

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

A sequence of verses in this week's sedra gave rise to a beautiful Talmudic passage—one that has found a place in the siddur. It is among the readings we say after the Evening Service on Saturday night as Shabbat comes to an end. Here is the text on which it is based: "For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d, who shows no favouritism and accepts no bribe. He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. (Deut. 10: 17-18)"

The juxtaposition of the two verses—the first about G-d's supremacy, the second about His care for the low and lonely—could not be more striking. The Power of powers cares for the powerless. The infinitely great shows concern for the small. The Being at the heart of being listens to those at the margins: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the poor, the outcast, the neglected. On this idea, the third century teacher Rabbi Yochanan built the following homily (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 31a): Rabbi Yochanan said, Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility. This is written in the Torah, repeated in the Prophets, and stated a third time in the Writings. It is written in the Torah: "For the Lord your G-d is G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d, who shows no favoritism and accepts no bribe." Immediately afterwards it is written, "He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing." It is repeated in the Prophets, as it says: "So says the High and Exalted One, who lives for ever and whose name is Holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with the contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite." It is stated a third time in the Writings: "Sing to G-d, make music for His name, extol Him who rides the clouds—G-d is His name—and exult before Him." Immediately afterwards it is written: "Father of the fatherless and judge of widows, is G-d in His holy habitation."

It is this passage that found its way into the (Ashkenazi) service at the end of Shabbat. Its presence there is to remind that that, as the day of rest ends and we return to our weekday concerns, we should not be so caught up in our own interests that we forget others

less favourably situated. To care only for ourselves and those immediately dependant on us is not "the way of G-d".

One of the more unusual aspects of being a Chief Rabbi is that one comes to know people one otherwise might not. These were three moments that made a deep impression on me.

From time to time Elaine and I give dinner parties for people within, and also outside, the Jewish community. Usually, at the end, the guests thank the hosts. Only once, though, did a guest not only thank us but also asked to be allowed to go into the kitchen to thank those who had made and served the meal. It was a fine act of sensitivity. No less interesting was who it was who did so. It was John Major, a British Prime Minister. Greatness is humility.

The oldest synagogue in Britain is Bevis Marks, in the heart of the City of London. Built in 1701, it was the first purpose-built synagogue in London, created by the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who were the first to return to England (or practice their Judaism in public: some had been marranos) after Oliver Cromwell gave permission in 1656 for Jews to return after their expulsion by Edward I in 1290.

Modelled on the Great Synagogue in Amsterdam, it has stayed almost unchanged ever since. Only the addition of electric lights has marked the passing of time—and even so, on special occasions, services are candle-lit as they were in those early days.

For the tercentenary service in 2001, Prince Charles came to the synagogue. There he met members of the community as well as leaders of Anglo-Jewry. What was impressive is that he spent as much time talking to the young men and women who were doing security duty as he did to the great and good of British Jewry. For security reasons, people volunteer to stand guard at communal events—part of the work of one of our finest organizations, the Community Security Trust. Often, people walk past them, hardly noticing their presence. But Prince Charles did notice them, and made them feel as important as anyone else on that glittering occasion. Greatness is humility.

Sarah Levene (not her real name) died tragically young. She and her husband had been blessed by G-d with great success. They were wealthy; but they did not spend their money on themselves. They gave tzedakah on a massive scale—within and beyond the Jewish community, in Britain, Israel and elsewhere.

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They were among the greatest philanthropists of our time.

When she died, among those who felt most bereaved were the waiters and waitresses of a well-known hotel in Israel where they often stayed. It transpired that she had come to know all of them-where they came from, what their family situation was, the difficulties they were going through, the problems they faced. She remembered not only their names but also the names of their spouses and children. Whenever any of them needed help, she made sure it came, quietly, unobtrusively. It was a habit she had wherever she went.

After her death I discovered how she and her husband came to be married. He was older than she was, a friend of her parents. She had some weeks free in the summer before the start of the academic year, and Mr Levene (not his real name) gave her a holiday job. One evening after work they were about to join her parents for a meal. In the street they passed a beggar. Mr Levene, punctilious about the mitzvah of tzedakah, reached into his pocket and gave the man a coin. As they were walking on, Sarah asked him to lend her some money-a fairly large sum, which she promised she would repay at the end of the week when he paid her wages.

He did so. She then ran back to the beggar and gave him the money. "Why did you do that?" he asked, "I had already given him some money". "What you gave him", she said, "was enough to help him for today but not enough to make a difference to his life."

At the end of the week, Mr Levene gave her her wages. She handed him back most of the money, to repay him for the sum he had lent her. "I will accept the money," he told her, "because I do not want to rob you of your mitzvah." But- as he himself told me after her death, "It was then that I decided to ask her to marry me-because her heart was bigger than mine."

Throughout their marriage they spent as much time and energy on giving their money to charitable causes as they did on earning it. They were responsible for many of the most outstanding educational, medical and environmental projects of our time. I have had the privilege of knowing other philanthropists- but none who knew the names of the children of the waiters at the hotel where they stayed; none who cared more for those others hardly noticed or who gave help more

quietly, more effectively, more humanly. Greatness is humility.

This idea-counter-intuitive, unexpected, life-changing-is one of the great contributions of the Torah to Western civilization and it is set out in the words of our sedra, when Moses told the people about the "G-d of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G-d" whose greatness lay not just in the fact that He was Creator of the universe and shaper of history, but that "He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing." Those who do this are the true men and women of G-d. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“[G-d] afflicted you and let you hunger [in the desert], and then He fed you the manna... in order to let you know that not by bread alone does a human live, but rather by that which comes from G-d's mouth does a human live" (Deut. 8:3).

What is the real message of the manna? And how does one live by that which comes from "G-d's mouth"? Toward the end of Deuteronomy, the Biblical text equates life with G-d Himself: "I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, [and life means] to love the Lord your G-d, to listen to His voice and cleave to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days" (Deut. 30:19, 20).

Conventional wisdom has it that bread is the staff of life, but this is only part of the picture. Our Torah teaches that it is G-d alone who enables human life, which is why it is G-d who provides the food by which we lived in the desert, so it would be clearly G-d's gift. To clarify these metaphysical verses, we turn to the earliest manuscripts of Onkelos' Aramaic translation (Targum) of the Biblical text, specifically the verse which heads up our commentary: "... Not by bread alone does a human live but rather by that which comes from G-d's mouth does a human live." Here the Targum explicitly distinguishes between bread - which provides physical subsistence - and G-d's mouth [words, Torah] which provides for human life, human eternity. Bread is temporal existence; G-d's words - and gifts - are eternal. Bread exists in the real world and over the course of time it rots and disappears; G-d's words are eternal - values, ideas and ideals that soar to the heavens and live in time immemorial, far beyond the parchment on which they are recorded. Bread is a thing, an "it," an object that can be gathered and consumed, lost or stolen. In contrast, love is a relationship, a desire to give and reach out beyond oneself, and which lives - and "begets" - beyond the life span of any of those who feel it. G-d is love, and real love emanates from - and ultimately returns to - the G-d who gave it. A Temple is

a building that exists in space, and just as it is constructed; it can be deconstructed, or even worse, burned to the ground. In contrast, Shabbat is a day unto the Lord, a sanctuary in time, which bestows a taste of eternity on all those who rejoice in its 25 hours. Manna from G-d's mouth is beyond physical food.

This was the Biblical way of teaching Israel how to experience Shabbat, and to help Israel realize that only by recognizing G-d as the true source of life, do we have the opportunity of living life eternal.

The second Mishna in the seventh chapter of Tractate Shabbat lists the 39 forbidden physical activities on Shabbat - activities derived from acts involved in the construction of the Mishkan - Desert Tabernacle, a building in space. A careful reading of these activities reveals the following categories: the process involved in bread production, the process involved in garment production, the process involved in leather production. Food, clothing and shelter - the fundamental needs of all physical creatures.

I believe the Mishna is teaching us the legitimacy of pursuing the necessities of life during the six-day work week; however, it is precisely this chasing after our physical needs which is prohibited on Shabbat. Shabbat is a day given over to true life, to the eternal values of Torah, love, family and community relationships. Shabbat is a day when we do not get into a car to escape the people closest to us, to avoid looking within ourselves or being present with spouse and children. Shabbat is a day when we refuse to be interrupted by a telephone and its conversations where we speak, but rarely truly listen. Shabbat is a day that brings us back to an earlier stage of human development, before Twitter tweets - a medium which may inform, but doesn't really communicate.

It is told that a man was once running back in forth in a frenzy, not far from Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev. When the rebbe asked him why he seemed so agitated, the Jew responded: "I am trying to find the best way to make a living." "Please make sure," cautioned Rebbe Levi Yitzhak, "that in your rush to make a living, you don't lose your life." © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**M**oshe's discourse to the children of Israel at the end of his life continues in this week's parsha. I think that it has to be said that Moshe presents a "fair and balanced" review of the events that have befallen Israel during its desert sojourn. The good and the bad, the exalted and the petty are all recorded for us in his words. And his view of the future of his beloved people is also a balanced mixture of woeful warnings and of great reward, of unlimited opportunity and of crushing defeats.

As always, he is forced to leave the choice of behavior and direction to the people of Israel themselves but he attempts surely to guide their choices in the right direction through his words and predictions. This is perhaps the greatest quality of a leader - the ability to clearly outline significant choices in life and society and give guidance to one's people to make wise and beneficial decisions.

Leaders who portray only one side, the bright one, of the coin - who promise only utopian lower taxes and yet increased welfare programs, peace without sacrifice and social systems of equality and blind justice that do not take into account the realities of human nature - only encourage inevitable disappointment, cynicism and apathy in their people and constituents.

On the other hand, leaders who govern by dire threats, terrible predictions, scapegoating imagined causers of all of society's ills and generating only drabness and a bleak view of the future destroy human initiative in a fog of pessimism.

Moshe, the paradigm of the great and wise leader presents throughout his discourse here in the book of Dvarim the coin as a whole.

Unfortunately, over the ages, the Jews have not always chosen wisely. People hear what they wish to hear no matter what the speaker really says. We are prone to misquote, misunderstand, repeat phrases out of context and generally ignore what we do not wish to hear and understand.

Moshe's attempt to portray the great achievements of the desert - and especially of Sinai - and balance them with the reminders of the tragedies and wars that also marked Israel's journey through the desert, in the long run had only limited influence on the people. Our sages taught us that the Jewish people simply did not believe that the dire predictions that Moshe warned them about if they sinned would ever really occur.

G-d simply had too much invested in the Jewish people. It was a forerunner of our modern "too big to fail" philosophy regarding otherwise corrupt financial institutions. So Moshe's darker side of the coin was never really believed by the Jewish people.

They heard only the good - what they wanted to hear - and ignored the rest. There are many Jews today that unfortunately listen to the opposite strains of Jewish life. They despair of our future and our wonderful state. They also only hear what they wish to hear, fueled by a biased and ignorant media and screwy intellectualism. They see no grand future for Israel, the people, the state and the land. A well considered study of Moshe's words and realistic and balanced message would certainly be in order for everyone. © 2010 *Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)*

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Ekev introduced us to the popular phrase "Man does not live by bread alone" (8:3). However, end of that verse is far less famous, although the second part contains the true message. It reads, "Rather, by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live." If the point is that G-d's emanations are the source of our lives, why use bread as the subject, when bread only becomes edible through the toils of man? Wouldn't fruits be a better example of G-d's influence on the world?

I heard Rabbi Greenberg and saw Rav Hirsch explain that bread is used as the subject because it exemplifies the toils of man, and that the message here is that even when you toil for the bread you eat, don't forget that Hashem (G-d) has toiled for everything that we have, and His goal is not just to sustain us, but to help us live physically AND spiritually. Man should not only seek physical nourishment from the work of his hands, but should seek spiritual nourishment from the word of his G-d. © 2010 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**O**ver and over our portion emphasizes the importance of inheriting the land of Israel. (Deuteronomy 8:1, 9:1) Why is Israel so crucial to our covenant with G-d?

In the end, the goal of the Jewish people is to do our share to redeem the world. This is our mission as the chosen people and this can only be accomplished through committing ourselves to the chosen land, Israel.

In fact, the first eleven chapters of the Torah are universal. G-d chose humankind over all species. He created. But humankind did not fulfill the chosen role G-d had assigned to it. The world was destroyed by flood, and soon after all of humanity was spread across the earth in the generation of dispersion.

G-d then chose Abraham and Sarah to be the father and mother of the Jewish people. Their mandate was not to be insular but to be a blessing for the entire world. It is not that the souls of Abraham and Sarah were superior; it is rather their task which had a higher purpose.

Ultimately, we became a people who are charged to follow halakhah, the pathway to Torah ethicism, which leads to the redemption of the Jewish people, through which the world is to be redeemed. Our task is to function as the catalyst in the generation of the redeemed world. The movement of chosenness is not from the particular to the more particular, but rather from the particular to the more universal. Chosenness

is, therefore, not a statement of superiority but of responsibility.

The idea of our chosenness has always been associated with our sovereignty over the chosen land. From this perspective, Israel is important not only as the place that guarantees political refuge; not only as the place where more mitzvot (commandments) can be performed than any other; and not only the place where - given the high rate of assimilation and intermarriage in the exile - our continuation as a Jewish nation is assured. But first and foremost, Israel is the place, the only place, where we have the potential to carry out and fulfill our mandate as the chosen people. In exile, we are not in control of our destiny; we cannot create the ideal society Torah envisions. Only in a Jewish state do we have the political sovereignty and judicial autonomy that we need to be the or lagoyim (light unto the nations) and to establish a just society from which other nations can learn the basic ethical ideals of Torah.

Of course, Jews living in the Diaspora can make significant individual contributions to the betterment of the world. And there are model Diaspora communities that impact powerfully on Am Yisrael and humankind. But I would insist that the destiny of the Jewish people-that is, the place where we as a nation can realize the divine mandate to Abraham of "in you will be blessed all the peoples of the earth"-can only be played out in the land of Israel.

From this perspective, those living in the chosen land have the greater potential to more fully participate in carrying out the chosen people idea. Only there do we, as a nation, have the possibility to help repair the world-the ultimate challenge of Am Yisrael. © 2010 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states, "For if you shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you to do them, to love the Lord, your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to cleave to Him..." (Deuteronomy 11:22). How does one "cleave to the Almighty?"

The Torah tells us that even someone who observes all of the commandments and has attained the attribute of loving G-d, must emulate G-d ("to walk in all His ways") in order to cleave to Him. Emulating G-d means being compassionate and bestowing kindness on others. ("He is merciful so we should be merciful, He bestows kindness, so we should bestow kindness"—Rashi). One might think that a person who loves G-d need only devote himself to prayer and Torah study and by this means he will cleave to G-d. We see from this verse, however, that an essential ingredient in cleaving to G-d is caring about our fellow man. (And if we care about our fellow human being, we wouldn't

gratuitously speak negatively about him, would we?)  
*Based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*  
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### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## On Cue

**N**ot often does G-d Almighty tell anybody to leave him alone. But then again, Moshe isn't everybody.

This week, Moshe recounts the sad tale of the Golden Calf. Moshe had promised to return from Mount Sinai after receiving the Torah in forty days, but the Jews miscalculated. According to their calculations, he was late. Fearing that Moshe would never return from his celestial mission, the Jews made themselves a golden calf and worshipped it while proclaiming, "this is our god that took us out of Egypt." Obviously, the calculations and miscalculations of the Jewish People are not as simple as they appear on the surface. That, however is an entirely different issue.

I'd like to focus in on the aftermath of the calamity of the Golden Calf. Hashem actually wanted to destroy the Jewish Nation and rebuild a new folk with Moshe, as its patriarchal leader. "Release me," said G-d, "and I will destroy them and build a new nation from you" (Deuteronomy 9:14)). Immediately after the words, "release me" Moshe sprung into action. In the Book of Exodus, it details how Moshe pleaded, cajoled, and reasoned with Hashem with a multitude of persuasive arguments that calmed His wrath. The Jews were spared.

What is troubling is Moshe's chutzpah. Didn't Hashem specifically tell him, "leave me alone"? What prompted him with the audacity to defy a direct command of Hashem?

Herbert Tenzer served as a distinguished congressman from New York in the 1960s. More importantly, he was an observant Jew who was a proud activist and was instrumental in providing relief for many Holocaust survivors. A few months before his passing, some years ago, he related to me the following story:

The energetic and often outspoken Rabbi Eliezer Silver of Cincinnati, Ohio was a prominent force in the Vaad Hatzallah Rescue Committee. He worked tirelessly throughout the terrible war years and their aftermath to save and place the victims of Nazi depravity. In addition to his prominence in the Jewish world, Rabbi Silver enjoyed a personal relationship with the very powerful Senator Robert Taft of Ohio.

Rabbi Silver had a very difficult request that needed much political pressure and persuasion to accomplish. He asked Mr. Tenzer to accompany him to the Senator. "Senator Taft!" he exclaimed, mixing his distinct accent in which the s would sound as sh, with a high pitched intoning of emotions. I have a very important and difficult request!"

Rabbi Silver went on to plead his case of obtaining a certain number of visas for some refugees who may not

have met all the criteria. Senator Taft looked nonchalant and non-committal. The Senator thought for a while then grimaced. He slowly and carefully stretched his response. "It would be arduous and burdensome," he began. "but technically," he continued, implying all the while that he was not the least bit anxious to get his hands dirty, "it can be done."

But Rabbi Silver did not hear anything except the last three words.

"IT CAN BE DONE?" He shouted with joy. "SHO DO IT!" Needless to say the stunned Senator got to work immediately and obtained the visas for the beleaguered Jews.

Moshe heard one line from Hashem, "leave me alone, and I will destroy them." That was his cue. The Talmud in Berachos explains that hearing those words, Moshe knew that now it all depended on him. The only way Hashem would destroy His people was if Moshe left him alone. And he didn't. Moshe badgered, cajoled, and pleaded with the Almighty and we were spared.

My Rebbe once quoted legendary slugger Ted Williams, the last player to achieve a batting average of over .400. "Every player gets one pitch that he definitely can hit. To hit .400, don't miss that pitch." Instead of recoiling at the words "release me" or "leave me be," Moshe saw his pitch. And he hit it awfully hard.

In life there are many cues. This week Moshe teaches his nation that when you get your cue, don't miss it. Even if it takes a little chutzpah. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd you shall remember all of the way (i.e. road) that Hashem your G-d made you travel these forty years in the desert, in order to afflict you, to test you, to know what is in your heart, whether you will keep His commandments or not" (Devarim 8:2). The above translation follows the "k'ri," the wording as it read; had I translated it according to the way it is written instead, the "k'siv," there would be one slight difference: Instead of being His "commandments" (plural) that we are supposed to follow, it would be His "commandment" (singular), as the third to last word in the verse has no letter "yud," but we "pretend" that there are six letters in the word instead of five, adding a "yud" before the last letter.

I could try suggesting a reason for this discrepancy. For example, even though the test is whether we will keep all of G-d's commandments (not just one), hence the added "yud," since Rashi tells us that the crux of the test is whether we will do so without complaining, it is in essence this one commandment (not to complain) that is the focus of the verse. In order to teach us that we are being commanded (singular commandment) not to complain while keeping all of the

commandments (plural), the Torah embedded both the singular and the plural forms into the same word.

However, rather than taking a closer look, this week I'd like to take a broader look, and discuss the very nature of "k'ri/k'siv." Why are there words in the Torah (and throughout Tanach) that are written one way but are supposed to be read a different way? There are even instances where there is no word at all yet our tradition says to pretend a specific word is there and read the verse as if it contains that word, and instances where the text contains a word that our tradition says to skip when reading the verse. Why is this so, and how did these "discrepancies" get there?

As I alluded to above, it can be suggested that each version (the version we read and the version in the text) has something to add. The Malbim (Ayeles HaShachar #247) says that the way things are read (the "k'ri") represents the plain meaning of the word/verse while the way it is written (the "k'siv") represents its exegetical meaning. The Vilna Gaon (in his commentary to Mishlay 16:19) says that the "k'ri" usually reflects the "revealed" meaning while the "k'siv" reflects its "hidden" meaning. This approach can be applied to narrative as well. For example, Sefer Devarim is primarily the words Moshe spoke to the nation shortly before his death. When Moshe said these words, he either said commandment (singular) or commandments (plural), but could not have said both. Nevertheless, when G-d told Moshe to write down the words he (Moshe) spoke to the nation and include them in the Torah, He (G-d) could easily have told him to write the word in its singular form but pronounce it as if it's written in the plural form. And this is what the Talmud (Nedarim 37b) seems to say happened, as "[words] read but not written and [words] written but not read are "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai," laws taught to Moshe at Sinai.

However, this is problematic, as these words were said by Moshe at Arvos Moav, 38+ years after the nation left Sinai; how could G-d tell Moshe at Sinai to write them down if they weren't said yet? (This issue applies to all of the narrative that occurred after they left Mt. Sinai.) But even if we want to "translate" the word "Sinai" liberally, and include any direct communication between G-d and Moshe (since there is no practical difference whether this communication took place atop Mt. Sinai, in the Mishkan while at Sinai, in the Mishkan at any of the stops along way, or in the Mishkan at Arvos Moav), calling it "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" is still problematic. The examples the Talmud gives are from the books of Shemuel, Yirmiyah and Rus, all of which were written well after Moshe died! How could any "k'ri/k'siv" contained in them have been taught to Moshe?

Ben Yehoyada drives this point home (without discussing it) by saying that there was never a change in the text, as all of it, including how it should be written and how it should be read, was said to Moshe at Sinai,

"and so it was with the verses of Nevi'im (Prophets) and Kesuvim (Writings); this was how it was revealed to us (i.e. with both the "k'ri" and the "k'siv") by the prophets that wrote them." How this qualifies as "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" is not explained.

The Rosh (Hilchos Mikva'os 1, after Meseches Nidah) explains "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" in a very non-literal way, understanding it to mean a law that is as clear (uncontested) as a law told directly to Moshe at Sinai. In this context, when the Talmud uses the expression "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" regarding how the text of Tanach is written, it would mean that these aspects (the three categories included by the Talmud) are not later additions, but were part of the original text (and how it should be read). Nevertheless, there is much written to explain what "k'ri" and "k'siv" represent, including how those in Nach (Nevi'im/Kesuvim) can be classified as "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai."

Radak (in his introduction to Sefer Yehoshua and on Shemuel II 15:21), gives his take on "k'ri" and "k'siv." "It seems [to me] that during the first exile (after the first Temple was destroyed) the books (containing the Biblical text) were lost and moved, and the sages that knew the text died. And the Men of the Great Assembly, who returned the Torah to its original state, found discrepancies in the texts that were available, and (when reconstructing the authoritative text) followed (for each discrepancy) the majority, based on their opinion/knowledge. And in place[s] that their knowledge/opinion did not reach a point of full clarity (i.e. they were not completely confident that they had restored the text to its original form), they wrote one [version] but did not vocalize it, or they wrote it outside (the margins) but not inside (the body of the text), or wrote one [version] outside and one inside." Radak is not the only one to suggest this, although it seems that the others who do so are following his lead (i.e. Meiri, in his introduction to Kiryas Sefer, who quotes Radak's language).

We can not apply the Rosh's understanding of "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" to the Radak's explanation, and it would be difficult to suggest that Radak is disagreeing with the Talmud's understanding of the origin of "k'ri" and "k'siv" (especially since Meiri repeats it in his explanation of the Talmud, which also precludes the possibility that "k'ri" and "k'siv" being "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" is only a minority opinion). I would therefore suggest something similar to what I wrote regarding the Talmud's assertion that Esther was given at Sinai and that the Aggadic literature was given at Sinai (see <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/shuvuos-5770>); Moshe was taught the system to reconstruct the Biblical text (when necessary) at Sinai, including what to do if unsure exactly what the original text stated.

Abarbanel (in his introduction to Sefer Yirmiyah) rejects Radak's approach, for several reasons. For one thing, if a Sefer Torah is missing even one letter it is invalid, and if "k'ri" and "k'siv" are based on

discrepancies that were unresolved, all of our Sifri Torah would likely be invalid. I'm not sure why this would be so; as long as we follow the proscribed procedure for writing/fixing the text, the halacha (law) would be that it is a valid Sefer Torah.

Abarbanel's next issue with Radak's approach is that there is a "guarantee" that the Torah would always be with us, which Abarbanel understands to mean with no doubts about what the original text was. Included in this concept (Abarbanel continues) is the comforting thought of the consistency of the Torah (its text) no matter how harsh the trials and tribulations we are forced to withstand are (keep in mind that Abarbanel had been a royal officer and had to flee Spain during the Inquisition, an upheaval that affected him greatly, including his having to rewrite much of his commentary due to the loss of his original manuscripts). This is why (according to Abarbanel) one of the fundamentals of our faith (referring to Rambam's 8th principal) is that the text we have now is the exact same text that was given to Moshe. A close reading of Rambam's 8th principal, however (see Igros Moshe, Yoreh Daya 3:114), indicates that Rambam did not mean (or at least focus on) whether the text we have is the exact same text given to Moshe, but whether any part of the text was written (or added) by Moshe on his own, without having been dictated to him (or to Yehoshua, according to the opinion that the last eight verses of the Torah were written down by Moshe, see Bava Basra 15a). Rambam does not mean that no textual doubt will ever arise, but that nothing in the text was purposely added; it all came directly from G-d. Reconstructing the text is not the issue, since the reconstruction is an attempt to determine what G-d had dictated, not a suggestion that the original came from another source. (Whether anyone disagrees with Rambam regarding this being a fundamental is a separate issue; I am only trying to clarify Rambam's opinion, since this is what Abarbanel is basing himself on and what the traditional community has accepted.)

The notion that we will always have the exact text that was dictated to Moshe is difficult to sustain. Aside from Radak (et al), Chikuni (Beraishis 15:5) says that the dots over certain letters or words in the Torah were added by Ezra to indicate which letters he was unsure were in Moshe's original text. (Although some attribute Avos d'Rav Nosson 34:4 as being Chizkuni's source, the context makes it clear that Avos d'Rav Nosson understands the dots to be a means of conveying additional messages from the text, not an indication of not being sure whether that part of the text really belonged.) Conceptually, the Chizkuni is very similar to Radak; Chizkuni uses the concept to explain the dots while Radak uses it to explain "k'ri" and "k'siv." In addition, there are numerous places where the text used by the Talmud and Midrashim does not exactly match our text (see Ran on Sanhedrin 4a). Rashba (Responsa Attributed to Ramban 232) acknowledges

that there are differences between the sages that excelled at exegesis and those that excelled at maintaining the text, and between "the sages in the east and the sages in the west" (which I understand to mean those in Bavel and those in Israel) regarding what the text actually is, making it impossible to say that we will always know what the exact text was. [The differences in the text are very few, and very minor, and almost always have no practical difference. In almost all cases, the exegesis involved did affect Jewish law, only Aggadic interpretation. Since the point of these interpretations is the message they carry, and the message was carried via Chazal, we can trust the message to be a valid one. The one instance where the difference between the texts affects Jewish law (and is only relevant to a rare circumstance, one that may never have occurred, as part of the service in the Temple in Jerusalem), is the subject of Rashba's Responsa. Conceptually, this is not really in issue either, and can be compared to different communities having different customs, or following the decision of their local Poskim (decisors of Jewish law); when it comes to maintaining the text, we follow the decisions of those whose expertise is in maintaining the text, and when it come to laws deduced through exegesis, we follow the decision of those who are experts in that area. Besides, at the time this "difference" could have been relevant, there was a Sanhedrin available to make the final determination.] Chazal (Meseches Sofrim 6:4, Yerushalmi Taanis 4:2, Sifri on Devarim 33:27) tell us that there were three Sifray Torah found in the Temple that had (slightly) different texts, and (in order to reconstruct the correct text) they used the concept of "majority rules" (Shemos 23:2), with the final text not being exactly the same as any of the three they had started with. This is not the same as Radak or Chizkuni, as once the text was reconstructed there was no indication included in the finished product that there had ever been a doubt, but it does show that discrepancies can arise, and at least until the reconstruction process is completed there could be doubts about exactly what Moshe's original text was.

It is unfair to mandate to others what should provide comfort, and practically speaking it is impossible. Nevertheless, I don't take any less comfort in knowing that we have a system in place (with divine approval) to reconstruct the text than if we had a guarantee that we would never have any doubts about what Moshe's text was, exactly, to the letter.

Another issue Abarbanel has with Radak's approach is determining which version to include in the body of the text (the "k'siv") and which to put in the margin or the vocalization (the "k'ri"). It would seem, though, that even if Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly weren't confident enough in one version to totally disregard the other, they could still choose which version they thought was more likely to be correct. In any case, what their "doubt" was needs to be explored,

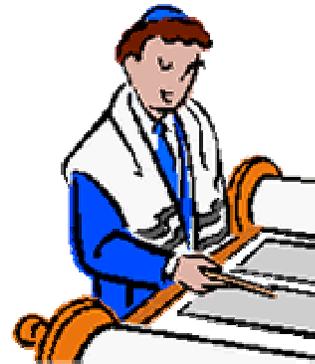
as if there was a majority of manuscripts that indicated one way, why didn't they just go with the majority (as stated in Meseches Sofrim, et al)? Did Radak think that there were exactly the same number of manuscripts for both possibilities for every "k'ri" and "k'siv?" That is rather unlikely. Quite possibly, there were reasons why they thought certain manuscripts were less reliable, and even though, when all the manuscripts were counted, there was a majority indicating one version over the other, since these less-reliable manuscripts created the "majority," they didn't want to disregard the version contained in the reliable manuscripts. Whatever the situation was, it does not seem strange that they would prefer one version over the other, and indicate as much by making one the "k'siv" and the other the "k'ri." [It should be noted that this discussion is not necessarily affected by the Talmud's discussion (Sanhedrin 4a) regarding whether the way things are written is primary ("yesh aim l'moseres") or the way they are read is ("yesh aim l'mikra"), as in those cases the differences are not between the "k'ri" and the "k'siv," but between how it could be written based on how we read it vs. how it could be read based on how it is written.]

The final issue Abarbanel challenges Radak with is the strongest. Many of the differences between the "k'ri" and the "k'siv" occur numerous times with the same word (although, ironically enough considering Abarbanel's take on the possibility of differences in the text arising, if you compare his examples with our text, they don't add up). If the "k'ri" vs. "k'siv" differences are the result of copyist errors, how likely is it that the same exact error happened almost every time a word was written. (Even though one version of the Chazal relating the three Sifray Torah found in the Temple has the third discrepancy occurring numerous times, it seems more likely that this is an inaccurate version of the Chazal rather than the same error being made so often.) Abarbanel also questions how they could be copyist errors if some words are read totally differently than the way they are written, but one of the three discrepancies in the three Sifray Torah in the Temple fit that category as well.

After rejecting Radak's approach, Abarbanel reiterates that the "k'siv" was never in doubt, and says that Ezra added a "commentary" to those words that would not have been understood properly (usually because the way it was written has hidden meanings) in the form of a way to read the word that brings out its simple, straightforward meaning. (This is consistent with the Malbim and Gra quoted above.) Although Abarbanel does not directly address how the Talmud can say this was "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai," he does say that Ezra being able to explain the text this way was "without a doubt received from the prophets and the sages of the generation that preceded him." If we take it back further, and say that the authorization to clarify the text this way was given to Moshe at Sinai, the approach of the Abarbanel can fit with the Talmud as well.

Maharal (Tiferes Yisroel 66) takes very strong issue with both Radak and Abarbanel's approaches, with one of the main reasons being that they go against Chazal telling us that "k'ri" and "k'siv" are "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai." (As we have discussed, this is not necessarily the case.) According to Maharal, the text as written contains the deep wisdom appropriate for divine works, while the way it is read reflects its plain meaning. Maharal does address how "k'ri" and "k'siv" can be "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" if they appear throughout Tanach, with the "halacha" being to hint to the deeper meaning in the written text but to read it in a way that the plain meaning is understood.

That the "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" is the system of using "k'ri" and "k'siv" rather than how each individual word should be written/read is evident from the Talmud itself. Aside from the fact that the examples given are from books written after Moshe had died, one of the other categories said to be "halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai" is reading "eretz" as "uretz" (changing the vowel under the first letter from a "segol" to a "kumatz") when it is the last word of a verse (or verse segment). This occurs for proper names as well (such as "Lemech" becoming "Lumech," see Beraishis 4:18 and 5:25). If the Talmud is saying that Moshe was taught how to pronounce the specific word ("eretz/uretz"), it would be no different than his being taught how to pronounce every other word in the Torah as G-d dictated it to him (see Ritz, quoted by Shita Mekubetzes). If however, the Talmud means that Moshe was taught the rule of how to vocalize these types of words in these types of situations (the "rule" rather than each word by itself), we can understand which "halacha" Moshe was taught independent of being taught the entire text. And just as the "halacha" regarding "mikre sofrim" refers to the rule, not the specific words the rule applies to, the "halacha" regarding "k'ri/k'siv" refers to the rule, not how to write/read each specific word. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer



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