



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 23 | Shavuos | Sichah 1

People of the Book

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1.

WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE WRITE A SEFER TORAH

Rambam rules:¹

It is a positive mitzvah for each and every Jewish man to write a Torah scroll for himself, as it says:² “And now, write down this song for yourselves.” Meaning, write down the entire Torah, which contains this song. The basis for this interpretation is that the Torah may not be written passage by passage. Even if a person’s ancestors left him a Torah scroll, it is a mitzvah to write one himself. If a person writes the scroll himself, it is as if he received it at Mount Sinai. If he does not know how to write himself, he should have others write it for him. Anyone who emends even a single {defective} letter of a Torah scroll is considered as if he wrote the entire scroll.

This raises a question: If writing a Torah scroll “is a positive mitzvah **for each and every Jewish man**,” why do we not see anyone trying to fulfill this mitzvah by writing a Torah scroll himself in order to fulfill the mitzvah in its fullest sense³ (about which Rambam says, “it is as if he received it at Mount Sinai”)?

We might suggest the following: If there is a skilled scribe whose handwriting is better than one’s own, it is advisable to forgo the reward and virtue of personally writing a Torah scroll, which is compared to receiving it at Mount Sinai. Instead, he should hire the scribe to write the Torah scroll on his behalf so that the Torah scroll will be **beautiful** (written by an expert scribe). The person would thereby fulfill the command derived from the verse,⁴ “This is my L-rd and I will glorify⁵ Him” — “beautify yourself before Him in {the performance of} mitzvos.”⁶

¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos (Tefillin uMezuzah Ve)Sefer Torah*, ch. 7, par. 1.

² *Devarim* 31:19.

³ The wording of Rambam in his *Sefer HaMitzvos* (Heller ed.): “And if he writes it himself, it is very praiseworthy, and it is better” (in Kapach ed., “it is preferable”), “as it says, ‘write.’” In our versions of *Sefer HaMitzvos*, this does not appear.

⁴ *Shemos* 15:2.

⁵ {In the original Hebrew, “*ve’anveihu*,” which also connotes “beautification.”}

⁶ *Shabbos* 133b.

Furthermore, *Tevuos Shor*⁷ discusses the idea that “it is more befitting that a mitzvah be performed by the person himself than by his agent.”⁸ He explains that this is because when a person appoints an agent to perform a mitzvah on his behalf, “he gives the impression that he does not want to bother himself.” This certainly does not show the appropriate honor for the mitzvah. In contrast, when a person appoints an agent to perform a mitzvah on his behalf in order to **enhance** the honor of the mitzvah, we do not apply the rule that “it is more befitting that a mitzvah be performed by the person himself than by his agent.” Thus, in our context, when the honor of the mitzvah — “Beautify yourself before Him in mitzvos” — requires an expert scribe, the law of, “it is more fitting that a mitzvah be performed by the person himself than by his agent,” does not apply.

But this does not answer the above question: We do not see Jewish people undertaking to “have others write it for him,” or people even making the effort to at least emend “even a single {defective} letter of a Torah scroll,” in order to make the Torah scroll kosher. (In this way, “it is considered as if he wrote the entire scroll”).

2.

PRINTED BOOKS

On a simple level, we can answer that the common custom of Jewish people is based on the opinion of the *Rosh*.⁹ The *Rosh* maintains that the obligation upon each individual to write a Torah scroll only applies:

... in earlier generations, when people would write Torah scrolls and study from them. However, nowadays when we write a Torah scroll and place it in the synagogues to be read from in public, it is a positive mitzvah incumbent upon every Jewish person who can afford it, to write Chumashim,¹⁰ Mishnah and Gemara, and their commentaries, for

⁷ *Tevuos Shor*, ch. 28, sub-sec. 14. {This work was authored by Rabbeinu Alexander Sender Shor of Zelkova, 1673-1737. This author is most famous for his work “*Simlah Chadashah*,” a seminal work on the laws of slaughtering kosher animals. To this day, his work is relied upon by those seeking to become qualified in this holy profession.}

⁸ *Kiddushin* 41a.

⁹ *Halachos Ketanos*, beg. of “*Hilchos Sefer Torah*.”

¹⁰ {The Five Books of Moses.}

him and his children to study. This is because the mitzvah to write a Torah scroll was instituted so that a person would study from it, as the verse says,¹¹ “and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths.” Through the Gemara and its commentaries, he will know the explanations for the mitzvos and all the laws associated with them, in a complete sense. Therefore, **these are** the books that a person **is commanded** to write.

The *Mechaber*,¹² in *Shulchan Aruch*, rules like the *Rosh*:¹³ “Nowadays, the mitzvah is to write Chumashim, Mishnah, and Gemara, with their commentaries.” Many halachic authorities¹⁴ take this a step further. They maintain that nowadays the mitzvah is to write *only* Chumashim, Mishnah, and Gemara, etc., and not to write a Torah scroll.

This answer, however, does not suffice: The *Rosh*, *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* use the term, “it is a mitzvah **to write**” (in the imperative form, as in the verse) also regarding **these** books (Chumashim, Mishnah, etc.). But we never come across anyone attempting to write these books or to hire someone to write these books for him. Nor do we find anyone even proofreading a purchased book in order to fulfill this mitzvah.

Even though nowadays, with the advent and commercialization of printing presses, it is the custom of virtually all Jewish people to buy printed books — even were we to assume that the term “to write” (used by the *Rosh* and the *Shulchan Aruch*) also includes printing (since nowadays printing has taken the place of writing), we certainly cannot equate purchasing a ready-to-read book to hiring a scribe to write it for him. Moreover, in many instances, the printing is done by a Gentile (and no halachic authorities question this).¹⁵

¹¹ {*Devarim* 31:19.}

¹² {Lit., “the author,” a reference to Rav Yosef Caro (1488-1575), author of the *Shulchan Aruch*.}

¹³ *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 270, par. 2.

¹⁴ *Drisha and Prisha*, ch. 270; *Shach*, ch. 270, sub-par. 5.

¹⁵ Note the halachic discussion whether books that were printed by a non-Jew possess holiness, and whether we are allowed to study from them (*Sdei Chemed*, “*Peas Hasadeh*,” “*Klalim*,” “*Daled*,” “*Klal*” 38, **and the sources cited there**; see *Pischei Teshuvah*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 271, sub-par. 20). However, (in addition to the fact that we currently do not find anyone who is careful that their books are not printed by a non-Jew) it is not germane to the discussion in the text. Because even those who are careful in this matter, are not doing so because such books would not fulfill the commandment of writing a Torah scroll, (since his agent to print them is a Gentile), but rather because such books possess no holiness.

Furthermore, and this is also a key point: The *Rema*¹⁶ rules (regarding a Torah scroll): “If the person bought it but did not emend it at all, it is as if he snatched a mitzvah from the marketplace, **and he does not fulfill his obligation thereby.**” (This position is at odds with Rashi¹⁷ and the *Nimukei Yosef*¹⁸ who maintain that in that case, too, the person has fulfilled his obligation, albeit not in the ideal form.) How, then, can we fulfill our obligation to write Chumashim, etc., by purchasing printed books without proofreading them?¹⁹

3.

SCROLL OR STUDY

Basically, it is assumed that this is the point of disagreement between Rambam and the *Rosh* (and *Shulchan Aruch*, which rules in accordance with the *Rosh*):²⁰

Rambam maintains that the mitzvah obligation is to write a **Torah scroll**. Therefore, a person is obligated to do certain **activities** in this regard. He must **write** the Torah scroll. (And thus: “If he does not know how to write himself, **he should have others write it for him**. Anyone who emends even a single letter of a Torah scroll is considered **as if he wrote the entire scroll.**”) The person does not fulfill his obligation by buying a previously-written Torah scroll.

The *Rosh*, however, maintains (and *Shulchan Aruch* rules in accordance with the *Rosh*) that “the mitzvah to write a Torah scroll was instituted so that a person would study from it.” Therefore, what matters is only that the person **has** books from which to study; he does not need to write them²¹ (or even to proofread them).

¹⁶ Commenting on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 270, par. 1.

¹⁷ *Menachos* 30a.

¹⁸ Beginning of *Hilchos Sefer Torah*; see *Taz*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 270, sub-par. 1.

¹⁹ As the *Rema*’s ruling that one does not fulfill his obligation with a ready-made Torah scroll he didn’t emend, also seems to apply nowadays to Chumashim, Mishnah etc. (which are discussed in sec. 2 by the *Mechaber*), there was no need for him to repeat his words.

²⁰ See *Shaagas Aryeh*, sec. 36; *Minchas Chinuch*, mitzvah 613; *Responsa of Shemen Rokeach*, vol. 3, “*Yorah Deah*,” sec. 17; *Kli Chemda*, “*Vayelech*”; **et al.**

²¹ Like Rashi and *Nimukei Yosef*’s opinion and unlike the *Rema*’s ruling.

But based on what the *Rosh* writes, clearly, he does not subscribe to the above distinction. When the *Rosh* writes, “This {mitzvah to write a Torah scroll} was in earlier generations {now it's done through books},” he does so **in continuation** of Rambam’s words and opinion (which the *Rosh* quotes first). This proves that the *Rosh* does not intend to create a new definition of the mitzvah of writing a Torah scroll (disputing Rambam’s view). Rather, the *Rosh* intends only to differentiate (between eras) concerning what the person needs to write. “Nowadays... it is a positive mitzvah... to write Chumashim, Mishnah, Gemara, and their commentaries, for him and his children to study.”

Additionally, we need to clarify the reasons behind the two opinions. A person can fulfill the mitzvah of writing a Torah scroll by buying a Torah scroll (according to Rashi and *Nimukei Yosef*, who maintain that even then, “he performed the mitzvah,” but, “if he would write it, that would be a greater mitzvah”).²² Alternatively, a person does not fulfill his mitzvah in this way (according to the *Rema* [and this seems also to be Rambam’s view, based on his writings in *Sefer HaYad* {i.e., *Mishneh Torah*}], “if the person bought it but did not emend it..., and **he does not fulfill his obligation thereby.**”)

4.

THE MITZVAH DOESN'T CHANGE OVER TIME

In order to clarify all the above, we need to preface with an explanation of the opinion of Rosh and the halachic ruling of *Shulchan Aruch*: How could we possibly introduce the novelty²³ that a positive mitzvah of the Torah would change periodically, and that, in fact, nowadays the mitzvah is performed differently from the way it is described **explicitly** in the Torah?

The *Rosh* himself does explain: “This is because the mitzvah to write a Torah scroll was instituted so that a person would study from it, as the verse

²² *Menachos* 30a, Rash.i

²³ See *Taz*, ch. 270, sub-par. 4.

says, ‘teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths.’” However, seemingly, this only refers to the purpose and intentionality behind the mitzvah, but the mitzvah **action** itself is stated explicitly in the Torah: “**Write** down this song for yourselves” — a mitzvah to write a **Torah scroll**.²⁴

5.

READING FROM A BOOK AND REMEMBERING

We can posit the following explanation:

Immediately following the verse, “Write down this song for yourselves,” Scripture explains that (the purpose of) the mitzvah is to “teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths.” This is also evident from the entire context of the *parshah*.²⁵ That is, the purpose of writing a Torah scroll is in order to “put it in their mouths.” Meaning, the Torah should serve as a “witness” {of Hashem’s word} to the Jewish people even when “they will spurn Me and break My covenant.”²⁶ From here, the *Rosh* infers that the command to “**write** for you” is not the core definition of the mitzvah; rather, it is only an obligatory detail of the mitzvah.

[The following example is similar: Regarding the mitzvah of mezuzah, the Torah says²⁷ to “**inscribe** them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Nonetheless, the definition of the mitzvah is (not to write the mezuzah, but) “to **affix** the mezuzah.”]²⁸

The parameters of this mitzvah will be clarified by prefacing with the following:

There is a mitzvah to study Torah. Moreover, “Torah study is equal to all of them.”²⁹ Concerning this mitzvah, the primary point is to know “all the final

²⁴ See *Responsa of the Chasam Sofer*, “Yoreh Deah,” sec. 254; *Binas Sofer*, “klal” 12, sec. 1; *Responsa Shemen Rokeach*, vol. 3; et al.

²⁵ *Devarim* 31:16 ff.

²⁶ *Devarim* 31:20.

²⁷ *Devarim* 6:9.

²⁸ The text of the *bracha* when affixing a mezuzah.

²⁹ {*Shabbos* 127a.}

halachos with their reasons.”³⁰ In this, “he is biblically obligated,” and to the extent that the halachos are “thoroughly reviewed and promptly articulable,” so that when questioned, “he can respond immediately,” etc.³¹ Surely, this already fulfills what Scripture says, “teach it... put it in their mouths” in the best way possible.

Parshas Vayelech comes along and introduces a special biblical positive mitzvah instructing us to perform an action (write), in order to procure a **written** Torah (scroll), and we should then study from **this** Torah. (Perhaps the reason for this is that studying from something written is easier, more penetrating [“letters make one wise {by looking at them}”] and safeguards a person from making mistakes. This is because “one who studies from a scroll will not forget his learning quickly”;³² he can always review, etc. All this adequately prevents {one from violating the admonition not to} “break My covenant.”)³³ When the mitzvah was given, achieving **this** act (writing) was linked with, and **only** possible by, learning from a Torah scroll, the Written Torah. (This is because, at that time, the Oral Torah could not be transcribed — “matters taught orally may not be written down.”³⁴ This restriction is depicted by the metaphor,³⁵ “a lion crouches upon it”³⁶ — upon the person {preventing him for doing it}.)

This prohibition (a crouching lion) brings up a **side** issue, not based on **our** discussion of the verse, “teach it... put it in their mouths,” but based on the laws of how to make a scroll — a Torah scroll. A Torah scroll must be scored,³⁷ it must be written for the sake of a Torah scroll; it must be written in *Ashuri* font,³⁸ and in “*lashon hakodesh*,”³⁹ etc. Therefore, **in actuality**, “**write** for you,” must be the type of writing that implements all the above detailed laws.

³⁰ The Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 2, par . 1.

³¹ Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 2, par. 3 (based on *Kiddushin* 30a).

³² *Jerusalem Talmud*, “*Berachos*,” beg. of ch. 5.

³³ {*Devarim* 31:6.}

³⁴ *Gittin* 60b.

³⁵ *Eruvin* 78b.

³⁶ {Just as a lion crouching at an entryway prevents a person from entering, the prohibition to transcribe the Oral Law prevents it from being transcribed.}

³⁷ {Straight lines must be etched into the parchment before writing a Torah scroll to ensure straight lines of text.}

³⁸ {The font used in Torah scrolls. See <https://www.chabad.org/3582435>}

³⁹ {Lit., “the Holy Tongue,” i.e., Hebrew.}

However, nowadays, when, the dictum,⁴⁰ “It is time to act for Hashem; they have violated Your Torah” applies, the Oral Torah has also been recorded in writing. Therefore, studying “in order to adequately know the explanations of the mitzvos and their laws” is not done from a Torah scroll. Rather, we study from Chumashim, Mishnah, Gemara, and commentaries. Therefore, the mitzvah to “write” (that is, the action) relates to **these** books. The various laws of scoring, etc., that apply to a Torah scroll, do not apply to these books. Thus, consistent with this point, when a person fulfills the mitzvah using **these** books, what is needed and what suffices is only an activity that makes these books usable to fulfill the requirement, “teach it... put it in their mouths,” from **written text**.

Along these lines, an example {of the above reasoning} is the principle:⁴¹ “Make an inference from it {A→B}, and then leave it {B} in its place.”

6.

PICKING AND CHOOSING

A **somewhat similar** illustration to the above: the obligation to rejoice on Yom Tov. When the *Beis HaMikdash* stood, this mitzvah was fulfilled by offering and eating *shalmei simchah*.⁴² According to many opinions, everyone is (biblically) obligated to rejoice on Yom Tov by eating meat, nowadays as well, since “there can be no rejoicing without meat.”⁴³

Obviously, the rejoicing of nowadays by eating meat does not have the same parameters as those applicable to *shalmei simchah*, which were eaten in a

⁴⁰ *Tehillim* 119:126; *Gittin* 60a. {Due to the harsh and deteriorating conditions of exile, the learning of Torah continually dwindled. Therefore, the Rabbis decided to allow the Oral Torah to be transcribed in writing and disseminated, thereby simplifying its transmission through the generations. They interpreted the verse, “It is a time to act for Hashem,” to mean that if the time has come to enact a decree for the sake of Hashem, it is appropriate to “violate Your Torah.” They explained, “It is better that one letter of the Torah [the verse forbidding to transcribe the Oral Torah] should be uprooted than that the whole of the Torah be forgotten.”}

⁴¹ *Yevamos* 78b. {That is to say, the main provision of case A is applied to case B, but case B is recognized as distinct with its own specific rules.}

⁴² {The *shelamim* offering of Yom Tov; part was consumed by the owners.}

⁴³ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yom Tov*,” ch. 6, par. 18; *Yam Shel Shlomo*, “*Beitzah*,” ch. 2, par. 5; *Magen Avraham* on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” ch. 249, sub-sec 6; see *Machatzis Hashekel*, loc. cit.; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 529, par. 7.

state of purity in Jerusalem, etc. All these considerations and parameters resulted from the **sacrifice** component inherent in *shalmei simchah*; and did not stem from the aspect of rejoicing associated with *shalmei simchah*. And only this aspect of the *shalmei simchah* is relevant (according to this opinion) to fulfilling the mitzvah to rejoice on Yom Tov.⁴⁴

The same applies in our context — in the words of the Gemara,⁴⁵ “It is *not* for that reason”: All the detailed laws pertaining to the writing of a Torah scroll are necessitated by the nature of the Torah scroll item,⁴⁶ *not* by the nature of the obligation and mitzvah to “write down this song for yourselves,” in order to teach it and put it in their mouths.

Thus, we can understand how, even according to the opinion of the *Rosh*, the nature of **this** mitzvah has never changed.

A question, however, remains: We do not see anyone trying to fulfill the mitzvah to “**write**” Torah by producing {Torah material to learn from, such as} Chumashim, etc. Only publishers, and the like, do this. And even if someone were to order the books and appoint the publisher as his agent to print them, “it is more befitting that a mitzvah be performed by the person himself than by his agent.” This question can be answered based on the explanation offered above (in Section 1) regarding a Torah scroll. And additionally and mainly — as explained later in Section 9.

7.

OTHER INSTANCES OF PICKING AND CHOOSING

Based on the above — that regarding two matters with a common denominator, it is possible that we apply the rule “infer from it, and infer again

⁴⁴ See *Machatzis Hashekel* on *Magen Avraham*, loc cit., where he says that from Rashi’s words (in *Taanis* 30a) it is clear that the joy is derived from the meat itself and not because it is a *shelamim* offering.

⁴⁵ *Shabbos* 116a; et al.

⁴⁶ {In the original, “הפצא.”}

from it”⁴⁷ about some details; and about other details, we say, leave it in its place — we can explain a number of other ideas. Some examples from different subjects:

“The prayers were instituted as a substitute for the daily offerings.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, even as an initial preference, a community of people joining to pray do not need to look for a kohen to join them. (The reason is that not all offerings required a kohen:⁴⁹ “No kohen officiated at a *bamah*.”)⁵⁰ On the other hand, prayers must be offered at the same **times** the daily sacrifices were offered⁵¹ (because the rule regarding any time-bound sacrifice is that once the time has expired, the window to offer the sacrifice is closed).

Regarding the seder on Pesach night: The custom in “these countries,” is to avoid eating roasted meat on Pesach night, “as a decree lest it be said that the meat is from the *pesach* sacrifice.”⁵² Nevertheless, we take a roasted shank “in commemoration of the *pesach* sacrifice, which was roasted over fire.”⁵³ Since the primary purpose of the *pesach* sacrifice is to eat it,⁵⁴ there isn’t an issue with having a roasted shank just sitting on the plate.

The rule⁵⁵ that “the words of Rabbi so-and-so and of Rabbi so-and-so are stated according to one view” obviously assumes that there will be certain details over which they will disagree, with actual halachic ramifications. (Were this not the case, what would be the practical ramifications in specific cases {of stating that they are of one view}?)⁵⁶ Otherwise, the wording could have just been “Rabbi so-and-so and Rabbi so-and-so said.”

And there are many more such examples.

⁴⁷ {In other words, after deducing case B from case A, all of the characteristics of case A are applied to case B.}

⁴⁸ This is the version found in many places. In *Berachos* 26b the statement is, “...corresponding to the daily offerings,” though there are no practical differences between these versions in our context.

⁴⁹ *Zevachim* 113a.

⁵⁰ {A private altar outside the Sanctuary. See <https://www.chabad.org/2843465>}

⁵¹ *Berachos* 26b; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 89, par. 1.

⁵² Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” ch. 476, sec. 1.

⁵³ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” ch. 473, sec. 21.

⁵⁴ *Pesachim* 76b (mishnah).

⁵⁵ See *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, “*Ein Halacha KeShita*,” and the sources cited there.

⁵⁶ See *Pesachim* 32b: “{They} all hold that... and they disagree with regard to the following...”

8.

BACK TO THE *REMA*

On this basis, we can suggest an explanation for the *Rema's* ruling: “If the person bought {the Torah scroll} but made no corrections to it, it is as if he snatched a mitzvah from the marketplace, and he does not fulfill his obligation thereby.” Rather, the person only fulfills his obligation when “he hired a scribe to write a Torah scroll for him, or he purchased a Torah scroll with a mistake and corrected it.” (This is in contrast to the views of Rashi and the *Nimukei Yosef*, who maintain that even when a person purchases a Torah scroll from the marketplace, he has fulfilled the mitzvah.) The *Rema's* ruling only applies to the {mitzvah of} writing a Torah scroll. However, regarding Chumashim, Mishnah, Gemara, and their commentaries, to which nowadays, the mitzvah to “write down for yourselves” (according to the *Rosh*) applies, according to all opinions, a person can fulfill his mitzvah by purchasing these books and studying them.

The explanation: According to all opinions, the mitzvah to “write down for yourselves” is comparable in its definition to “receiving the Torah.” That is, a person needs to perform an action to take and receive the Torah and then learn from it. The question is to what extent is the “doer” and the action linked to the result:

In earlier generations, the mitzvah, “write down for yourselves,” was linked with a Torah scroll: “people would write Torah scrolls and study from them.” Therefore, the person writing it had to do so with the intention that it be made for the sake of a Torah scroll; the parchment needed to be tanned and lined; and so, too, all the other conditions and rules had to be met (it must be complete, etc.). {Thus, one perspective is} the Torah scroll object has numerous requirements and conditions in its creation, and the activities required to meet them become part of the mitzvah to *write* (“this song”).

An alternative perspective: These activities and all these conditions that must be met are only necessary because of the holiness of the Torah scroll, not because of the mitzvah, “write down this song for yourselves, and teach it.”

9.

ASSOCIATED WITH A TORAH SCROLL OR NOT

This also explains the two aforementioned opinions regarding fulfilling the mitzvah of “write down... for yourselves,” when a person fulfills the mitzvah with a Torah scroll: Rambam and the *Rema* maintain that since this mitzvah is associated with the holiness and writing of a **Torah scroll**, and this holiness mandates all the conditions necessary for the action — the writing of the Torah scroll. Therefore, this action becomes (not only a part of creating the object of the Torah scroll, i.e., a detail concerning the sanctity of a Torah scroll, but rather, these activities also become) part of the **mitzvah** to “write down... for yourselves.”

Therefore, when a person fulfills his obligation by writing a Torah scroll, he must do the mitzvah act — **writing** the Torah scroll, or correcting a Torah scroll “with mistakes” — whereby through his action, the obligation to “write down... for yourselves” is completed and accomplished. However, “if he purchased it and did not make any corrections... he does not fulfill his obligation.”

In contrast, according to Rashi and the *Nimukei Yosef*, the holiness of the Torah scroll is not a part of the **mitzvah** to “write down for yourselves.” [The many conditions necessary are only part of the process of creating a holy Torah scroll.] Thus, if someone finds a Torah scroll with its holiness already in place, it is sufficient for him to simply acquire the Torah scroll — he purchases it (from the marketplace).

On this basis, we can also understand the ruling that “nowadays, it is a mitzvah to write Chumashim, Mishnah, Gemara, and their commentaries.” Even

according to the *Rema*, it is not obligatory for an individual to personally write, appoint an agent to write, or proofread the book. This is because these books do not require any specific human involvement in their creation. These books can be created through the actions of a “monkey” (a machine). The only thing that matters is that it is written — and thereby, there is a **complete** fulfillment of the injunction to “teach it... put it in their mouths.”

The *Rosh* and the *Shulchan Aruch* use the term “write” in relation to Chumashim because the foundation and origin of this law is the act of “writing a Torah scroll.” But “make an inference from it, and then leave it in its place.”

10.

TIMES CHANGE

The above explanation clarifies another aspect concerning the actual observance of the mitzvah to “write down this song for yourselves” as it is fulfilled “nowadays”:

One can give an analogy: Presently, fulfilling the mitzvah of Torah study does not involve a person first studying the entire Torah (all the laws),⁵⁷ and only afterwards researching and analyzing, etc.

The same applies to fulfilling the mitzvah — “Now, write down this song for yourselves” — “nowadays.” This mitzvah does not require a person to personally write (or purchase) **all** the books (Chumashim, Mishnah, Gemara, and their commentaries), and only after he has done so does he fulfill the mitzvah. After all, there are a vast number of commentaries. And in fact, we see that among the books that people own, the vast majority of Jews do not own **all** the types of books mentioned above.

⁵⁷ See Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 1, par. 6.

11.

BAYIS MALEI SEFARIM

On this basis, we can also appreciate what the Gemara⁵⁸ writes: “And if he himself writes a Torah scroll, Scripture considers it as though he received it at Mount Sinai.” Rambam also quotes this in his book of halachah because this explains the nature of the **mitzvah**, “And now, write down this song for yourselves.” Meaning, this mitzvah is analogous to receiving the Torah, which is done through an action — by writing and preparing a Torah scroll (or buying the books mentioned above with one’s own money) and to “teach it” afterwards.

However, in earlier generations, people fulfilled this mitzvah by writing a Torah scroll. When a person writes a Torah scroll “with his own hand,” he receives the Torah perfectly. “It is considered as if he received it **at Mount Sinai**.” Meaning, this experience is like the experience of receiving the Torah for the first time because this experience brings the person to learn Torah and fulfill mitzvos consummately. Nevertheless, a similar experience is possible, at all times and in all places, when a person purchases books and studies from them.

From all the above, we can also appreciate the importance of endeavoring to ensure that every Jew has books in his home — and even better, “a home brimming with books.” But at the very least, every home should possess the basic books: (Siddurim) Chumashim, (Tanach), Mishnah, books of Jewish law, etc. And a person should then study them, “place it in their mouths.”

⁵⁸ *Menachos* 30a.

12.

REWARD

On an indirectly related topic, we can tentatively add the following:

The mitzvah to write a Torah scroll, derived from the verse, “Now, write down this song for yourselves,” as discussed above, mandates a person to write the entire Torah scroll.

We can suggest an explanation to supplement the plain meaning of the words: {By way of introduction:} Everything is alluded to in the Torah.⁵⁹ Therefore, the Torah scroll, the Written Torah, alludes to and includes the entire Oral Torah. The Oral Torah was also given to Moshe at **Sinai**, including Mishnah, Gemara, Aggadah, etc., to the extent that “any novelty a seasoned Torah student will innovate....”⁶⁰

The same holds true (regarding the mitzvah of writing the Torah scroll) from the perspective of the person. The Gemara says that when a person writes a Torah scroll, “Scripture considers it as though **he** received it at Mount Sinai.”

Understood simply, the clause, “Scripture considers it as though...,” refers to a **reward**. That is, the reward is that his fulfillment of this mitzvah proves that this person **himself** has attained the virtue of receiving the Torah at Sinai. As the *Nimukei Yosef* puts it, “The Attribute of Mercy can maintain, ‘Just as this person has undertaken this burden {to write a Torah scroll}, so, too, he would have troubled himself to trek through the desert to receive the Torah at Sinai.’” But the reward is not a direct result of fulfilling the mitzvah of writing a Torah scroll.

However, Rambam brings down this quote as part of the law in his *Sefer HaYad*, a book that is strictly a codex of halachos.⁶¹ Moreover, he places this

⁵⁹ See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 221a.

⁶⁰ {Was already taught to Moshe at Sinai.} See *Megillah* 19b; *Talmud Yerushalmi, Peah*, ch. 2, par. 4; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 47; *Vayikra Rabbah*, ch. 22.

⁶¹ Rambam, at the end of his Introduction to his *Mishneh Torah*. {In the original Heb., “halachos, halachos.”}

quote in the middle of the first law, which discusses the actual implementation of this mitzvah. Furthermore, Rambam deviates from the wording used by the Mishnah and the Gemara. He writes: “If a person writes the scroll himself, it is as if he received it at Mount Sinai.” This implies that this is a reward and a direct result of the mitzvah of writing the Torah scroll.

One can say that this viewpoint is analogous to the teaching,⁶² “Anyone who teaches someone else’s son Torah, Scripture considers it as though he fathered him.”

13.

MOSHIACH

May it be the will of Hashem that very soon, “our eyes will behold”⁶³ the literal coming of King Moshiach. The king will write the entire Torah “for the sake of his sovereignty,” and, “this scroll should be with him at all times... as the verse states:⁶⁴ ‘And it shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life.’”⁶⁵ Then, Hashem’s sovereignty will be revealed. “Hashem shall be King over the whole earth; on that day Hashem will be One and His name will be One.”⁶⁶

— Based on talks delivered on Acharon Shel Pesach and Shabbos *parshas Kedoshim*,
5741 (1981)

⁶² *Sanhedrin* 19b; *Rashi* commenting on *Bamidbar* 3:1.

⁶³ {*Siddur*, “*Vetechezenah*” in the *Amidah* prayer.}

⁶⁴ {*Devarim* 17:19.}

⁶⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Tefillin, U’Mezuzah, Ve’Sifrei Torah*,” ch. 7, par. 2.

⁶⁶ *Zechariah* 14:9.