

PhiloTorah This 'n That

THU, 15 Iyar, May 23rd On the occasion of PhiloTorah #200, I decided to begin a feature that I will add to from time to time. Each entry will be dated, so that if you come back to this file, you will be able to find your place and skip over that which you have already read.

PhiloTorah is the successor to the website I maintained over many years - Ttidbits.com - which paralleled the printed version of Torah Tidbits.

Back in June of 1992, the then director of the OU/NCSY Israel Center (that's what it was called back then), Shai Solomon, asked me to print up a schedule of activities of the Center to be distributed in shuls with English-speakers. The idea did not sit well with me for about five minutes. Then I had an idea. How about the schedule of Center activities on one side of a sheet of paper and a D'var Torah on the other? Shai went for the idea, and Torah Tidbits was born.

Actually, it was reborn in a new form. Its real beginning was back in 1971, when I used the term Torah Tidbits to describe short Divrei Torah and Halachic review points, which I presented at NCSY Shabbatonim. At the time, I sensed that a minute to a minute and a half 'tidbit' would go over better than a 20 minute D'var Torah. Torah Tidbits began in an oral form.

Back to the early '90s. before the first

issue of TT in June of '92 for Parshat Sh'lach, there were two other Torah pages that carried the name Torah Tidbits.

When the Israel Center was at 10 Straus, there were two long tilted shelves near the entrance on which we placed flyers for the many activities taking place at the Center. People would come, peruse the dozen or so flyers and take copies of what interested them.

I came up with the idea of having a one page D'var Torah available to be taken along with the flyers. That page was named Torah Tidbits.

So too, we had a project headquartered at the Center called NITZOTZ. It was geared to English-speaking students at yeshivot, seminaries, and university, to offer volunteering and chesed opportunities to supplement and enrich their year (or more) in Israel. One of the Nitzotz projects was TOCHNIT NISAN. Kids who were staying in Israel over the Pesach-time break in their studies would go with us to Gush Katif for a work-study-enjoy program. David Katz, the director of Nitzotz (now longtime director of MMY) asked me for a printed D'var Torah to be put in the lunch boxes each day, to supplement the sandwich, fruit, and piece of cake contained therein. Torah Tidbits to Go was an A4 sheet of paper folded twice into a small A6 sized 4-pager.

These were the first three forms of Torah Tidbits.

Which brings the story back to June '92. First two weeks, TT was a single sheet of A4 paper printed on both sides. 60 copies were made and distributed 30 copies in each of two shuls - Beth Jacob in Ramot Eshkol and a shul in Nayot.

From there, things took off. Calls like: I was at my brother-in-law's for Shabbat and I saw Torah Tidbits; do you think I can get some for my shul?

The format and the number of copies and the number of shuls and other locations that received TT grew and grew and grew.

Personally, I started TT, edited it for 28 years, until my retirement in September of 2019. I continued to contribute to TT to help things along for about an additional seven months and then I was asked to stop, to allow the new editor to spread his wings (as the saying goes).

On the day that I ended my involvement with Torah Tidbits (having become its Editor Emeritus), I acquired the website that went through a couple of name changes and soon became philotorah.co - which means 'Lover of Torah' (which I am and which I hope my readers are).

PhiloTorah is website only - no printed version (except what individual readers decide to print up for themselves, their families, or their shuls).

Sometime ago, I put a counter on the website which counts unique visitors. It stands at this moment at 11,600. (Someone who accesses the site many

times is only counted once.) Torah Tidbits had always been a labor of love for me, as is PhiloTorah. Part of loving Torah is sharing it with others.

I think that's it for now. More to come - IYH/BN.

THU, 14 Sivan, June 20th To keep readers of PhiloTorah in the loop. For the past two weeks, I have been experiencing a problem with updating the website. It is not a fatal problem, just a bit crippling. GoDaddy, the company from which I bought the domain philotorah.co - and their cPanel (I don't know what to call it) which hosts (is that the right word) the website, had made a change, which they called migration of the website. That's when the problem started. I estimate that I have spent a solid 10-12 hours on the phone and chats with tech people, and have gotten nowhere in solving the problem.

Basically, it's like this:

I have a file manager on cPanel to which I upload all the files for the website. I also have an index.html file to which I make changes in order to update the website to show the new files. The final step of the process of taking an edited article from my DavkaWriter file and it being accessible on PhiloTorah is to refresh the website to reflect the changes made to the index.html file. This works only sometimes. But not always. It comes and goes.

Which is weird because a computer

problem should result in something not working at all. Whether this final step - which I always implemented multiple times every day, works or not, seems to be a matter of time.

After several hours of not trying to refresh the webpage, a new attempt will succeed. After that, it repeatedly fails, until leaving it alone for a number of hours, when it will then work as it is supposed to.

Don't know if this was of interest to anyone else, but that's the story.

The problem has not stopped the website from working - it just slows things down from my end.

MON, 18 Sivan, June 24th Thanks to a suggestion by Ellis Cohen, I now can update the website whenever something new is added or changed. It requires clicking on CLEAR CHACHE, not on my browser but on my page at GoDaddy, the host of philotorah.co

WED, 20 Sivan, June 26th

Once upon a time, a long time ago...

32 years ago, to be specific, June '92, the then director of the Israel Center was Shai Solomon. I was his associate director and educational director. At the time, our activities were listed weekly in the Jerusalem Post or the In Jerusalem. Shai ask me to print up a weekly schedule of activities to be distributed in shuls with English speakers, some of whom don't read the Post. I didn't like

the idea of giving out a weekday schedule in shul on Shabbat, so I suggested putting a D'var Torah on one side of a sheet of paper with the schedule on the other side. "Go for it", was Shai's reply.

[We had previously used the name Torah Tidbits on a few weekly Divrei Torah that shared a shelf at 10 Straus with flyers for our activities. They were not distributed, just picked up at the old Israel Center building (which was formerly, the San Remo Hotel), our first home. We also packed Torah Tidbits to Go with lunchboxes for Nitzotz kids in Gush Katif for Project Nissan. That small 4-pager contained divrei Torah on the Hagada.]

We made 60 two-sided A4 photocopies of the new Torah Tidbits. 30 went to our shul in Ramot Eshkol and 30 went to Shai's father's shul in Nayot.

The left side of the front of the first TT dealt with the details and stats of Israel and Chutz LaAretz getting out of sync with Parshat HaShavua, as happened that year.

On the flip side, as we called it, we had upcoming events at the Center.

The main part of the front page was a d'var Torah from Maayana shel Torah.

Here is the gist of the first Torah Tidbit:

The ARI Z"l says that the mitzva of BIKURIM is a TIKUN for the sin of the spies. BIKURIM is not just one of the many Mitzvot HaT'luyot BaAretz, the

mitzvot that are connected and dependent upon the Land of Israel - it is the perfect counterpoint to the devastating sin that we read about in Parshat Sh'lach. The Meraglim took fruits from the Land - the Bikurim bringer takes fruits from the Land. The Meraglim opened their mouths and poisoned a generation against going into Eretz Yisrael with their scare-tactics and negative comments. The Bikurim-bringer opens his mouth in thanks and praise to HaShem for His having brought us to this place. The Meraglim said, "It's a beautiful country but we don't want to live there; we won't survive there. The Bikurim-bringer is thrilled and delighted to have actualized the purpose of our existence as a Nation and as Jews. He recites about our ancestors going down into Egypt, what happened there, how G-d took us out, and how He brought us to Eretz Yisrael.

G-d says that He is taking us out of Egypt in order to give us the Torah and bring us to the place He promised to the Avot and to us. The Meraglim said - no! The Bikurim-bringer says, YES!

Rav Menachem Zamba HY"D (of the Warsaw ghetto) beautifully points out that the three fruits that the Meraglim brought back with them - grapes, figs, and pomegranates are exactly the three fruits that the Mishna (Bikurim 3:1) uses as examples for Bikurim - driving home the point that Bikurim is a kapara for Cheit HaMeraglim.

Torah Tidbits has continued since Parshat Eikev of 5780 (2020), without my input. Since then, a new website, in the style of ttidbits.com (which was discontinued by OU Israel Center) has been appearing on the internet weekly, with many features - including some that were dropped from Torah Tidbits.

That website is the one you are reading from - PhiloTorah.