donned on both hands? If not, on which one should it be placed? The answers to these questions are unclear.

89 *Bamidbar* 3:47.

90 *Os Chaim Veshalom* 27:9, sec. 13.

TWO BODIES, ONE HEAD

In the previous sections, we explored what the Torah has to say about animals and people with one body and two heads. Let's now take a look at the opposite type of scenario: two separate bodies but heads that are joined together.

R' Yaakov Reisher, a European eighteenth-century Rav, describes a wondrous scene he witnessed one Chanukah:

Two non-Jewish twin boys were brought from a foreign country. They each possessed all their limbs and abilities, just like regular people, and their faces were also complete, but their heads were joined together at the side. In other words, the right boy's head near his left ear was attached to the left boy's head near his right ear. From the back, their heads appeared as one head that was extremely wide. They were over one year old.

When I saw them, I recited the *brachah* of *meshaneh habriyos*. One of the Jewish onlookers asked me to specify the *halachos* that would apply if such an occurrence would take place with a Jew, *chas veshalom*.

R' Yaakov proceeds to discuss various halachic applications. He quotes the Gemara cited above which records a question raised by the sage Plimu: "If someone possesses two heads, upon which one does he lay *tefillin*?" The Gemara does not offer an answer.

It appears from the Gemara that such twins may perhaps be halachically viewed as a single person, and therefore only one head would be required to don *tefillin*. However, R' Yaakov maintains that our case is different. Since they both possess separate bodies and faces, they are surely

considered as two separate individuals and are both required to don *tefillin*.

R' Yaakov brings an interesting proof that this is indeed the case.

The Gemara cites a *machlokes* as to how Chavah was created from Adam. According to one opinion, Adam was created with an extra tail-like appendage which Hashem subsequently removed and used to create Chavah. According to a second opinion, Hashem initially created a two-sided figure, with Adam at the front and Chavah at the back, which He then proceeded to split.⁹¹

What is the source for this second opinion? The *possuk* says, "Hashem created them male and female, and he called their name, 'Adam.'"⁹² The wording of the *possuk* implies that the initial creation of man was as a male and female.

R' Yaakov focuses on the fact that the *possuk* uses the plural, "created *them*...called *them*." This implies that the creation of Adam and Chavah as a joint unit is to be viewed as a double creation, because even before they were split they were considered as two entities.

Now, Adam and Chavah were attached from top to bottom, yet they were considered to be two people. All the more so in our case, where the twins were born with separate bodies and joined heads: they are halachically viewed as two individuals, and each one is obligated to perform *mitzvos*.⁹³

R' Yaakov concludes his *teshuvah* with a prayer: "May Hashem rescue us from all malformed creatures." May all Jewish children be born healthy and complete!

91 *Brachos* 61a.

92 *Breishis* 5:2.

93 *Shu"t Shevus Yaakov* 1:4.

מוקדש
להבחור הבר מצוה
ישראל מאיר שי'

על ידי הוריו
יהודה ליב וחיענא שיחיו

ועל ידי אחיו ואחיותיו
לוי יצחק, חי' מושקא, יוסף,
פינחס שמואל, חנה, ושניאור זלמן שיחיו
אלטיין

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