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**A Review of the article "On the matter of the number of verses, words and letters in the Torah" by Rabbi Isaac Zilber** (from *Moriah*, 22<sup>nd</sup> year, issue A-B [153-154], Elul 5758 (1998))

The translated text of R' Zilber's article is in red letters, our comments in black. Before starting to comment on this article by R' Zilber, we should note that this is not the first time R' Zilber has published these ideas. Avraham Korman published an article on this very subject in 1975,<sup>1</sup> and another one in 1981,<sup>2</sup> in which he quotes R' Zilber. Most of the ideas that R' Zilber brings here were already brought in his name in Korman's article. Therefore we will refer to Korman's article as the first version of R' Zilber's article, although it wasn't published by the same person. We should also mention that between the time we started to write this review of R' Zilber's article and its publication, it came to our knowledge that another review of the article by R' Zilber (and R' Korman) was written by Prof. Menachem Cohen, available at <http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/StatSci/text.html>. We recommend the reader read both reviews, although they have much in common, since each review also covers the subject from some angles that are not discussed by the other review.

We learn in Mesechet Kidushin (page 30a): "Therefore the first ones were called *soferim*, for they counted every letter in the Torah, for they said the *vav* of *Gachon* (Leviticus 11:42) is the middle of the letters of the Torah scroll, *darosh darash* (Leviticus 10:16) is the middle of the words, and *v'hitgalach* (Leviticus 13:33) is the middle of the verses, *yecharsemena chazir m'yaar* (Psalms 80:14) the *ayin* of *ya'ar* is the middle of Psalms, *v'hu rachum yechaper avon* (Psalms 78:38) is the middle of the verses. R' Yosef asked: 'is the *vav* of *Gachon* on this side or on that side?'. They told him: 'Let's bring a book and count it, like Rabba Bar Bar Hana said [in another context]: They did not move from there until a sefer Torah was brought and counted'. He replied: 'They were experts in defective and plene spelling, we are not experts'. Rav Yosef asked: '*V'hitgalach* is on one side or on the other?' Abaye said to him: 'At least the verses we can count?' -[No,] in verses, likewise, we are not experts. For when Rav Acha Bar Ada came he said: 'In the Land of Israel they have separated this verse into three verses - "And G-d said to Moses, Behold I am coming to you in the thickness of the cloud" (Exodus 19:9).' The rabbis taught that 5888 verses are the verses of the Torah scroll, Psalms has eight more and Chronicles has eight fewer." These are the words of the Talmud.

After research and checking the letters, words, and verses of the Torah, we find that the *vav* of *Gachon* is not the middle letter, *darosh darash* is not the middle of the words, and *v'hitgalach* is not the middle verse, the *ayin* of *ya'ar* is not the middle of Psalms, *v'hu rachum yechaper avon* is not in the center of the verses of Psalms, the number of verses in the Torah is 5845 and not 5888, Psalms numbers 2528 verses and is not larger than the Torah, and in Chronicles there are only 1656 verses.

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<sup>1</sup> אברהם קורמן, "מספר הפסוקים בתורה", שמעתין, תמוז תשל"ה, שנה יב (גליון 43)

<sup>2</sup> אברהם קורמן, "מספר הפסוקים המלים והאותיות שבתנ"ך", שמעתין, תשמ"א, (גליון 66-65)

But the Sages did not write inexact words, "It is not an empty thing for you." What is written in the Torah and said by the Sages is not an empty thing; if you see it as empty, it is "for you" -- it is because for you it is empty, you are the one who does not understand, and you must trouble yourself and research it; when you have troubled yourself and researched it you will understand.

Before addressing R' Issac Zilber's specific arguments, I want to discuss the matter more generally. I don't know R' Issac Zilber's motivation in writing this document. But just in case he is trying to sustain the belief that the Torah scrolls we have nowadays are precise to the letter, I'll mention here a few rabbis who claim that this is not so, mostly in matters of defective and plene spelling. And this they learnt from this passage in Kiddushin 30a, as well as from some discrepancies that exist between our version of the Torah and what is implied in several Halachic and Aggadic homilies in the Talmud and Midrashim, and from the differences between different Massoratic manuscripts and schools.

For example, the Shagat Aryeh says (in response 36 in his responsa book) that we no longer are obligated by the commandment for each person to write a Torah scroll for himself because we are not expert in defective and plene spelling:

- שו"ת שאגת אריה (סימן לו): "יכולני לפטור מדין אחר ממצוות כתיבת ספר תורה בזמן הזה, משום דאפילו בימי אמוראים לא היו בקיאים בחסרות ויתרות, כדאמר ליה רב יוסף לאביי (קידושין ל ע"א): 'אינהו בקיין בחסרות ויתרות, אן לא בקיין'."

[Translation: "I could rule that the commandment of writing a Torah scroll does not apply nowadays, because even in the Amoraim's time they were not expert in defective and plene spellings, as Rav Joseph had said to Abaye [Kiddushin 30a], 'They are expert in defective and plene spellings, we are not expert'."]

And the Chatam Sofer explained that this is also the reason why Chazal didn't order us to say a blessing before writing a Torah scroll. These are his words:

- שו"ת חתם סופר חלק א (או"ח) סימן נב: "מאי טעמא לא מברכים על מצוות עשה של כתיבת ספר-תורה? [...] לע"ד אין קושי' זו צריכה לפנים כי אילו היו חז"ל בקיין בחסרות ויתרות היו מתקנים ברכה לס"ת אבל יען שהם עצמם לא היו בקיין כמבואר בקידושין למ"ד ע"א דאפילו בפסוקי לא בקיין, ועוד איכא כמה פעמים דהמסורה פליג אהש"ס וכותבים כהמסורות ולהש"ס פסול הס"ת, [...] וכיון שכן וקיי"ל ס"ת שחסר אות א' לא נקרא ס"ת [...] א"כ ממילא א"א לברך בשום אופן כנלע"ד."

(Translation: "What is the reason we don't recite a blessing when we fulfil the commandment of writing a Torah scroll? [...] In my humble opinion there is no question. Were Chazal expert in defective and plene spellings, they would have established a blessing for [the writing of] a Torah scroll. But they themselves were not expert, as brought in Kiddushin 30a, that even in the [partition of the text into] verses they were not expert; moreover, there are several instances where the Massorah differs from the Talmud, and [we] write according to the Massorah -- so that according to the Talmud, our scrolls would be invalid. [...] and since we know that a Torah scroll that is missing even one letter is not called a Torah scroll [...] therefore we cannot bless in any way. This is my humble opinion.")

And the Rema ruled that if an error was found in a Torah scroll in matters of defective and plene spelling, we don't need to take out another scroll. And this is because our Torah scrolls are not so precise, and we cannot be sure that the other scroll will be more kosher than the one in which the error was found. Here are his words:

- שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן קמג סעיף ד: "אם נמצא טעות בס"ת בשעת קריאה, מוציין ספר תורה אחרת, [...]. הגה: [...] והא דמוציין אחר, דוקא שנמצא טעות גמור, אבל משום חסירות ויתרות אין להוציא אחר, שאין ספר תורה שלנו מדוייקים כל כך שנאמר שהאחרת יהיה יותר כשר [...]."

R' Baruch Epstein, in his Torah Temima commentary on the Torah, says:

- פרוש תורה תמימה מאת ר' ברוך הלוי אפשטיין  
 ויקרא יא' מב', אות (קפח): "לעיל בפסוק דרש משה הוי חציין של תיבות שבתורה, וכאן הוא חציין של מספר האותיות, ויתכן דלרמז זה בא הו' דגחון רבתא. אמנם כבר עמדו למנין ואין מספר החצי בכאן מכוון, ואין ספק שזה הוא מפני שאין אנו בקיין בחסרות ויתרות כמו חכמי התלמוד".  
 ויקרא יג' לג', אות (קמד): "לעיל סוף פרשת שמיני בפסוק כל הולך על גחון אמרו ו' דגחון חציין של אותיות שבתורה וכאן מציין חציין של פסוקים. ויתכן דלסימן הדבר בא כאן ושם הג' והו' [דגחון] באותיות רבות. אמנם צ"ע דבחומשים המדוייקים אצלנו נסמן בפרשת צו על הפסוק ויאפד לו בו (ח' ז') חצי התורה בפסוקים, וצ"ל עפ"י מה שכתבו התוספות בשבת נה' ע"ב ובכמה מקומות דהגמרא חולקת עם המסורה שלנו, ולפי זה אפשר דגם בהפסקת הפסוקים יש מחלוקת בין התלמוד והמסורה".

(Translation:

On Leviticus 11:42 - "Above, in the verse *darosh darash* (Leviticus 10:16), was the middle of the Torah words, and here is the middle of the Torah letters, and possibly the *vav* of *is* is larger in order to hint this. However, the letters were counted and it was found that the middle here is not accurate, and there is no doubt that this is because we are not expert in defective and plene spelling as were the sages of the Talmud."

On Leviticus 13:33 - "Above in Leviticus 11:13 they said that *vav* of *Gachon* is the middle of the Torah letters and here they note the middle of the Torah verses. And maybe in order to mark this the *gimel* of *v'hitgalach* here and the *vav* of *Gachon* there are larger letters. However there is a difficulty, for in our precise *chumashim* we find the middle of the Torah verses is marked in Leviticus 8:7. And we have to say according to what *Tosfos* say in Shabbat 55b, and in several other places, that the Talmud disputes our Massorah, that here, too, it's possible that the Talmud disputes our Massorah in the partition [of the text into] of verses.")

More Rabbinical sources on this matter can be found in Appendix A of this document, and even more Rabbinical sources and references can be found in the article by Prof. Menachem Cohen: <http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/opinions/CohenArt/>, and in footnotes 15-20 of Prof. Jeffery Tigay's article: <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~jtigay/codetext.html>.

### **The matter of the *vav* of *Gachon***

As I learned the above topic with my son, R' Ben-Zion, may he live, we thought that perhaps the intent was to the odd letters in the Torah, and not to every letter in the Torah.

It is clear that this assumption has no basis. This reading of the Talmud is extremely implausible for the following reasons:

1. The Talmud says explicitly:

לפיכך נקראו ראשונים סופרים - שהיו סופרים כל האותיות שבתורה, שהיו אומרים: וא"ו דגחון - חציון של אותיות של ס"ת."

(Translation: "Therefore the first ones were called *soferim*, for they counted every letter in the Torah, for they said the *vav* of *Gachon* (Leviticus 11:42) is the middle of the letters of the Torah scroll.")

2. The Talmud says:

בעי רב יוסף: וא"ו דגחון מהאי גיסא, או מהאי גיסא? א"ל: ניתי ס"ת ואימניה! מי לא אמר רבה בר בר חנה: לא זזו משם עד שהביאו ספר תורה ומנאום? א"ל: אינהו בקיאי בחסירות ויתרות, אנו לא בקיאינו.

(Translation: "R' Yosef asked: 'is the *vav* of *Gachon* on this side or on that side?'. They told him: 'Let's bring a book and count it, like Rabba Bar Bar Hana said [in another context]: They did not move from there until a Torah scroll was brought and counted'. He replied: 'They were experts in defective and plene spelling, we are not experts'.")

If the Talmud meant that *vav* of *Gachon* is the middle of the odd letters only, then R' Yosef's answer doesn't make much sense. He should have replied that we are not expert in odd letters, not that we are not expert in defective and plene spelling!

Perhaps R' Zilber might say that when R' Yosef says here חסירות ויתרות he doesn't mean defective and plene spelling but rather small and large letters. However, such an explanation would be very novel. The literal meaning of the expression חסירות ויתרות is "missing [or deficient] and excessive." Now, in theory this could mean either "deficient and excessive letters" in the sense of their size (i.e. small and large letters) or "missing and excessive letters" in the sense of spelling (i.e. defective and plene spelling). However, when we look in the Talmudic literature we find that this expression appears twice more in contexts which makes it clear that it refers to defective and plene spelling<sup>3</sup>. There is no place where this expression refers to small and large letters, and we haven't found any rabbinical source that uses it with this meaning, whereas it appears many times in rabbinical literature with the meaning of defective and plene spelling.

3. In the following quote from *Masechet Sofrim* 9:2 (that was written in the Early Gaonic era, between 500-750 CE, according to Prof. S.Z. Havlin in Encyclopedia Hebraica) we find that "*vav* of *Gachon*" is large because it is the middle of the letters of the Torah!

מסכתות קטנות מסכת סופרים פרק ט ה"ב: "ו' דגחון צריך להיות זקוף, שהוא חצי אותיות של תורה. דרש דרש, חצי תיבות של תורה, דרש סופה, דרש ראשה. וישחט צריך ח"ת פשוט, שהוא חצי הפסוקים של תורה."

According to R' Zilber's opinion, on the other hand, "*vav* of *Gachon*" is the middle of the letters of the Torah because it is large! If it weren't large it couldn't be the middle of the odd letters of the Torah. So we see clearly that

<sup>3</sup> תלמוד בבלי מסכת מנחות דף כט עמוד ב; אוצר המדרשים (אייזנשטיין) עמוד קצד.

this source from the Gaonic era doesn't admit R' Zilber's reading, that "*vav* of *Gachon*" is the middle of the odd letters only.<sup>4</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that almost none of the rabbis who were faced with the contradiction between the Talmudic statement about the middle letter of the Torah and what we find in our scrolls tried to explain it as R' Zilber does. Among the Rishonim we didn't find any comment on this difficulty (presumably because they didn't know where the real middle of the Torah letters is). But we found that some of the later Achronim dealt with this problem.

Above, we saw Rabbi Baruch Epstein admitting that there is a contradiction and attributes it to our lack of knowledge in defective and plene spelling, i.e. he admits that our Torah scroll is significantly different in defective and plene spelling from that of the Talmud. Another rabbi who held the same view is Rabbi Avraham Ben Tsvi Yafeh, author of the book *Mishnat Avraham*, a book on the halachot of writing a Torah scroll. In section 11 of the introduction to this book he writes (p. 12-13 in the 1868 edition):  
"אך לעניות דעתי מעיקרא לא קשיא מידי. כיון שהש"ס אמר דאינהו בקיאי בחסר ויתיר, יכול להיות שבחצי הראשון היה יותר מן ה' אלפים חסרות, ובחצי האחרון היה יותר מן ה' אלפים יתרות עד שהיה ואו דגחון מכון אמצע. אבל אנן דלא בקיאי בחסרות ויתרות בודאי אצלנו ואו דגחון אינו אמצע כנ"ל. וזה עיקר הרבותא מסופרים ראשונים שהיו בקיאי בחסרות ויתרות ומחמת זה היה אצלם ואו דגחון מכון אמצע. כך נראה לי פשוט."

(Translation: "...but in my humble opinion there is no problem here to start with. Since the Talmud said that they were experts in defective and plene spelling, it's possible that in the first half they had more than 5000 missing letters [i.e. defective spellings, where we have plene], and in the last half they had more than 5000 excessive letters [i.e. plene spellings where we have defective], and so they had *vav* of *Gachon* exactly in the middle. But we are not expert in defective and plene spelling, and therefore we don't have *vav* of *Gachon* exactly in the middle. And this is the merit of the *sofrim*, that they were experts in defective and plene spelling and therefore they had *vav* of *Gachon* exactly in the middle. So it looks simple to me.")

Another rabbi, R' Yaacov Shor, tried to resolve the contradiction by deciding that the Talmudic text here is corrupt. However, this solution is also difficult, for all the manuscripts of the Talmud we have support our version on this matter (of the middle letter), as do all the quotes from the Rishonim. And most important, our version on this matter is supported by *Masechet Sofrim*. There is also no reasonable philological explanation for how a Talmudic text (as suggested by this rabbi) which states the correct middle letter of the Torah, the *vav* of *hoo* in Leviticus 8:28, would get corrupted into the *vav* of *Gachon* of our version.<sup>5</sup> So it seems that this suggestion should be rejected as well. Even from a traditional point of view, suggesting such a radical change to the text of the Talmud without any basis is almost as bad as suggesting a very large amount of differences in plene and defective spellings between

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<sup>4</sup>It is also interesting to note that we find in this source that the verse "*Vayishchat...*" is the middle verse of the Torah. In our Torah text there are five verses beginning with "*Vayishchat*" -- Leviticus 8:15, 8:19, 8:23, 9:12 and 9:18

by the Masorah), which is Leviticus 8:8 - "*Vayasem alav et hachoshen*". However, the middle verse according to *Masechet Sofrim* is much closer to the middle verse in our text than is the middle verse according to the Talmud in Kiddushin 30a.

<sup>5</sup>Similarly, there is no reasonable explanation for how the true middle word of the Torah - המזבח in Leviticus 8:15 -- could get corrupted into דרש דרש.

the Talmud's Torah and our Torah. As R' Elyahu Posek, whom we mention below, says about R' Shor's suggestion: "בראותי זאת רעדה אחזתני לעשות טעות גדול כזה בגמרא."

We found only one rabbi who suggested a solution similar to R' Zilber's. R' Elyahu Posek, in the article *משה דרש משה* in his book *Piskey Eliyahu*, Part 3, (published in 1928) suggested that maybe *vav* of *Gachon* is the middle of

"אותיות קטנות וקרי ולא כתיב עקושות ונקודות ... אותיות גדולות, כתיב ולא קרי ומשוכות"

However, he only raised it as speculation and didn't try to develop it in detail and to check it as R' Zilber did. In any case, his suggestion shows us the large **arbitrary** wiggle room which exists. We can look at large letters only, or at large and small only, or at both large, small and those which appear in *ktiv* but not *kri*, etc. etc.

[And we should note that earlier in his article R' Posek even tells us that he played with yet another idea - that maybe *vav* of *Gachon* is the middle of all the *vav* letters in the Torah! Only this idea didn't work, since in fact it is *vav* no. 14883 out of 28602 *vavs*, and therefore 1164 *vavs* away from bring the middle *vav* (according to his count).]

Further discussion of the rabbinical opinions we mentioned here appears in R' Reuven Margalioth's book *המקרא והמסורה*, pp. 13-16 and 44-46.

I checked and found that there are two alternatives in the matter: according to our Torah scrolls there are 16 larger or smaller letters and according to Rabbeynu Yosef Tuv Elem (brought in the *Vitri Mahzor*, Part 2, pg. 673) there are 32 odd letters. According to both opinions the *vav* of *Gachon* is the middle letter--8 to one side and 8 to the other according to one opinion, or 16 to one side and 16 to the other, according to the second opinion.

Beyond the fact that in our opinion this whole idea has no basis to start with, for the reasons we listed above, we should also note that R' Zilber's claim that there are "two alternatives" on this matter is overoptimistic. In fact, we were able to find many more alternatives. In the Jewish literature of the last 1000-1500 years we found many different lists of large and small letters in the Torah, and we present some of them in a table in Appendix B.

As we said, we don't accept R' Zilber's theory, and instead we think that *vav* of *Gachon* was supposed to be the middle of all the letters of the Torah, not just the odd ones. In any case, on statistical grounds we can expect that *vav* of *Gachon* will be in the middle of most of these lists of odd letters. The reason is really simple and straightforward. On the one hand, the odd letters of the Torah are distributed across the Torah more or less evenly, but very sparsely. In the largest lists of odd letters in the Torah there are no more than 50 odd letters, so the average distance between adjacent odd letters is larger than 2% of the length of the Torah. On the other hand, *vav* of *Gachon* is relatively close to the real middle of the Torah (it is 4829 letters away, which is less than 2% of the length of the Torah). The combination of these two facts inevitably leads to the result that in any list of the odd letters in the Torah, *vav* of *Gachon* will be close to the middle, with high chances of being the exact middle.

And indeed this is what we find in Appendix B. *Vav* of *Gachon* is in the middle in most of the lists of the odd letters, but not in all of them. For example, in the list of large and small letters that exist in today's Yemenite Torah scrolls and in the list of odd letters

that appears at the end of the famous Leningrad manuscript (the oldest complete manuscript of the Bible extant), *vav* of *Gachon* is clearly not in the middle. There are more lists like these. In fact, there is even a list of the large letters in the Bible where *vav* of *Gachon* is not even mentioned at all! This is the list printed in the Massorah at the beginning of Genesis in the *Mikraot Gedoloth* edition.<sup>6</sup>

So we can now add another reason for rejecting R' Zilber's theory. It simply doesn't fit the facts about odd letters as nicely as he thought!

And it may be possible to derive it from the precise wording of the Talmud, as it is not written "the middle of the letters of the Torah" as is written before that, "for they counted every letter in the Torah." It is written, "the middle of the letters of the Torah scroll"--as they are written in the Torah scroll.

As we said above, we think that from the Talmud's words here we should deduce precisely the opposite - that *vav* of *Gachon* is the middle of **all the letters** of the Torah.

And the Rambam, in chapter 7 of Hilchot Sefer Torah, halacha 8, wrote thus: "and he should be careful with the larger letters and the smaller letters, etc. as the scribes copied each from another." Thus his words. And Rabbeynu Bachya on the laws of Torah wrote: "It is part of the wholeness of the Torah and the hints hidden in its letters, for this is why the Torah brought backwards letters and hanging ones, and also crooked and winding, and so larger and smaller, and so striped and dotted." Thus his words.

However, as the Rambam himself says in the following halacha (chapter 7 of Hilchot Sefer Torah, halacha 9), if one is not careful about marking the odd letters, the Torah scroll is still valid:

רמב"ם הלכות תפילין ומזוזה וספר תורה פרק ז הלכה ט: "כל הדברים האלו לא נאמרו אלא למצוה מן המובחר, ואם שינה בתיקון זה או שלא דקדק בתגין וכתב כל האותיות כתיקונן או שקרב את השיטין או הרחיקן או האריכן או קצרן הואיל ולא הדביקן אות באות ולא חיסר ולא הויתר ולא הפסיד צורת אות אחת ולא שינה בפתוחות וסתומות הרי זה ספר כשר."

If we take the odd letters in the books of our Torah, the larger ones and the smaller, aside from the truncated *vav* of "את בריתי שלום" (Numbers 28:12) which is a singular case in the whole Tanach, we get this picture:

It's not clear why we shouldn't include this truncated *vav* in the list of odd letters. Even though it is a truncated letter and not a large or small one, it is still an odd one. And while we are about it, we can also ask-- why not include other kinds of odd letters? There are many other kinds of odd letters and odd attributes related to letters in the text of the Torah. For example, the backwards *nuns* in Numbers 10:35-36 or the letters that have dots upon them, as in 29:28 and other places. Several more kinds of oddities like these are listed in the passages from the Rambam and Rabbeynu Bachya that R'

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<sup>6</sup> Another long list of the large letters in the Bible that doesn't contain *vav* of *Gachon* appears in a page from the Cairo Geniza, published in PAAJR 35 (1967) p. 1-10. However, it's not clear how authoritative this list is.

Zilber mentions above, and in the passage we brought in the name of R' Elyahu Posek. Or alternatively, instead of including other kind of odd letters we can include only large letters as R' Zilber himself does regarding the verses below!

Anyway, returning to the truncated *vav*, the arbitrariness of not including it here is highlighted by the fact that in the first version of this article R' Zilber did include it in the list of odd letters!<sup>7</sup>

### Genesis

**ב** בראשית (1:1)--larger  
**ה** בהבאם (2:4)--smaller  
**כ** ולבכתה (23:2)--smaller  
**ק** קצתי בחיי (27:46)--smaller

One larger + three smaller =  
4 odd letters

### Exodus

**נ** נצר חסד (34:7)--larger  
**ר** אחר (34:14)--larger

Two larger =  
2 odd letters

### Leviticus

**א** ויקרא (1:1)--smaller  
**מ** מוקדה (6:2)--smaller  
**ו** גחון (11:42)--larger  
**ג** והתגלח (13:33)--larger

Two larger + two smaller =  
4 odd letters

### Numbers

**י** יגדל (14:17)--larger

One larger letter = 1 odd letter

### Deuteronomy

**ע** שמע (6:4)--larger  
**ד** אחד (6:4)--larger  
**ל** וישלכם (29:27)--larger  
**ה** הלד' (32:6)--larger  
**י** תשי (32:18)--smaller

Four larger + one smaller =  
5 odd letters

Total to *Gachon* (not inclusive)  $4 + 2 + 2 = 8$  odd letters. And from *Gachon* until the end of the Torah  $2 + 1 + 5 = 8$  odd letters. *Gachon* is to one side--it is the first on the left.

We don't know how R' Zilber obtained this list, for when we checked the large and small letters in today's Torah texts we found a rather different picture. As representatives of the situation of the Torah texts in our days we chose the three following exemplary editions:

1. Koren Bible (Jerusalem 1995), which is probably the most common Bible in Israel today.
2. Tikun Sofrim Davidovich (Bnei Brak 1977), which we are told is very highly regarded among scribes, and which contains both the Ashkenazi/Sefaradi and the Yemenite versions of the text.

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<sup>7</sup>Other than that, the list published there is the same as the first list (of 16 letters) published here.



3. Chumash Torat Chayim (Jerusalem 1991), proofread by R' Mordechai Breuer based on the Aleppo Codex.

We found that these books contain three different lists of odd letters in the Torah, and none of these lists is exactly equal to R' Zilber's list! The lists are displayed in the following table:

ס"ת תימני (עפ"י תקון-סופרים דידוביץ', וספר תגא דאורייתא)	תנ"ך קורן, וכן תיקון-סופרים דידוביץ' לפי הנוסח האשכנזי-ספרדי	חומש תורת חיים (מוגה ע"י מרדכי ברויאר עפ"י כתר ארם צובא)	ס"ת בימינו לפי הרב זילבר		
v	v	v	v	בר' א' א'	בראשית
v	v	v	v	בר' ב' ד'	בהבראם
v				בר' ה' א'	ספר
v	v	v	v	בר' ג' ב'	ולבכתה
v	v	v	v	בר' כז' מו'	קצתי
	v	v	v	שמ' לד' ז'	נצר
v	v	v	v	שמ' לד' יד'	אחר
v	v	v	v	ויק' א' א'	ויקרא
	v	v	v	ויק' ו' ב'	מוקדה
v	v	v	v	ויק' יא' מב'	גחון
8	9	9	9		סה"כ אותיות משונות, עד וכולל וא"ו דגחון
v	v	v	v	ויק' יג' לג'	והתגלח
v	v	v	v	במ' יד' יז'	יגדל
	v			במ' א' כה'	פינחס
	ו קטועה	ו קטועה	ו קטועה	במ' א' יב' כה'	שלום
v	v	v		במ' כז' ה'	משפטן
v	v	v	v	דב' ו' ד'	שמע
v	v	v	v	דב' ו' ד'	אחד
v				דב' יא' כא'	הארץ
v				דב' כב' ו'	קן
v	v	v	v	דב' כז' כט'	וישלכם
v	v	v	v	דב' לב' ו'	הלה'
v	v	v	v	דב' יח' לב'	תשי
v				דב' לג' כט'	אשריך

19	(19) 18	(18) 17	(17) 16	סה"כ אותיות משונות
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As we can see, the list that is closest to R' Zilber's is in Torat Chayim. According to this list, *vav* of *Gachon* is the ninth out of 17 odd letters (or out of 18 if you count the truncated *vav* of \$LWM, as R' Zilber did in the first version of this article). In any case, in this list it is the middle letter -- either the exact middle or the last on the right side.<sup>8</sup>

The next closest list is in the Koren Bible and in Tikun Sofrim Davidovich's Ashkenazi/Sefaradi version. According to this list, *vav* of *Gachon* is the ninth out of 18 odd letters, if you don't count the truncated *vav*, the last on the right side. But **if you do count the truncated *vav* (as R' Zilber did in the first version of this article) then *vav* of *Gachon* is the ninth out of 19 odd letters, not in the middle at all;** the middle letter then is the 10th - *gimel* of *v'hitgalach*!

The third list is that of Tikun Davidovich's Yemenite version. **In this list *vav* of *Gachon* is, in both cases, the eighth out of 19 odd letters, which is far from the middle!** The middle odd letter in this list is the 10<sup>th</sup> - the *yud* of *yigdal*.

To sum up this point, we found five possible ways to list the odd letters in contemporary Torah scrolls. In three of them *vav* of *Gachon* is in the middle (or last on the right side) and in the other two it's not in the middle. As we explained above, this fits very well with what we might expect on statistical grounds, even if we don't accept R' Zilber's theory. But for R' Zilber's theory this seems to be a serious problem.

If we now check the odd letters according to Rabbi Yosef Tuv Elem's scheme, we get the following picture:

### Genesis

ב בראשית (1:1)--larger  
ה בהבראם (2:4)--smaller  
כ ולבכתה (23:2)--smaller  
ק קצתי (27:42)--smaller  
פ ובהעטיף (30:42)--larger  
ז הכזונה (34:31)--larger  
ח חכלילי (49:14)--larger  
מ שלשים (50:23)--larger

5 larger + 3 smaller =  
8 odd letters

### Exodus

ט כי טוב הוא (2:2)--larger  
צ צא (11:8)--larger  
צ ציץ (28:36)--larger  
נ נצר (34:7)--larger  
ר אחר (34:14)--larger

5 larger =  
5 odd letters

### Leviticus

<sup>8</sup>The same list of odd letters also appears as the main list of odd letters in the book *Mishnat Avraham*, which we mentioned above in a different context. The list appears on chapter 27. There is also another, larger, secondary list there. See Appendix B.

א (1:1)--smaller ויקרא  
מ (6:2)--smaller מוקדה  
ו (11:42)--larger גחון  
ג (13:36)--larger והתגלח

2 larger + 2 smaller =  
4 odd letters

### Numbers

ס (13:30)--larger ויהס  
ד (14:17)--larger יגדל  
מ (24:5)--larger מה טובו  
נ (27:5)--larger משפטן  
מ (31:24)--smaller וטהרתם

4 larger + 1 smaller =  
5 odd letters

### Deuteronomy

ע (6:4)--larger שמע  
ד (6:4)--larger אחד  
מ (9:24)--smaller ממרים  
ק (22:6)--larger קן  
כ (28:27)--larger והתמכרתם  
ל (29:27)--larger וישלכם  
פ (32:5)--larger ופתלתל  
ה (32:6)--larger הילד'  
י (32:18)--smaller תשי  
א (36:29)--larger אשריך

8 larger + 2 smaller =  
10 odd letters

Total until *Gachon* (inclusive)  $8 + 5 + 3 = 16$  odd letters, and from *Gachon* until the end of the Torah  $1 + 5 + 10 = 16$  odd letters, *Gachon* is one side--the last to the right.

Here, too, the picture we find when we look at the source in Machzor Vitri and its explanation in the Talmudic Encyclopedia (volume 1 columns 408-412) is slightly different (we marked the odd letters from the Torah):

מחזור ויטרי סימן תקכב:  
"מכתובות רבנו יוסי טוב עלם העתקתי אלפא ביתא מאותיות גדולות שבתורה.  
אשריך ישראל: בראשית: והתגלח: י"י אחד: הליו"ה: על גחון: הכזונה: חכלילי: ותרא אתו כי טוב  
הוא: יגדל נא כח י"י: והתמכרתם: וישלכם: מה טבו אהליך. וירא יוסף לאפרים בני שלשים: נצר חסד  
לאלפים. משפטן: ויהס כלב: שמע ישראל: ופתלתל: ובהעטיפ: צא אתה וכל העם אשר ברגליך:  
ועשית ציץ דואתה תצוה: כי יקרא קן צפור: לא תשתחוה לאל אחר: פלוגתא: ערש ברזל: תמים תהיה  
עם י"י אלהיך: ומוספי ביה ג' דלגלגלותם, ולי' דלגלגלתם, דלבני שמעון:  
[...]  
אלפא ביתא מאותיות קטנות אשר בתורה נביאים וכתובים:  
ויקרא. ה. ה. וגוש עפר. אדם עשק בדם. בהבראם. בנפשו. ומצ' במדוייק ונפשו לא חיה. ויזתא. ח.  
אנכי. טבעו בארץ. ילדך תשי. לספד לשרה ולבכתה. לא אליכם. ממרים הייתם. וטהרתם. נעו עורים.  
דברי נרגן: וחלוף ג' נונין זעירין: נטע ארן. ונרגן מפריד אלוף. בסופה וסערה דרכו. לעות אדם.  
בשפרפרא. וצוחת ירושלם: ומצ' במדוייק ובחוצות ירושלם. יפרצני פרץ. קצתי בחיי. כמנור ארגים:  
במדוייק. ויש שמצאתי דיערי אורגים. פרמשתא. פרשנדתא."

As we can see, there are some mistakes in the way R"Z brings the list from Machzor Vitri:

1. מוקדה (Leviticus 6:2)--smaller M, doesn't appear in Machzor Vitri at all.
2. יגדל (Numbers 14:17)--larger D, doesn't appear in Machzor Vitri, instead we have יגדל (Numbers 14:17)--larger Y.

3. וטהרתם (Numbers 31:24)--smaller M, doesn't appear in Machzor Vitri, instead we have וטהרתם (Ezekiel 36:25)-- smaller M. (See The Talmudic Encyclopedia).
4. R' Zilber didn't include the following letters which appear in Machzor Vitri (though we admit that most, if not all, of them are listed there as disputed cases):
  - עֲרַשׁ (Deuteronomy 3:11) - disputed
  - לגלגלתם (Numbers 1:22) - disputed
  - לגלגלתם (Numbers 1:22) - disputed
  - בנפשו (Genesis 9:4)- maybe disputed
  - תמי (Deuteronomy 18:13) - this doesn't seem to be disputed, but it's not clear

So we see that if we consider only the non-disputed letters in Machzor Vitri, *vav* of *Gachon* is the 15<sup>th</sup> out of 30, i.e. the last one on the right side. However, if we consider all the letters listed there, then *vav* of *Gachon* is the 16<sup>th</sup> out of 35, not in the middle at all.

And this may have been Rav Yosef's problem--"Is the *vav* of *Gachon* on this side or on that side?"--is *Gachon* the first on the left or the last on the right? That is, is our version the correct one or perhaps the version of Rabbi Yosef Tuv Elem is? And the answer of the Talmud: "We are not experts."

In view of all we have said above, we think that the reader will agree that it is very unlikely this was Rav Yosef's problem.

### **The Issue of *Darosh Darash***

"*Darosh darash* (Leviticus 10:16) is the middle of the words" (Kiddushin 30a). I saw in the book "Ahavat Torah" (Cracow, 5665) by Rabbi Pinchas Zalman Segal Ish-Horowitz, page 4, the possibility that what is being discussed here is the repeated words in the Torah, such as *hasheret hashoretz* (Genesis 7:21).

Again, there is nothing in the text of the Talmud that supports this interpretation, and no rabbi (before 1905) thought of reading the Talmud in this way, even when faced with the problem that the Talmud describes a different middle word than we see in our Torah.

I have checked in the whole Torah and found that there are 91 incidents of repeated words. If we remove *lech lecha* (Genesis 12:1) and *sham sam* (Exodus 15:25) which are repeated words with separate roots, we are left with 89 incidents, the middle of which is *darosh darash*, 44 before it and 44 after it. The language of the Talmud is interesting: it does not ask if the words are on one side or the other, for the Talmud knows it is in the middle. These are the 89:

Again, the decision to exclude words that are of separate roots looks arbitrary. Why include only words that are of the same root and not all the words? Or alternatively, why not include only pairs of the form *Darosh Darash* (that is, 2 successive verbs like "Atsar Atsar," "Yatso Yatsa," "Tarof Toraf," "Gao Gaa," "Dalo Dala," "Yarok Yarak" etc.)?

**Genesis**

**הרמש הרמש (1:26)**

זרע זרע (1:29)  
נח נח (6:9)  
שבעה שבעה (7:2)  
שנים שנים (7:9)  
הרמש הרמש (7:14)  
שנים שנים (7:15)  
מאד מאד (7:19)  
השרץ השרץ (7:21)  
הרמש הרמש (8:17)  
שם שם (11:10)  
תרח תרח (11:27)  
עצר עצר (20:18)  
אברהם אברהם (22:11)  
אברהם אברהם (25:19)  
האדם האדם (25:30)  
יצא יצא (27:30)  
מאד מאד (30:43)  
עדר עדר (32:17)  
מלך מלך (36:31)  
טרף טרף (37:33)  
יום יום (39:10)  
העד העד (43:3)  
שכלתי שכלתי (43:14)  
טרף טרף (44:28)  
יעקב יעקב (46:2)

#### Exodus

דלה דלה (2:19)  
משה משה (3:4)  
כה כה (7:16-17)  
חמרים חמרים (8:10)  
גאה גאה (15:1)  
גאה גאה (15:21)  
יום יום (16:5)  
בבקר בבקר (16:21)  
מעט מעט (23:30)  
בבקר בבקר (30:7)  
יהוה יהוה (34:6)  
בבקר בבקר (36:3)  
איש איש (36:4)

#### Leviticus

אשם אשם (5:19)  
בבקר בבקר (6:5)  
דרש דרש (10:16)  
השרץ השרץ (11:41)  
השרץ השרץ (11:42)

השרץ השרץ (11:43)  
בהרות בהרות (13:38)  
איש איש (15:2)  
איש איש (17:3)  
איש איש (17:8)  
הגר הגר (17:10)  
הגר הגר (17:13)  
איש איש (18:6)  
הגר הגר (19:34)  
איש איש (20:2)  
הגר הגר (20:2)  
איש איש (20:9)  
איש איש (22:4)  
איש איש (22:18)  
איש איש (24:15)

#### Numbers

איש איש (1:4)  
איש איש (1:44)  
נתונם נתונם (3:9)  
חמשת חמשת (3:47)  
איש איש (4:19)  
איש איש (4:49)  
איש איש (5:12)  
אמן אמן (5:22)  
עשרה עשרה (7:86)  
נתנים נתנים (8:16)  
איש איש (9:10)  
ירק ירק (12:14)  
מאד מאד (14:7)  
יום יום (14:34)  
מטה מטה (17:17)  
הקרוב הקרוב (17:28)  
עשרון עשרון (18:21)  
עשרון עשרון (28:29)  
עשרון עשרון (29:10)  
יצא יצא (35:26)

#### Deuteronomy

בדרך בדרך (2:27)  
מעט מעט (7:22)  
שנה שנה (14:22)  
צדק צדק (16:20)  
מעלה מעלה (28:43)  
מטה מטה (28:43)  
אני אני (32:38)

Total 89 repeated words, 44 before דרש דרש and 44 after it.

## The Issue of *V'hitgalach* Being the Center of the Verses

After research and examination, I think that it can be said the intention was to verses in which larger letters appear. As already brought above, there are two alternatives in this matter. According to our version of the Torah scrolls there are nine such verses and according to the version of Rabbi Yosef Tuv Elem there are 23 such verses. According to both versions *v'hitgalach* is the middle verse.

**This suggestion is really strange and inconsistent. Why in the case of the middle letter should we look at both large and small letters, and in the case of the middle verse we look only at the large letters?** And why should the Talmud bother to mark the middle verse of the verses with odd letters in the first place, after it already marked the middle odd letter?

Besides, we don't see why R' Zilber was forced to give this implausible explanation when the Talmud itself says here explicitly: **"In verses, likewise, we are not experts. For when Rav Acha Bar Ada came he said: 'In the Land of Israel they have separated this verse into three verses - 'And G-d said to Moses, Behold I am coming to you in the thickness of the cloud' (Exodus 19:9)."** R' Moshe Feinstein ruled, based on this passage in the Talmud, that if one reads two long verses for an *aliya* he need not be called again, despite the halacha that each person must read at least three verses. R. Feinstein states that one should make a distinction between long and short verses, especially in the second half of the Torah.

In short verses we must be strict about reading three verses. But in long verses, especially in the second half of the Torah, there is the possibility that originally they were actually partitioned into three verses, since *v'hitgalach* is supposed to be half of the Torah in verses, and in our Torah the real middle verse is before that. These are his words in *Igrot Moshe, Orach Chayim*, 1:35 (our emphasis):

שו"ת אגרות משה חלק או"ח א' סימן לה:  
" [...] אבל בפסוקים גדולים שיש לחלקם לשלשה שודאי הוא ספק אצלינו שמא הם שלשה, וכ"ש מחצי השניה של הס"ת שאחר והתגלח שמפורש בגמ' בקידושין דף ל' שהוא חצי התורה בפסוקים ואצלינו החצי הוא ויאפד לו בו בפרשת צו שהוא ק"ס פסוקים קודם והתגלח שנמצא שהאמת הוא שצריך לחלק הפסוקים מוהתגלח עד סוף התורה עוד לק"ס פסוקים וגם אצלינו יש ה' אלפים ותתמ"ה פסוקים בכל התורה ובגמ' שם/קידושין ל' איתא ה' אלפים ותתפ"ח שצריך לחלק כל התורה עוד למ"ג פסוקים, וא"כ אפשר שיש באמת בשני פסוקים גדולים אלו שלשה פסוקים שנחשבו קריאה, וא"כ אין ראוי שאותו הקורא יקרא עוד פעם [...] ולכן לע"ד בפסוקים גדולים שלא מפורש בגמ' שהם רק שני פסוקים יש להורות לקרא אחר וכ"ש בהפרשיות של אחר והתגלח שיש להורות כן."

More than that - from this passage in the Talmud we can see clearly that the Talmud didn't understand the claim that *v'hitgalach* is the center of the verses to mean that it is only the center of verses containing large letters (as R' Zilber wants us to believe). For the Talmud says that **"In verses, likewise, we are not experts. For when Rav Acha Bar Ada came he said: In the Land of Israel they have separated this verse into three verses - 'And G-d said to Moses, Behold I am coming to you in the thickness of the cloud' (Exodus 19:9)."** Now according to R' Zilber's interpretation, it would have made sense to bring the example from the Land of Israel into the discussion only if this verse (Exodus 19:9) contained a large letter. But as we can see in Appendix B, this verse doesn't appear in any of the many different lists of large letters we were able to find!

We can also see that *Masechet Sofrim* and the sages of the Massorah didn't understand the claim that *v'hitgalach* is the center of the verses to mean that it is only the center of verses containing large letters, for they disputed the claim that *v'hitgalach* is the center of the verses, as we mentioned above in footnote 3.

"The *ayin* of *ya'ar* is the middle of Psalms" (Kiddishin 30a). We must specify whether we mean the middle of the words or the middle of the letters. It appears that the intention was to the middle of the letters; otherwise why did they mention the letter *ayin* specifically? And, in truth, in "Ein Yaacov" the variant is: "The *ayin* of *ya'ar* is the middle of Psalms in letters." But the Rashash thinks that since it is not said explicitly in our version "the middle of the letters" as is said about the Torah scroll, then here the intention is to both words and letters. The Rashash adds that he took the trouble of counting and found that there are more than a thousand extra words on the half to the right of *ya'ar*. I also checked in a Psalms book written on pages of almost equal length, and found that there are more than two and a half extra pages in the first half above what is in the last.

I checked; perhaps the intention was to odd letters in Psalms, and I found that there are a number of versions about this, and they are:

לשוא (24:4)--smaller or truncated ו  
הלעולמים (77:8)--larger ה  
זרמו (77:18)--smaller ז (according to the another version)  
מיער (80:14)--hanging ע  
וכנה (80:16)--larger כ  
קן (84:4)--larger ק  
המרו (107:11)--smaller ה (according to the another version)

Whether in the standard version or the other version, the *ayin* of *ya'ar* is the middle of the odd letters in Psalms.

Again, we don't know where R' Zilber obtained this data. We used the Talmudic Encyclopedia and R' Zilber's list to check the situation in the Koren Bible, and to our surprise found that there are only three odd letters in Psalms: מיער (80:14)--hanging ע, וכנה (80:16)--larger כ, קן (84:4)--larger ק. As we can see, **in the Koren Bible the *ayin* of *ya'ar* is the first odd letter in Psalms and not the middle one!**

And according to the version of Rabbi Yosef Tuv Elem, the odd letters are:

ע על כן (18:50)--larger ע  
ונפשו (22:30)--smaller ו  
הלעולמים (77:8)--larger ה  
מיער (80:14)--hanging ע  
וכנה (80:16)--larger כ  
קן (84:4)--larger ק

Even according to this version the *ayin* of מיער is in the middle of the odd letters.

This time R' Zilber copies accurately, and according to this version the *ayin* of *ya'ar* is indeed the middle odd letter in Psalms. However, we found that in this case as well that the two or three versions he brings are not all the alternatives that exist. See the table in Appendix C. Again, since *ayin* of *ya'ar* is relatively close to the real middle of Psalms, the same statistical argument we brought above concerning *vav* of *Gachon* applies. According to our assumption that *ayin* of *ya'ar* was supposed to be the middle of all the letters of Psalms, we still expect it to be the middle letter of most lists of odd letters, as indeed is the case. But the fact that there are lists (e.g. Koren Bible) where *ayin* of *ya'ar* is not the middle odd letter is a serious problem for R' Zilber's theory.

It is interesting that all these letters and words are odd, that is, the *ayin* of *ya'ar* is hanging, the *vav* of *Gachon* is larger, *darosh darash* is two words close together, *v'hitgalach* has a

larger *gimel*. This is proof for our theory, and may G-d light our eyes in the ways of his Torah.

This is no proof of R' Zilber's theory. In the case of the odd letters (*ayin* of *ya'ar*, *vav* of *Gachon* and *gimel* of *v'hitgalach*) it is more probable to say that they are large (or hanging) in order to mark the middle letter and middle verse of the Torah and Psalms. In fact, we saw above that *Masechet Sofrim* and R' Baruch Epstein say this explicitly! As regards *darosh darash*, these are not odd words, only a pair of words with the same spelling. It's true that there are only 91 such pairs in the Torah (out of 79980 words, which is 0.2%), and in that sense they may be considered unique. But this figure is misleading. For almost any word or pair of words you'll pick in the Bible or anywhere else can be considered unique from one aspect or another **after you pick it and look at it closely** (i.e. a posteriori). It seems, then, that for any word the Talmud would have stated as the middle word of the Torah, we could build some short list of words that share some unique attribute with it. As we explained above, by virtue of it's being close to the real middle word of the Torah we can expect on statistical grounds that in many cases this word will be in the middle (or close to the middle) of this list.

Just as a simple illustration, we conducted the following simple quasi-experiment. Suppose that the Talmud had stated that the middle word of the Torah is not *darosh darash* but some other word in the same verse (Leviticus 10:16). How difficult would it be then to find a R' Zilber type solution to the difficulty? We were able to find a very easy solution for 2 out of 17 words in this verse (~12%): ויקצר and איתמר. We simply decided that these words are not the middle of all the words in the Torah, but rather the middle words in the list of all the appearances of these words in the Torah. ויקצר is the third out of 5, and איתמר is the fourth out of 8, and this is without playing any tricks to omit disturbing words from the list. There are, of course, many other ways of finding more interesting and complicated properties common to lists of words.

To further demonstrate the wiggle room in this matter, we'll also mention R' Elyahu Poskek's suggestion (in the article *דרש משה*, mentioned above) that maybe *darosh darash* is the middle of the unusual words:

משונות בהיפוך הפשט כגון "לא יעדה", "לא חמה", "לא כרעים" שהכתיב באלף והקרי בוא"ו... משונות בתיבות אחרות "בעפולים - בטחורים", "ישגלנה- ישכבנה", או נפרדות ומחבורות בתיבה אחת או שתיים כמו "תובל קין", "כדרלעומר", "כס יה", "פוטירע" - כתיב שתיים וקרי אחת; "בגד", "מזה", "אשדת" - כתיב אחת וקרי שתיים.

Another question we need to ask about R' Zilber's theory is why the Talmud would bother to tell us the middle of the large and small letters and not tell us the middle of all the letters? Why give us the middle of the verses that contain a large letter and not the middle of all the verses, and why note the middle of the double words that are not of the same root instead of the middle of all words?

R' Zilber doesn't suggest any answer. However, we found someone else who tried to solve this difficulty with the following suggestion:

יש לזכור, כי מטרת הסופרים בספירות השונות של האותיות, המילים, הפסוקים והפרשיות הייתה לשמור על אחדות ודיוק התורה שבכתב. הם רצו לתת שיטות בדיקה פשוטות לכל מחזיקי ספרי התורה כדי לבדוק שאכן לא נשכח דבר, ואין תוספות בתורה. אין זה מעשי לבקש מאדם לספור 80,000 מילים, ולכן הם הציעו בדיקות פשוטות הרבה יותר, אם כי לא מוכחות בוודאות.

(Translation: We have to remember that the purpose of the *sofrim* in the different counts of the letters, words, verses and *parshiot* was to preserve the uniformity and precision of the Written Torah. They wanted to give all the holders of Torah scrolls simple testing methods that would enable them to check that nothing was omitted from or added to the Torah scrolls that they hold. It is not practical to ask a person to count 80,000 words, so they suggested much simpler checks, though they are less certain."

[Quoted from Prof. Eli Mertsbach's article *חזיון של תיבות* at

<http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/shmini/mer.html>].



Prof. Mertsbach suggests that when the *sofrim* marked the middle of the odd letters and the middle of the double words (of the same root) they wanted to give us a tool for checking the integrity of the text.

However, when Prof. Mertsbach says that these methods are less certain than the count of all letters, words and verses, he is making a major understatement. In fact, as methods for checking the integrity of the text, these methods (of noting the middle of the odd letters etc.) are totally worthless. For example, in order for these methods to give an indication of textual corruption, the textual corruption has to hit one of the 18 odd letters of more than 300,000 letters, or one of the 91 double words out of over 80,000 words! It means that more than 99% of the cases of textual corruption will escape detection by these methods.

In contrast, noting the middle letter (or word) of all the letters (or words), or giving us the total number of all the letters (or words) gives us the possibility of detecting the omission/addition of even one letter (or word).

Moreover, if that was indeed been the idea, then we would expect to be given a list of all these instances (all the odd letters and all the double words) and not just the middle of them. Since in both cases the number of these instances is smaller than 100, there shouldn't have been any difficulty in listing all of them. Just giving us the middle point is not of much help, for finding the middle of all the double words of the Torah, without a given list, is apparently not an easy practical task. An interesting proof of that comes from the fact that in the first version of this article R' Zilber said that he was able to find only 77 (instead of 89) such pairs of words, and even in a second counting he got only 85! (See the details in Prof. Menachem Cohen's article on this subject.)

As for the middle of the odd letters, as we show in Appendix B there is great confusion regarding the exact list of small and large letters in the Torah and their number. This turns the idea of using the middle of these letters for checking the integrity of the text into quite an implausible suggestion.

To sum up this part of this article: In all four cases above (*vav* of *Gachon*, *gimel* of *v'hitgalach*, *darosh darash* and *ayin* of *ya'ar*) R' Zilber reads the Talmud in Kiddushin 30a in a way that deviates significantly from the plain meaning of the text. Moreover, the idea that the *sofrim* marked only the middle of some lists of special letters, words and verses, but not the middle of all the letters, words and verses doesn't make much sense. Once he introduces this idea he has a lot of room to play with the exact definition of these lists of special letters and words so that the stated middle letters/words will indeed fall in the middle of his lists.<sup>9</sup> This whole suggestion is really like drawing the circle around the arrow after the arrow has been shot.

### **The Issue of *V'hu rachum* Being the Middle of the Verses**

It is commonly accepted that the number of verses in Psalms is 2527, but this is a mistake; their true number is 2528. Half of this is 1264, that is, the verse "Yet they deceived Him with their speech, lied to Him with their words," but it is not appropriate to mark this verse. The next verse is "Their hearts were inconstant toward Him; they were untrue to His covenant" and this verse, too, is inappropriate to mark. After it comes "But he, being merciful," (*v'hu rachum yechaper avon*), etc.

This suggestion is reasonable, though according to my audit (against the MTR database, available at <http://www.mechon-mamre.org>) the number of verses in Psalms is actually 2525, so the middle verse is verse number 1263. But this is the same verse which R' Zilber found,

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<sup>9</sup>Especially as it already has a large a priori chance of falling in the middle of such a list, as we explained above.

"Yet they deceived Him with their speech, lied to Him with their words." So this suggestion might well be correct.

### **On the Issue of the Number of Verses in the Torah**

"The rabbis taught that 5888 verses are the verses of the Torah scroll, Psalms has eight more and Chronicles has eight fewer."

And this is difficult, since in all books of the Pentateuch it is written that the number of verses is 5845. Moreover, why did our Sages compare it to Psalms and Chronicles and not, for example, to Isaiah and Proverbs? And moreover, as the Tosfos's already asked, the number of verses in the Torah is much greater than in Psalms? And look at what the Maharsha wrote to settle this dispute under great pressure. And we have already written, above, that the count in Psalms is 2528 and the count in Chronicles is 1656.

And I have seen in "*Ein Yaacov Katan*" according to "*Kinamon Bosem*" from Rabbi Yehuda Idel HaLevi Epstein, which says he saw in a very old book "*Keter Torah*" a wonderful explanation.

Earlier in this Talmud it is said, "Therefore the first ones were called *soferim*, for they counted every letter in the Torah," and our Sages had a tradition that the number of verses in the Torah was 5888, but in the Torah there are only 5845. Our Sages came and said that, in addition to the verses in the Torah, there are eight verses of the Torah in Psalms and 35 verses in Chronicles, signaled by "they are in the Writings." And why did they say that Chronicles is missing eight? To aid the memory and memorization, since the number eight was mentioned here several times: in the Torah there are 5888, and Psalms has eight more, therefore they said that Chronicles is missing eight, meaning that all the Torah lacks, short of the eight in Psalms, can be found in Chronicles.

And now the language of the Talmud is exact, as it says "these are the verses of the Torah" and it does not say that in the Torah there are 5888 verses, since not all the verses are found in the Torah, but they all are "verses of the Torah."

This proposed solution to the problem of the number of verses in the Torah is discussed thoroughly and refuted by Prof. Menachem Cohen' in his review of Korman's article, and we refer the reader to it.

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More discussions of this subject can be found in:

1. המקרא והמסורה by R' Reuven Margalioth, p. 13-16 and 44-46
2. חומש תורה שלמה by R' Menachem Kasher, vol. 28, p. 286-289

## Appendix A -

### Some more Rabbinical sources on the accuracy of the Torah text

All emphasis is ours.

#### • הרשב"א

שו"ת הרשב"א המיוחסות לרמב"ן סימן רלב:  
שאלה: אם נפסל ס"ת = ספר תורה = בחסרות ויתרות, שיהיה כנגד המסורה. שאני אומר: אין ספרי המסורה, מעולין מספרי התלמוד, שאמר: פלגשם; כתיב. וכן: ואשמם; כתיב. וכן: כלת; כתיב. וכן: קרנת; כתיב ובספרים שלנו: פלגשים ביו"ד, ואשימם ביו"ד, כלות ביו"ו, קרנות ביו"ו; הפך מזה שאמרו חכמים. ואין אנו חוששין לספרי התלמוד, לתקן הספרים, לשנותם. שכך אני מקובל ממך. ואיך נחוש לספרי המסורה, חדשים מקרוב באו! ויש לי ראייה לקבלתי זו, מפ"ק דקדושין. דאמר, דבשני רב יהודה ורב יוסף, לא הוו בקיאי בחסרות ויתרות. כ"ש אנו. ומי שדרש: פלגשם, ואשמם, וכלת; יש לנו לומר: שמצאו כן בספריהם. אבל אנו, לא נחוש להם, וספרינו נחזיק כמה שהם. אמנם, אני איני תמה על פסוקי דרשות של הגדה, כדאמרן. אבל: קרנת, קרנת; חושש אני להם, כיון שב"ש = שבית שמאי = וב"ה = ובית הלל = מודים להם. ולא נחלקו, אלא ביש אם למקרא, או יש אם למסורת. ושניהם עושין דין, ע"פ החסר והיתר. ודעתי היה לתקנם, אלא שאני ירא בדבר, ואשמר לי עד יבא דברך ויורנו. ובסכות, בסכת; מצאנוהו בספרינו, כמו שאמרו חכמים. הודיעני דעתך בזה. תשובה: מדעתי, שכן האמת, שאין מוסיפין וגורעין בכל מקום ומקום בספרים, ע"פ המסורת, וע"פ מדרשי אגדה. לפי שנחלקו במקומות, בארצות, ע"פ חכמיהם הבקיאים בחסרות ויתרות. וכמדומה לי, אפילו במקרא ומסורת. כמחלוקת בן אשר, ובן נפתלי, ובין מערבאי, למדינחאי. וכמדומה לי, שבזה תלוי מה שדרשו: בכי חזק הוא ממנו. אל תקרי: ממנו; אלא: ממנו. אע"פ שבכל הספרים הכתובים אצלנו, אין חילוק במלת: ממנו; בין שנופל על רבים, בין שנופל על יחיד. אע"פ שכל מקום כנוי נון וי"ו, לרבים ברפה, וליחיד בדגשות. אלא שאני סבור, שבין מדינחאי ומערבאי, היה מחלוקת: בממנו. שהאחד נוהג בו, כבשאר הכנויין, להרפות כל שהוא בא לרבים. והאחד נוהג כמנהג מקומנו, לדגש הכל. וכמדומה, שכן מצאתי בספרי המסורה, שיש מחלוקת בין מדינחאי למערבאי. ומ"מ, בכל מה שבא בתלמוד, דרך עיקר דין: כקרנת קרנת, וכבסכת, לטוטפת. ובן אין לו; ביו"ד, דרשינן: עיין עליו, מדלא כתיב בלא יו"ד. כמו: מאן בלעם; שעליו דנין עיקר ירושה, שממשמשת והולכת. בזה ודאי מתקנין המיעוט. וכן, בכל מקום ומקום, אפילו בחסרות ויתרות, מתקנין המיעוט ע"פ הרוב. דמקרא מלא דבר הכתוב: אחרי רבים להטות. ושנינו במסכת סופרים: אמר ר"ל: ג' ספרים נמצאו בעזרה, ספר מעון, וספר זעטוטי, וספר הוא. באחד מצאו: מעון אלהי קדם; ובשנים מצאו כתוב: מעונה. באחד מצאו: זעטוטי בני ישראל; ובשנים מצאו: נערי. באחד מצאו כתוב: אחד עשר היא; ובשנים: אחד עשר הוא; וקיימו שנים, ובטלו אחד.

#### • ר' יחזקאל לנדא (הנודע ביהודה)

שו"ת נודע ביהודה מהדורה תנינא-או"ח סימן קט:  
[..] והרי שמדברי התלמוד והפוסקים אין שום צד מפורש לא האיסור ולא ההיתר אלא שלשונו של הרמב"ם בהלכות ספר תורה משמע לאיסור. אבל מה שפשוט אצלכם שמצד הזוהר נכון לעשות כן לא כן הוא והאמת שאני אין לי עסק בנסתרות והלואי שאוכל לצאת ידי חובתי בתלמוד ופוסקים הנחוצים למעשה והם חיינו ובהם נהגה. אבל כיון שראיתם דברי הזוהר שם הלא מבואר שאם ח"ו הספר ההוא חסר אות אחת גורמים רעה גדולה ואם כן אפוא איה אצלנו ספר תורה שיהיה בדוק בחסירות ויתירות ועיין בא"ח סימן קמ"ג סעיף ד' בהגה"ה. [..]

## Appendix B - Variations in the list of large and small letters in the Torah

Reference to the tables below:

רשימות של כל האותיות

1. רשימתו של ר' יצחק זילבר
2. חומש תורת חיים, הוצאת מוסד הרב קוק, י-ם 1991 (מוגה ע"י ר' מרדכי ברויאר עפ"י כתר ארם צובא).
3. תנ"ך קורן, י-ם, 1995.
4. וכן הוא בתקון סופרים לר' מנחם דוידוביץ', בני ברק, 1977
5. נוסח תימן עפ"י תיקון סופרים דוידוביץ'.
6. מדרש ר' עקיבה בן יוסף על אותיות קטנות וגדולות (מופיע ב"בתי מדרשות" של ורטהיימר)
7. כתב יד לניגוד B19a, מהדורת פקסימיליה, י-ם 1970, כרך 3, עמ' 277-278
8. רשימת ר' יוסף טוב עלם במחזור ויטרי
9. אכלה ואכלה, מהדורת הנובר 1864, רשימה 1 (פריטים 82+84 בעמ' 88-89)
10. אכלה ואכלה, מהדורת הנובר 1864, רשימה 2 (פריטים 83+84 בעמ' 88-89)
11. רשימת תיקון סופרים המצורפת בסוף ספר מסורת סייג לתורה, פירנצה 1750, עמ' 84, רשימה קצרה
12. רשימת תיקון סופרים המצורפת בסוף ספר מסורת סייג לתורה, פירנצה 1750, עמ' 84, רשימה מלאה
13. שיטה שניה בספר משנת אברהם לרבי אברהם בן צבי יפה (1868), פרק כז'.
14. מחברת התיג'אן, מודפסת בסוף חומש התאג', מהדורת חסיד, ירושלים תשל"א. (זהו אחד מנוסחי תימן).
15. ספר "חיים לגופא" לר' חיים פאלאג', פרקים ב' וג'. זוהי רשימה כוללת המורכבת מכמה שיטות.

רשימות של חלק מהאותיות:

15. מקורות שונים: האנציקלופדיה התלמודית כרך א' עמ' תח-תיב
- The Massorah compiled from manuscripts, Christian D. Ginsburg, New York 1975, Vol I, items 225-229 p. 35-37.
- [ב15 פרטתי רק מספר מקרים שלא נמצאו באף אחד מהמקורות אחרים!]
16. מסורה גדולה המודפסת בראש בראשית במהדורת מקראות גדולות (אותיות גדולות בלבד!)
17. מסורה גדולה המודפסת בראש ויקרא במהדורת מקראות גדולות (אותיות קטנות בלבד!)
18. מסורה גדולה המודפסת בראש דה"י במהדורת מקראות גדולות (אותיות גדולות בלבד!)
19. מסורה גדולה המודפסת בסוף התנ"ך במהדורת מקראות גדולות (אותיות קטנות בלבד!)



																			יא' ח'	
				*															שמ' טו' כה'	ויורהו
				*															שמ' כ' ב'	אנכי
							v	v			v	v		?					שמ' כח' לו'	ציץ
v								v	v										שמ' לב' כה'	בקמיהם
			v		v		v	v	v		v	v		v		v	v	v	שמ' לד' ז'	נצר
	v		v		v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	שמ' לד' יד'	אחר
v <sup>10</sup>																			שמ' לד' כו'	ראשית
v		v			v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	ויק' א' א'	ויקרא
v		v			v		v	v	v							v	v	v	ויק' ו' ב'	מוקדה
					v		v	v	v										ויק' יא' ל'	והלטהה
	v				v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	ויק' יא' מב'	גחון

<sup>10</sup>Clarified according to the Talmudic Encyclopedia.

רשימות של חלק בלבד					רשימות של כל האותיות															
1 9	1 8	1 7	1 6	1 5	1 4	1 3	1 2	1 1	1 0	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		
מערכת מסורה שבסוף	מסורה ראש דברי הימים	מסורה ראש ויקרא	מסורה ראש בראשית	מקורות שונים	חיים לגופא (ר' חיים)	מחברת התיגאן	משנת אברהם שיטה ב'	מסורת סייג לתו' 1750	מסורת סייג לתו' 1750	אכלה ואכלה רשימה 2	אכלה ואכלה רשימה 1	ר' יוסף טוב עלם במחזור	כתב-יד לינינגרד B19a	מדרש ר' עקיבה בן יוסף	ס"ת תימני (עפ"י תקון)	תנ"ך קורן, וכן תיקון	משנת אברהם שיטה א'	ס"ת בימינו לפי זילבר		
	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	ויק' יג' לג'	והתגלח
												?	✓						במ' א' כב', או במ' א' ב'	לגלגלתם
												?							במ' א' כב'	לגלגלתם
					✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓							במ' יג' ל'	ויהס
	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	במ' יד' יז'	יגדל
					✓		✓	✓			✓	✓							במ' כד' ה'	מה
					✓											✓			במ' כה' יא'	פינחס
ז		ז			ז		ק	ז	ז	ז	ז			ז		ק	ק	ק	במ' כה' יב'	שלום
			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	במ' כז' ה'	משפטן
		?																	במ' לא' כד'	וטהרתם
					✓		✓	✓			✓								דב' ב' לג'	ונר
					✓		✓	✓			✓	?							דב' ג' יא'	ערש
	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	דב' ו' ד'	שמע
	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	דב' ו' ד'	אחד
✓		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					דב' ט' כד'	ממרים
															✓				דב' יא' כא'	הארץ
	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓							דב' יח' יג'	תמים
					✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓				דב' כב' ו'	קן
							?												דב' כג' כד'	מוצא
					✓		✓	✓			✓	✓							דב'	והתמכרתם

																			כח' סח'	
	v		v		v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	דב' נט' כז'	וישלכם
				v		?	v	v											דב' לב' ד'	הצור
			v		v		v	v			v	v							דב' לב' ה'	ופתלתל
	v				v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	דב' לב' ו'	הלה'
?		v																	דב' לב' יח'	ילדך
?					v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	דב' לב' יח'	תשי
													v						דב' לב' מג'	וכפר
					v	v	v	v			v	v	v		v				דב' לג' נט'	אשריך
					v														דב' לד' יב'	לעיני

הערות

- כמו כן מופיע בכמה מקומות "וכבשה" אך אין לדעת אם הכונה היא לבראשית א' כח' או ויקרא יד' י' או במדבר ו' יד'.
- לגבי ו'ו' של שלום: ק- פרושו קטועה, ז- פרושו זעירה



## Appendix C - Variations in the list of large and small letters in Psalms

רשימות של חלק בלבד					רשימות של כל האותיות											
שונות	מסורה סוף	מסורה ראש	מסורה ראש	מסורה ראש	מחברת	חיים לגופא	תניך קורן	כ"י לינגרד	מדרש ר' עזיבה ב' יוסף	אכלה ואכלה	יוסף טוב עלם	זילבר גרסה	ב' זילבר גרסה	א' זילבר גרסה		
								√							תה' ו' ט'	סורו
											√				תה' יח' נ'	על
	√								?	?	√				תה' כב' ל'	ונפשו
	√	√				√						√	√		תה' כד' ד'	לשוא
							√								תה' כד' ד'	נפשו
										√					תה' כז' ה'	יצפני
	√	√							√	√					תה' כז' ה'	בסכה
											√	√	√		תה' עז' ח'	הלעולמים
							√					√			תה' עז' יח'	זרמו
	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	√	√		תה' פ' יד'	מי"ר
			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	תה' פ' טו'	וכנה
										√					תה' פ' טו'	וכנה
			√	√	?	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	תה' פד' ד'	קו
							√					√			תה' קז' יא'	המרו
*															תה' קיט' קס'	ראש