In a remez associated with the count completed in this week’s parashah, the word “ישראל” is taken as the acrostic "ש ששים ריבואי תורהלאותית" – there are 60 myriads letters in the Torah”, one for each man counted in the desert. Each Jew brought to the Torah his own perspective.

Abayei said in the name of Shmuel: For three years there was a machlokes between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel, one saying “the halachah is like us”, the other saying “the halachah is like us”. Until a bas kol proclaimed “These and those are the words of the Living G-d, but the halachah is like Beis Hillel.” (Eiruvin 13b)

The debates of the schools of Hillel and Shammai are not of the type that one is correct and the other false. Rather, both are Hashem’s truth. However, in practice we can only follow one, and we rule according to Beis Hillel.

As the Gemara continues: R’ Abahu said in the name of R’ Yochanan: R’ Meir had a student named Sumchus. He was able to say about any tamei item 48 reasons why it should be tahor. And about any tahor item, he could bring 48 reasons why it should be tamei. (Ibid.)

Similarly, the R’ Elazar ben Azariah comments on the verse, “The words of chachamim are like goads, and like nails well planted are those of the masters of gatherings, they are given from one Shepherd.” (Koheles 12:11)

...“Well planted” – just as a plant is fruitful and multiplies, so too words of Torah are fruitful and multiply. ‘Masters of gatherings’ – these are talmidei chachamin who sit in many gatherings and busy themselves with the Torah, some pronouncing tamei, others pronouncing tahor, some prohibiting, others permitting, some declaring unfit, others declaring fit. A man might say, “How then can I study Torah?” Therefore the pasuk continues “all of them are given by one Shepherd.” One G-d gave them...” (Chagiga 3b)

How are we to understand this? How can two conflicting ideas be simultaneously true?

The Ritva writes that the Torah contains a range of halachic responses to any given situation. Authority was given to our rabbanim to define which of these possibilities is law. The process of pesak is not to discover law, but to select which of that range is to become law.1

The Torah contains a range of halachic responses to any given situation. Authority was given to our rabbanim to define which of these possibilities is law.

The Maharal’s approach is similar. However, according to the Maharal, it is not that both positions are equally emes. In fact, the Maharal believes that this world can not fully capture the full emes. Rather, the poseik must capture the pure ideal by approximating it. A pesak is by necessity a model that approximates the truth, and conflicting rulings can be equally valid models of the same ineffable ideal.2

Rav Tzadok HaKohen offers this explanation of the existence of conflicting notions within Torah:

Whenever a new thing about the Torah is found by a wise person, its opposite simultaneously arises... When it comes to the realm of po’el (action), it cannot be that two [contradictory] things are true simultaneously. In the realm of machashavah (thought), on the other hand, it is impossible for a person to think about one thing without considering the opposite. (Resisei Laylah 17)

Rav Tzadok makes two points. First, the plurality of Torah teachings emerges from finding new ideas. Yes, “all of them are given by the same Shepherd”, but were they given explicitly or implicitly? Rav Tzadok writes that Hashem did not spell out every idea of Torah to Moshe

1 Eiruvin ad loc

2 Be’er HaGolah, introduction
Rabbeinu. Rather, He expressed the ideas from which we are to derive and deduce the rest.

The second point in Rav Tzadok’s words is that in the realm of thought, contradiction is not only possible, but also necessary. While this seems surprising at first glance, it is central to our experience. We have all experienced moments of ambivalence. The person who learns of the death of a rich relative who left behind a large inheritance is obligated to bless G-d both as “Dayan emes”, that the death was just, and as “Tov uMeitiv”, the provider of the good of the inheritance.

We are used to a tradition of logic that began with Aristotle, one in which there is either truth or falsehood – nothing in between and certainly never both. However, there are other logical systems. In quantum mechanics, the physicist is called upon to consider a “superposition” of conflicting possibilities coexisting. In computer science, many explore “fuzzy logic”, a logic system that explores the gray areas of questions such as “John is tall.” How does one define a word like “tall” without having room for people at the edge of the definition?

When we looked at Parshas Behar we looked at the need to have both reductionist and holistic analyses of Torah. We need to divide Torah down into its components and understand each, as well as find the understanding of Torah that inheres in the relationship between components. We suggested that this is why the first Mishnah explains the time for Shema in terms of the laws of kohenah and taharas rather than simply spell out the law directly. The meaning of our din inheres in its connection to related dinim.

This too opens the door for alternatives to Aristotelian logic. Nothing is individual. The smallest item is not a single yes/no question but something that takes its meaning from its relation to many others. It therefore can only be understood when simultaneously perceived in different ways from multiple perspectives.

A third point in Rav Tzadok’s comments is that the human condition is based upon dialectics. We speak both of the greatness of man and his ability to comprehend, and his puniness and how little he can truly grasp. We can believe that man is basically good, and simultaneously that man is basically evil. If the Torah is to enable us to live within these conditions and to perfect ourselves, it must be equipped to speak to both sides of these paradoxes simultaneously.

The Torah allows us to develop different conclusions based upon how we evolve as individuals and as a people as a whole. The Maharash finds the source of this ability in the presence of the 600,000 people present at the giving of the Torah, in the Torah being given through multiple channels via multiple souls, each with its own perspective on the truth.4

Yes, the Torah embodies an absolute truth. Not every perspective is valid. Or, if we take the Maharal’s approach, not every model is a full three-dimensional, this-world shadow of the supernal truth. The Torah was given to include 600,000 letters, to accommodate analysis from each person’s perspective. In a machlokes, both conclusions are Torah because both are built upon the original letters; both are perspectives of the same truth. Within Rav Tzadok’s world of machashavah, both truths are a fulfillment of the mitzvah of Torah study. However, in the world of po’el, one better represents the more pragmatically appropriate approach to Hashem given where we stand in relation to the ideal, from the perspective with which we view the mountain.

A After teaching the laws of the sotah, the wayward wife, the Torah moves on to the laws of the nazir, one who vows to abstain from a number of otherwise permitted activities such as drinking wine. Rashi quotes the famous question of R’ Yehudah HaNasi, recorded in Sotah 2a, of why the Torah placed the laws of nazir directly after sotah. What is the connection between these two disparate themes? R’ Yehudah HaNasi’s answer is that whoever sees a sotah in all her shame will perforce vow to become a nazir and to refrain from drinking wine. Rashi explains that alcohol is frequently the cause of lewdness and marital infidelity. After seeing the sotah, a person might desire to

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4 Yam shel Shelomo, Bava Kama, introduction.

**Mesukim Midevash**

**Bakeish Shalom**
refrain from anything that might cause this impropriety.\(^1\)

The commentators are bothered with this logic. Someone who sees the results of infidelity does not need to further reinforce his position. Quite the opposite! His repulsion from the results of such acts has been greatly strengthened by what he has witnessed. If so, and this certainly seems to be human nature, why would someone who sees a sotah vow to become a nazir and refrain from drinking wine?

I believe that one possible explanation is as follows. The Torah commands us to “Judge your neighbor fairly” (Vayikra 19:15) which, among other things, obligates us to assume the best about our fellow Jews.\(^2\) In explaining the rationale behind this mitzvah, the Semak writes as follows: “From one’s judging others favorably one will think that no one but oneself sins and will return to his Creator [i.e. repent].”\(^3\) When we recognize that others are sinning, we face less of a psychological burden to sin than otherwise. It is normal to be imperfect, we will think, and only those above-normal are careful about this matter. If, however, we believe that no one sins then performing such an act is not only

1 See Rashi, Bamidbar 6:2 and on Sotah 2a sv. yazir.
2 See Shevuos 30a: Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos, aseh 177. Elsewhere I discuss the absence of this obligation from Rambam’s Mishneh Torah. On this, see R’ Yerucham Fishel Perlow, Sefer HaMitzvos LeRasag, aseh 97.
3 Semak, 225

Having concluded our study of the Morning berachos, a sequence of blessings and personal acknowledgements that raise us from the borders of consciousness to a point where we can approach a relationship with G-d, we come to the first major phase of morning prayer: Pesukei Dezimrah, the Verses of Song.
Why do we say Psukei Dezimrah? Parashas Va’eschanan, opens:

> And I entreated the Lord at that time, saying: “O Lord G-d, You have only begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what G-d is there in heaven or on earth that can deeds and mighty acts like Yours? Let me cross over, I pray to You, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill-country, and Lebanon.”

(Devarim 3:23-25)

R’ Simlai in Berachos 32b reads this as a paradigm for prayer. “First a person should order the praises of G-d (entreat...You have...), and after that he shall pray for what he needs (Let me...I pray to You).”

What do we say as Pesukei Dezimrah? The Rif’s text in Berachos there adds “we say a beracha beforehand, and what is it? Baruch She’amar and Yishtabach.” R’ Binyamin Yechezkel Romm notes (Sidur Otzar HaTefillos) that Baruch She’amar is first referenced in the Halachos Gedolos, which quotes a Gaon Moshe referring to “Baruch She’amar etc.” – indicating that the prayer was known to the Geonim and, by implication, the Amoraim, thereby supporting the Rif. Furthermore, the Rif and R’ Amram Gaon hold that Yishtabach does not begin with “Baruch atah” because it is the close of a “long-beracha” which starts with Baruch She’amar. As we know, in a sequence of berachos, only the first beracha need mention G-d’s Name and kingship, and open “Baruch”; the later ones only need a concluding “Baruch.” Thus, they hold (although others disagree) that one may not talk between Baruch She’amar and Yishtabach, as they are both parts of a contiguous sequence of berachos.

Furthermore, R’ Yossi in Shabbos 118a prays that his portion be with those who “complete Hallel from Tehillah LeDavid to the end of the book” – that is, Ashrei through Kol HaNeshamah Tehallel Kah.

Now we have a basic view of the content of Pesukei Dezimrah in its Talmudic form: Baruch She’amar, Tehillim 145-150, Yishtabach. But our Pesukei Dezimrah has a lot more material. Where does it fit in?

The first lengthy addition, Hodu, comes from Divrei Hayamim I:16:8-36. King David gives it to the priests to sing in the Mishkan, as a prelude to the daily offering, until the Temple is built. This temporary ordinance became permanent, and we see in Nehemiah 11:17, the kohanim relating that they still said it throughout the First Temple and wished to re-establish it in the Second Temple (yehodeh may refer to Hodu). Thus, we say it right after the Korbanos (in Nusach Sefard, even before Baruch She’amar), and as the first prelude to the daily Avodas HaTefillah.

One Israeli scholar has noted a possible paper trail from these verses through Rabbinic literature to indicate that it was said in the tefillos in Eretz Yisrael, and later in early Ashkenazic prayerbooks, making it possibly the oldest human-composed prayer in continuous use. Others, however, are of the view that it was a medieval addition.

Be that as it may, it is a historic reference right after Baruch She’amar. Then follows Yehi Kevod, a long meditation on G-d’s might, as an introduction to Ashrei and the “end of Hallel” psalms. Then come more miscellaneous verses on Hashem’s might, and another historical interlude from Kesuvim, culminating in Az Yashir. The sequence closes with Yishtabach.

This is a palindromic, or (as some Biblical scholars call it) a chiastic structure:

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Mesukim Midevash

Beracha: Baruch She’amar

History: Hodu

Miscellany: Yehi Kevod

Hallel: Ashrei → end

Miscellany: Baruch H’

History: Avram → Az Yashir

Beracha: Yishtabach.

This structure often appears in Tanach to emphasize the unity and importance of a passage, e.g. Ayin Tachas Ayin in the end of Parshas Emor, or in the Noach story, or repeatedly in the book of Ruth.

This pattern gives a different emphasis to a sequence similar to that in the Berachos. Again (particularly in Ashrei and its associated miscellanies) we have a series which arouses different emotions in our developing relationship with G-d. However, this is bracketed by history and by joyful berachos. Not only are we to construct our relationship with G-d, we are to rejocie in that relationship and thank Him for His great deeds.

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Mesukim Midevash is a project of The AishDas Society, offering words of machshavah, mussar and tefillah each week. For more information, email mesukim@aishdas.org or call (201) 757-0246.

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