

## One Letter Speaks Twice: Extraordinary Letters and Lessons from the Torah Scroll

### Otiot Meshunot

Each letter in the Aleph-Bet appears meshunah (irregular/distinct/extraordinary) at least once in the Torah. Otiot meshunot are meaningful, sometimes mysterious, and create a visual midrash in the text.

#### 1) Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1137-1204 CE), Mishneh Torah, Tefillin, Mezuzah, and the Torah Scroll 7:8:

One should be careful of the large letters, the small letters, the dotted letters, and the otiot hameshunot, such as the wrapped Pei and the bent letters, that the sofrim have copied from one scribe to another.

משנה תורה, הלכות תפילין ומזוזה  
וספר תורה ז' ח'

(ח) ויזהר בְּאוֹתֵי הַגְּדוֹלוֹת  
וּבְאוֹתֵי הַקְּטָנוֹת וּבְאוֹתֵי הַנְּקֻדוֹת  
וְאוֹתֵי הַמְּשֻׁנוֹת כְּגוֹן הַפֶּאִי"ן  
הַלְּפוּפוֹת וְהַקְּטָנוֹת הַעֲקָמוֹת כְּמוֹ  
שֶׁהֶעֱתִיקוּ הַסּוֹפְרִים אִישׁ מִפִּי אִישׁ.

### The Wrapped Pei

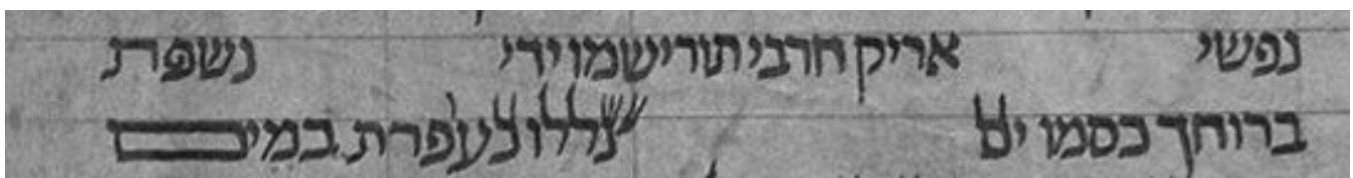
2)

#### Otzar Midrashim, Sefer Tagin

There are 191 places in our tradition where we do not add crownlets [to the letter Peh] and their mouths are on the inside.

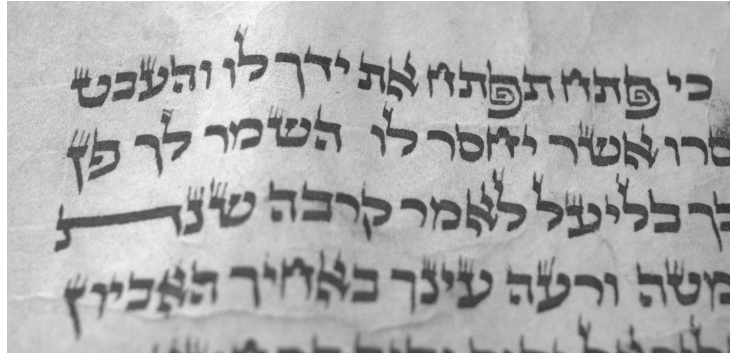
אוצר מדרשים, ספר תגין  
פ) טוב קצ"א באורייתא דלא מזיינין  
ופומיהון לגאיו.

#### 3) Bologna Torah Scroll, the oldest complete Sefer Torah in the world:



Song at the Sea (detail). Scroll 2, University of Bologna, c. 1155-1225.

#### 4) Czech Memorial Scroll, Number 1093:



Torah from town of Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Czech Republic, written in 1890. Photo by Deborah B. Thompson.

#### 5) Dev. 15:7-8

כִּי־ה' בָּרַךְ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאֲחִידָה בְּאֲחִידָה שְׁעָרֶיהָ בְּאֶרֶץ־הָאֲשֵׁר־ה' אֱלֹקֶיהָ נָתַן לָהּ לֹא תִאֲמַץ אֶת־לִבְכֶּהּ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת־גְּדָףָהּ מֵאֲחִידָה הָאֲבִיוֹן:  
כִּי־פָתַחְתָּ תִפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לּוֹ וְהֵעַבְטָהּ תֵּעָבֵטְנוּ. דִּי מְחִסְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסַר לּוֹ:

If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kin in any of your settlements in the land that your G'd is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. Rather, you must **open** your hand and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need.

#### 6) Baal HaTurim (Rabbi Yaacov ben Asher c. 1269-1343 CE) on Devarim 15:8:

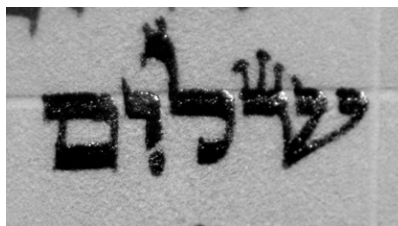
This doubled Pei indicates that you who are giving the loan to your brother should open, not only your hand, but your mouth, and speak reassuring words to him.

#### The Vav Ketiyah: The Cut Vav

#### 7) Talmud Kiddushin 66b:

אמר רב נחמן ניו דשלום קטיעה היא

Rav Nahman says: The letter vav of the word *shalom* [in Numbers 25:12] is cut.



#### 8) Numbers 25:12-13

לָכֵן אָמַר ה' הִנְנִי נֹתֵן לּוֹ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם:  
וְהָיְתָה לּוֹ וּלְזַרְעוֹ אֶחָדֵי בְרִית כְּהִנָּחַת עוֹלָם פֶּסַח אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאֱלֹקָיו וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל־בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Therefore, say, "I hereby give him My covenant of peace." It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time, because he took impassioned action for his G'd, thus making expiation for the Israelites.

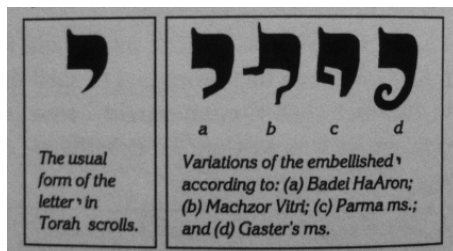
## 9) Numbers 29:39

אלה תעשו לה' במועדיכם לבד מנדריכם ונדבתיכם לעלתיכם ולמנחתיכם ולנסוכיכם ולשלמיכם:

All these you shall offer to G!d at the stated times, in addition to your votive and freewill offerings, be they burnt offerings, meal offerings, libations, or offerings of well-being.

### The Yud Kefufah: The Bent Yud

**10) Sefer Tagin:** The Sefer Tagin states that there are eighty-three yuds known as the כפופה " written in the Torah scroll.



Baal HaTurim Chumash, ed. by Avie Gold. Mesorah Publications, 2003. p. 295.

## 11) Genesis 32:11

קטנתי מכל החסדים ומכל־האמת אשר עשית את־עבדך כי במקלי עברתי את־הירדן ועתה הניתי לשגני מחנות:

I have been humbled by all of the kindnesses, and all of the truth that You have shown to your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

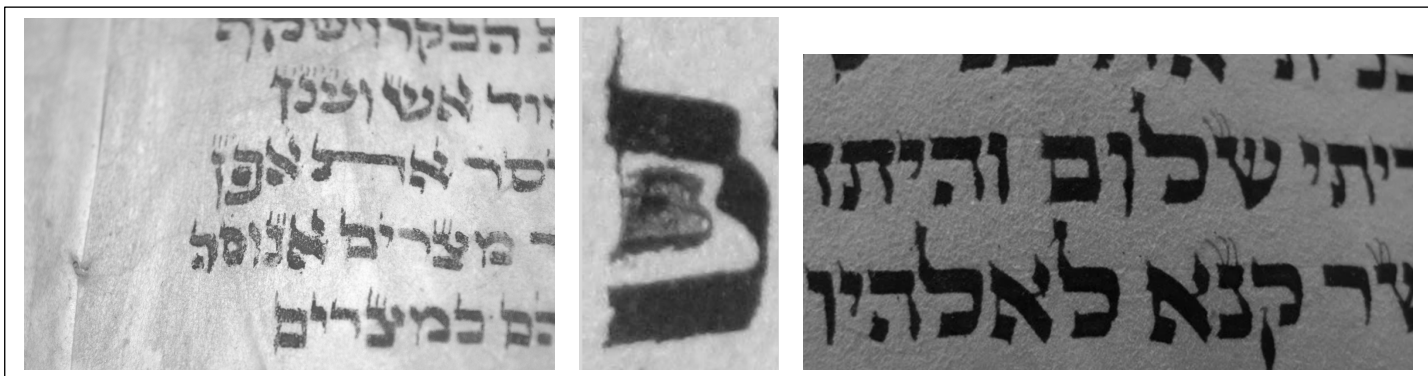
### **12) The Baal HaTurim on Genesis 32:11:**

קטנתי. יו"ד כפופה - אף על פי שנתברכתי בעשרה ברכות, ירא אני שמה יגרם לי החטא

The yud of this word is written in a bent form [indicating that Jacob was saying modestly,] "Although I have been granted ten blessings, I am fearful lest my sins cause [me to forfeit G-d's protection]."

### **Guarding the Tradition:**

Many otiot meshunot are "endangered", meaning that few Jews today know of them and their ancient and important masorah (tradition). These letters are often erased or corrected to look like normal letters:



Examples of "corrected" otiot meshunot. Photos by Deborah B. Thompson (left), Ethan Rotenberg (center), and Mordechai Pinchas (right).