



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Letter Perfect
2. Happy Birthday to Germs
3. Yiddle Riddle



[LS1]Sol Harris < 74654.257@compuserve.com > wrote:
Dear Rabbi,

While looking at the Torah scroll, I have noticed that the top of most every section starts with the letter 'vav.' Is there a specific reason for this? I'm sure that this is not a coincidence. All these years I did not realize this until very recently. Shalom

Dear Sol Harris,

It's no coincidence. Starting each column with the letter 'vav' is a custom some scribes follow when writing a Torah scroll. It is mentioned in the Zohar and the Shulchan Aruch.

To jockey a letter 'vav' to the head of each column, scribes would sometimes ignore proper form and spacing, stretching letters or squishing them together. The result was not pretty, invalid, or both. For this reason, the *Semak* (13th century) and the *Mordechai* (1240-1298) wrote that they would like to abolish this custom.

Today, some scribes use computers to plan the layout of a beautiful, valid Torah scroll with a 'vav' on top of every column.

This custom is reminiscent of the courtyard surrounding the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) in the desert. Tapestries held in place by little hooks stretched from one upright column to another. The Hebrew word for a 'little hook' is 'vav'; hence, each 'column' had a 'vav' on top.

As a prefix, the letter 'vav' means 'and' — hence it is the letter of 'connection.' The 'vav' on top of each column hints to the Torah's unity. Torah is our 'connection' to the spiritual.

Sources:

- *Yoreh De'ah 273:6, Rema*
- *Ibid., Shach, Birkei Yosef*
- *Tikunei Zohar Parshat Terumah*

Dr. Robert E. Braitman < braitman@massmed.org > wrote:

In Ask the Rabbi Issue #106, Brian Connack wrote:

"I was at a birthday party recently and the hostess insisted that the birthday boy not blow out the candles, rather she put them out by hand. Is there any basis to this custom (not to blow out a candle)?

Perhaps the most common reason is that parents don't want their children spreading infection by blowing on the cake. More often than not there is more saliva than air expended in the act of blowing out a candle!

ROBERT E. BRAITMAN, M.D.

President, NE Region, Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs

Yiddle Riddle

Raphael N. Levi < rnlevi@village.ios.com > wrote:

Here is a Yiddle Riddle for you. Which ONE verse (NOT different verses with the same words) is read publicly from the Torah most frequently?

PS I enjoy your comments (even though I'm FFB).

Dear Raphael N. Levi,

Thanks for the riddle. By the term FFB, you mean 'Frum (Torah observant) From Birth.' That reminds me of a story: Once, a young man studying in Ohr Somayach — a yeshiva where many students are newly observant — went to see the famous Chassidic Rebbe of Gur.

"In which yeshiva do you study?" the Rebbe asked.

"Ohr Somayach," he answered. "But I'm not a Ba'al Teshuva (newly observant)," the young man hastened to add.

"You're not a Ba'al Teshuva?" asked the Rebbe in surprise. "Why aren't you?"

The Rebbe meant to say that everyone needs to make a personal commitment to the Torah, to become 'newly observant' every day.

(answer to riddle next week)

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