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Shabbos Daf 115

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Saving Parchments From A Fire

The Mishna says that one may save from a fire on Shabbos any parchments with Tanach written on them, whether they are ones we read from or not, irrespective of what language they are written in, and one must dispose of them by storage. The Mishna explains that one may not read parchments of kesuvim on Shabbos, lest that keep people from coming to hear the lecture in the Bais Medrash.

Parchments In Other Languages

The Gemora cites a dispute about saving parchments written in Aramaic or other languages from a fire on Shabbos. Rav Huna says you may not, while Rav Chisda says you may. The Gemora explains that their dispute is only according to the opinion that one may not read from such parchments. Rav Huna says that since one may not read from them, one may not save them, while Rav Chisda says that one may save them, to avoid the disgrace of parchments with holy content being burned.

The Gemora tries to resolve this dispute from the Mishna, which states that one may save all parchments with Tanach, "even if written in other languages." Since the Mishna lists parchments in other languages separately, it implies that one may save them, even though one may not read them, supporting Rav Chisda. Rav Huna deflects this, as the Mishna continues to say that one must dispose of them respectfully, which would be obvious if one may even save them from a fire. Rav Huna therefore amends the Mishna to say that one may save parchments

of all parts of Tanach, even kesuvim, which one may not read. The Mishna then states that parchments written in other languages, even though they may not be saved, must be disposed of respectfully. Rav Chisda says that the end of the Mishna is referring to parts of parchment which rot. He therefore amends the Mishna to say that one may save all parchments of Tanach, irrespective of their language, and even the rotted portions of the parchments must be disposed of properly.

The Gemora tries to resolve this dispute from a braisa which says that if Tanach parchments are written in Aramaic or any other language, one may save them from a fire, supporting Rav Chisda. Rav Huna deflects this by saying that the braisa is according to the opinion that allows one to read from such parchments, but he is only disputing according to the other opinion.

The Gemora tries to resolve the dispute from a braisa which says that one must save from a fire Tanach parchments written in any language (e.g., Giftis, Madis, old Hebrew, Ilmis, or Greek), even though one may not read from them, supporting Rav Chisda. Rav Huna says that this question is actually itself a dispute of Tanaim, and he follows Rabbi Yossi. The Gemora cites a braisa in which the first opinion says that one may save parchments in Aramaic or other languages, while Rabbi Yossi says you may not. Rabbi Yossi also relates a story of his father, Chalafta, who visited Rabban Gamliel in Teveria, and found him next to Rabbi Yochanan ben Nizuf's table, reading a parchment of Iyov, written in Aramaic. Chalafta told him that he remembered Rabban



Gamliel's grandfather, Rabban Gamliel, standing on a step on the Temple Mount, and when they brought him an Aramaic parchment of Iyov, he told the builder next to him to hide it under the stones of the building. In response, Rabban Gamliel ordered the parchment to be hidden. Rabbi Yossi beRabbi Yehuda says that the elder Rabban Gamliel covered it with a plate of mud, but Rebbi objects to this version, as there is no mud on the Temple Mount, and one isn't permitted to openly destroy such parchments, but only leave them exposed so they rot on their own. The Gemora explains that Rav Chisda may not be consistent with the first opinion in Rabbi Yossi's braisa, as he may say that one may read from them. Rav Chisda's position is consistent with the braisa cited as a proof against Rav Huna.

Other Parchments with Holy Contents

The braisa says that written blessings and amulets, even if they have names of Hashem and sections of Torah, may not be saved from a fire on Shabbos, but must stay where they are and get burned. The Sages therefore said that one who writes blessings down is akin to one who burns a Torah. There was someone in Tzidon who wrote blessings, and they told Rabbi Yishmael about him. When he went to investigate, the person was on a ladder and realized why Rabbi Yishmael came. To avoid detection, he took a package of blessings and dunked them in a pail of water. Rabbi Yishmael said that this was worse than his writing them in the first place, since he now directly destroyed the holy content.

Parchments Written in Alternate Inks

The Exilarch asked Rabbah bar Rav Huna whether one may save parchments that are written in Hebrew, but in alternate inks. This question is independent of whether one may save parchments of Tanach in other languages. Even according to Rav Chisda, perhaps we may not save these, as they are not written in the fully permanent ink of a Torah, and even according to Rav Huna, perhaps we may save these, since they are written in Hebrew. He

answered that one may not save them. When the Exilarch challenged this from Rav Hamnuna, who taught in a braisa otherwise, he said that if so, he'll reverse himself and say that one may save them. The Gemora asks which braisa Rav Hamnuna taught, and Rav Ashi cites a braisa which says that the only difference between parchments of Tanach and Megilas Esther is that all parchments can be written in any language, while the Megila must be written in Ashuri script with proper ink on proper parchments, implying that the others may be written in other inks.

An Incomplete Torah

Rav Huna bar Chaluv asked Rav Nachman whether one may save a Torah which doesn't even have 85 letters, the size of *vayehi binsoa* - the section about the Ark traveling and camping. Rav Nachman asked why he didn't just ask about a Torah which only had that section and was missing letters. He explained that he knew that one could still save such a Torah, since it still has names of Hashem. He specifically asked only about a Torah which has no names of Hashem, or even 85 letters left. Rav Nachman answered that one may not save it. Rav Huna challenged this from a braisa which says that if one wrote Aramaic parts of Tanach in Hebrew, or vice versa, or if one wrote in old Hebrew script, one may save the parchments, and one may definitely save parchments sections of Tanach that are written correctly in Aramaic. Rav Huna explained that the only part of Torah written in Aramaic is the name Lavan gave to the place of his treaty (*yegar sahadusa*). Even though this is less than 85 letters, the braisa says that one may save such a parchment. Rav Nachman deflected this by saying that the braisa is simply saying that these words can count towards the 85 letters necessary to save the parchment.

The Gemora asks whether the 85 letters must be contiguous or can even be spread out. Rav Huna says they must be contiguous, while Rav Chisda says they may be spread out. The Gemora challenges Rav Huna from a braisa which says that one may save a parchment which



has 85 letters, *like* the amount in vayehi binsoa, implying that they need not be contiguous. Rav Chisda deflects this, saying that Rav Huna only requires the letters to be in full words, and this is what the braisa is saying as well.

The Gemora cites a braisa which says that the paragraph of vayehi binsoa is demarcated (by upside down nun's) to indicate that this is not its appropriate location, while Rabbi says it is to indicate that this paragraph is its own book in the Torah.

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Geniza in Extenuating Circumstances

As we know, it is forbidden to discard worn out Torah scrolls or other Torah writings. When Sifrei Torah or other seforim are no longer useable, they are buried in geniza with the utmost respect and reverence. This halacha is based on the possuk, "You shall destroy their name from that place [a reference to avoda zara]. You shall not do this to Hashem, your G-d," (Devarim 12:4), which forbids us to destroy any document that contains the Name of Hashem. Destroying Hashem's Name is punishable by flogging, according to Torah law (Makkos 22a, Rambam Yesodei HaTorah 6:1).

Other Torah writings that do not contain Hashem's Name, also may not be destroyed. The Magen Avraham (154:9) rules that they are also subject to the Torah prohibition against disgracing holy writings. However, in Teshuvos Achiezer (II, 48:3), R' Chaim Ozer rules that they are only subject to a Rabbinic prohibition. According to both opinions, the punishment of flogging for destroying them is only mederabanan, as the Rambam explicitly writes (Rambam, *ibid* 6:8).

In our sugya we find that not only is it forbidden to destroying Torah writings, we are obligated to protect them from destruction or disgrace. The Gemara rules that even those Torah writings that may not be saved from a

fire on Shabbos, still require geniza when disposed of on a weekday.

The Moroccan funeral procession: In Morocco, worn Torah writings were buried in geniza amidst a funeral procession that took place each year on the day following Shavuos. Special piyutim were sung for the occasion, such as "It is a merit for Israel, on the conclusion of the festival of the Torah. Just as we protect the holy Names of Hashem, and show them great respect, so may Hashem protect His nation..." (Nesivos HaMaarav, p. 111).

On many occasions, geniza offered an invaluable treasure house of rare documents, when discovered many years after their interment. One of the most famous examples is the geniza of Kahir, which was found in the attic of an ancient shul in Postat, Egypt. The dry desert conditions helped preserve approximately two hundred thousand pages of Torah writings, which were found there about a hundred and ten years ago.

The vandalized geniza: In the community wherein the Shvus Yaakov presided as rav, geniza was stored in the attic of the shul. Over the years it accumulated, until the attic was full and could hold no more. The caretakers of the shul then gathered all the Torah writings into barrels and brought them to the graveyard for burial. Gentile neighbors discovered the buried writings and used them for an unspeakably disgraceful purpose. Left with no other alternative, the Shvus Yaakov ruled that it is more respectful to burn them, than to let them be so heinously defiled. However, he ruled that they must be burned in the most discrete and respectful way possible. They should not all be burned at once in a giant bonfire, but little by little in earthenware vessels. The ashes should be put in storage until the passing of a Torah scholar, and then buried together with him in his grave. In the course of a lengthy responsa, he explains his proofs for this ruling, and states that this leniency should not be applied to Sifrei Torah. Since there are not so many worn Sifrei



Torah to be buried, other alternatives can be found for their geniza.

The Shvus Yaakov's ruling was challenged by other Poskim, who reasoned that we may not destroy Torah writings in order to prevent others from defaming them (Knesses Yechezkel, 37; Sho'el U'Meishiv 2:15; Chasam Sofer's commentary to O.C. 154; Kaf HaChaim ibid, s.k. 37).

Printed seforim: Contemporary poskim discuss whether the laws of respecting Torah writings also apply to printed seforim. Some hold that the holiness which rests upon the letters depends upon the intent of the person who writes them. Since a machine has no intent whatsoever, the holiness and the restrictions that accompany it, do not apply. The poskim reject this reasoning, and rule that even if the printing press was run by a gentile, the seforim still have holiness (Tzitz Eliezer III, 11; Minchas Yitzchak I, 17; 8:12).

One of the most common mishaps of improperly disposed geniza occurs when Torah thoughts are written in the course of a mundane text. People might not realize that the text contains kedusha, and disgrace or even destroy it (Ginzei HaKodesh, chs. 9, 14). Just such an incident occurred in the 2004 Jerusalem Chareidi phone book. A carpenter who specializes in shul furniture submitted an ad with a photograph of his handiwork, a beautiful *amud tefilla* with Hashem's Name clearly apparent in the picture. According to what we have discussed above, it is a Torah prohibition to throw away such a picture. The Geniza Society of Israel posted signs across the city, warning people to tear out this page and put it in geniza before throwing away the book.

DAILY MASHAL

The Backwards Letter Nun

The Gemara states that Hashem placed "*simaniyos* – markings," before and after the psukim, "And it was

when the Aron would travel, Moshe would say, 'Arise Hashem, and let Your enemies be scattered...'" (Bamidbar 10:35-36). According to the Rabanan, the marks denote that this *parsha* is out of place. It was moved here in order to separate between the ominous passages before and after it, both of which discuss the misdeeds of Bnei Yisrael. According to Rebbe, the marks denote that these psukim comprise a sefer in and of themselves. Hence, Rebbe holds that there are in fact seven books of Chumash, since Sefer Bamidbar is divided into three: the portion preceding "Arise Hashem," these psukim themselves, and the portion following them. There is no clear indication from the Gemara what form these markings must take. As such, a debate ensued among the Poskim, who draw upon both halacha and kabbala to investigate the issue.

The Maharshal (Teshuvos 73; Chochmas Shlomo, here) writes that the Gemara refers to "*parshiyos*" which must be placed before and after these psukim. Although we commonly used the word *parshiyos* to refer to the weekly Torah readings, the Poskim use this word to refer to the space left blank in the Sefer Torah, to signify the beginning of a new concept. Within the narrative of the Torah, "Arise Hashem," is not the proper place for a pause in the text, since the section preceding it also discusses the journeys of Bnei Yisrael in the Desert. Therefore, Rebbe and the Rabanan debate the significance of these spaces.

In some versions of Rashi's commentary, the *simaniyos* are interpreted as upside down letter-nuns. (This interpretation does not appear in the commonly accepted version of Rashi). The Maharshal at first argued that this cannot possibly be true, since extraneous marking such as vowels, tropes, or presumably upside down *nuns*, render a Sefer Torah posul. Therefore he interprets the *simaniyos* to mean blank spaces. As a proof for his conclusion, he notes that neither the Rambam, nor any of the early Poskim, describe the marks that should be written.

After having confidently reached this conclusion, the Maharshah was shown the writings of Rabbeinu Bachaye and the Rikanti, both of whom interpret the *simaniyos* to be upside down *nuns*, and even explain the significance of this symbol. Rabbeinu Bachaye explains that *nun* equals the number fifty in gematria. It represents the fifty parshiyos between the proper location of these psukim, and the place to where they were relocated. Alternatively, he explains that it kabbalistically represents the greater cycle of fifty from the world's creation until its ultimate destruction, after which it will be recreated. This cycle mirrors the fifty-year cycle of Yovel, after which the all land-acquisitions are annulled, and the fields return to their original owners. The *nun* is upside down to signify that the order of creation will be overturned. Nevertheless, the Maharshah does not seem to take this drasha as conclusive proof to the halacha.

The Zohar also makes mention of the backwards *nuns* in these psukim. Some Poskim cite this as proof that the *simaniyos* are indeed upside *nuns*. However, the Maharshah rejects this proof as well, explaining the quote from the Zohar as a kabbalistic passage, with no relevance to halacha.

In order to investigate the issue further, the Maharshah surveyed a number of Sifrei Torah, and found that many did use *nuns* to mark these psukim, with no less than twelve different variations. The following are the three most prevalent customs:

- a. To add *nuns* above the *nun* from בנסע and the *nun* from ובנחה. Although the Zohar does not seem to support this view, the Maharshah encourages it, explaining that since the extra *nuns* are added between the lines, and not within the actual text, they do not render the Sefer Torah posul. The Maharam (Teshuvos Maharam, 75), however, writes that this opinion is baseless, and these *nuns* should be erased from any Sefer Torah that may contain them.
- b. No extra *nuns* should be added, but the *nuns* from these two words should be written backwards and upside

down. This opinion was very commonly followed in the past. According to both the Maharam and the Maharshah, it is supported by the Zohar. (Although the Maharshah himself did not agree that this passage from the Zohar should be applied to halacha, he did respect the opinions that relied upon it, in as much that it does not contradict the prohibition against adding extra letters).

- c. Backwards *nuns* should be added within the text, in the spaces preceding and following these psukim. The Maharshah staunchly opposes this opinion, and writes that these extra letters render the Sefer Torah posul, as we explained above. The Noda B'Yehuda (74) argues that even if the Maharshah is correct that this opinion is inaccurate, the extra *nuns* do not render the Sefer Torah posul, since they are written between the words, and not within them. An alternate opinion is that of the Maharam, who cites the Sifri and Ralbag that the *simaniyos* are a series of dots placed over the psukim, or before or after them.

Over the course of the generations, the predominant custom became to add backwards *nuns* before and after these psukim, despite the Maharshah's reservations. The Mishnas Avraham (Shaar HaTemuna 24, p. 115), a leading authority in this field, writes that many Rishonim and Acharonim support this opinion, including the Aruch HaShulchan (Y.D. 275:21).

However, there is still some controversy as to how to write them. Some write a *nun* that is rotated 180 degrees, such that it is both backwards and upside down. The most common custom is to write a *nun* that faces backwards, but is not upside down. However, in printed Chumashim, the first opinion is followed, and the *nuns* are inverted 180 degrees. Some attribute this discrepancy to the printers, who balked at the expense of casting new type letters, to be used only twice in the entire Torah. Instead, they took the standard letter *nun* and simply turned it upside down.