YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**GREAT BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS**

**By Dr. Avigail Rock**

**Lecture #28:**

**The Netziv**

**A. Biography**

R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893) — hereinafter, the Netziv (literally, “pillar” or “governor”) — was born in the Russian Empire, in Mir, Belarus, to an educated, scholarly family. His father, Yaakov, was a merchant and Torah scholar, and his mother was descended from R. Meir Eisenstadt.[[1]](#footnote-1)

At the age of thirteen, he married the daughter of R. Yitzchak of Volozhin (Reb Itchele), the son of R. Chayim, the founder of the Volozhin Yeshiva. When he married, the Netziv moved with his bride to the city of Volozhin.

After R. Chayim died, his son R. Yitzchak took over the yeshiva, and when R. Yitzchak died in the year 1851, his son-in-law and nephew, R. Eliezer Yitzchak Fried, inherited his position. R. Eliezer Yitzchak did not last long in this position; a few years later, in 1854, he passed away. The Netziv was then appointed to be the Rosh Yeshiva, and the Netziv held on to this position for close to forty years. In the year 1866, after his first wife died, he married his niece.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Under the Netziv’s leadership, the Volozhin Yeshiva became resoundingly successful, and it was famed far and wide. The students came to the yeshiva from the farthest reaches of Europe, and the number of students in the yeshiva reached a height of four hundred. The Volozhin Yeshiva recruited elite students who could study Talmud and Tosafot on their own and were ready to apply themselves in long hours of study. The graduates of the yeshiva during the Netziv’s tenure eventually became the shapers of Orthodox Judaism throughout the world at the end of the 19th century. This elite group included, among others, R. Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook, R. Shimon Shkop, R. Isser Zalman Meltzer (author of *Even Ha-Azel*), R. Barukh Ha-Levi Epstein (author of *Torah Temima*), and many other notable figures.

While the Volozhin Yeshiva enjoyed great success, it also underwent more than a few crises. Foremost among them was the Russian government’s demand that the administration integrate secular Russian studies in the curriculum the yeshiva. This issue was raised repeatedly, with increasing intensity. Although the Netziv initially accommodated these demands, in the year 1892, the yeshiva was asked to implement far-reaching changes:[[3]](#footnote-3) now the yeshiva would be require to dedicate most of its time to secular studies, and religious studies would only occupy a few hours at the end of the day. Otherwise, the yeshiva would be shuttered. In the end, with great pain, the Netziv decided to close Volozhin Yeshiva. With the closing of the yeshiva, the Netziv resolved to make *aliya*, but his health failed, and in the year 1893, he died in the city of Warsaw.

The Netziv’s scholarliness was expressed in his various compositions, which showed him to be a master of all disciplines of Torah study. He wrote *Birkat* *Ha-Netziv* on the *Mekhilta*, *Emek* *Ha-Netziv* on the *Sifrei*, and a composition on the Babylonian Talmud called *Meromei Sadeh*. In addition, he wrote a commentary on R. Achai Gaon’s *She’iltot* called *Ha’amek* *She’ala* (the name comes from the verse, *Yeshayahu* 7:11), and *Ha’amek* *Davar* on the Torah, with addenda in a commentary called *Harchev* *Davar*. The Netziv dealt not only with theoretical study, but also with teaching practical Halakha. The Netziv’s responses to those who turned to him may be found in his responsa.

Aside from his scholarly activity, at the end of his life, the Netziv joined the Hovevei Zion movement. He became an ardent supporter of the Zionist movement, advocating for the Jewish settlement of what was then Ottoman Palestine.[[4]](#footnote-4) He even would put out charity boxes on Yom Kippur eve to gather contributions for the settlers. This was at a time when many Orthodox rabbis (R. S.R. Hirsch among them) shunned the Zionist movement; some even opposed the movement in a public way, out of concern for the negative influence of the movement’s membership, which included a significant number of people associated with the Haskalah.

The Netziv contributed to the development of Torah study in the yeshiva setting in a number of ways. First, while most *yeshivot* of the time studied primarily the Babylonian Talmud, the Netziv devoted a place of honor to the in-depth study of Midrashic and Geonic literature, which had been almost totally banished from the bookshelves of *yeshivot* before the Netziv. His *Ha’amek* *She’ala* is an analytical composition of R. Achai’s *She’iltot,* and the Netziv was the first to analyze Geonic literature systematically.

The Netziv also continued to develop the methodology introduced by the Gra, a method of comparing and emending texts in order to allow for a basic understanding of primary sources. However, it appears that the Netziv’s most sweeping and seminal innovation was to move biblical study to the center of the yeshiva’s focus. While contemporary *yeshivot* avoided studying *Tanakh*, apparently due to the increased interest of the Maskilim in biblical studies, the Netziv stressed for his students the importance of studying Holy Writ. The Netziv himself gave a daily shiur in the weekly Torah portion, and these lessons constituted the basis of his masterwork of biblical exegesis, *Ha’amek* *Davar*.

**B. The Aim of the Commentary**

In *Kidmat Ha-Emek* (his introduction to *Ha’amek* *She’ala*, Part II), the Netziv relates to the importance of biblical study. In the period of the Netziv, as we have said, the study of *Tanakh* was seen as not particularly exigent. Thus, the Netziv sets out to explain why the study of *Tanakh* is in fact important, beginning by citing *Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa* 11:

“R. Shimon ben Lakish says: Just as a bride adorns herself with twenty-four adornments, so a Torah scholar must be diligent in twenty-four books…”

The bride, aside from the essence of her dowry and the conditions of her marriage, comes to her nuptial home expending all effort to find favor in the eyes of her husband and all who are happy with her.

This is the condition of the Torah scholar, that aside from the body of laws which he studies in order to perform them, which brings him to the level of the Torah scholar, he still must adorn himself with traits and ethics and wisdoms alluded to in the twenty-four books of Holy Writ, to find favor in the eyes of God and man.

Thus, he makes his way straight and pure, following the path of good manners, loving people and maintaining their honor. He seeks out their desire and their good and their peace, and the name of Heaven is sanctified by him.

The Netziv reaches the conclusion that the study of the Written Torah has two facets, and a Torah scholar must deal with both of them:

From our words we have learnt that the Written Torah may be expounded in two ways: one way, for the topic at hand, to study every jot and tittle until we reach the point of the law or the depth of the story…

In other words, one aim of studying the Written Torah in detail is the basic understanding of Halakha and the story being told. However, there is also an additional facet – the derivation of wisdom and morality from the Torah - and every sage must interpret the verses and learn from them according to the needs of his generation:

Another way is to derive, via an exacting reading of the language, wisdom and knowledge which diverges from the topic under discussion…

The sage has to know the time and its issues in order to accommodate himself to that which is good and moral, according to his wisdom.

In other words, a Torah scholar is required to learn ethics from the Torah according to the needs of his generation, beyond the basic intent of the verse.

**C. Style and Target Audience**

As we have said, the basis of this commentary is the series of lectures given by the Netziv on the weekly Torah portion in Volozhin Yeshiva. The style of the commentary is not simplistic at all. The point of departure for his commentary is that his students are experts in the sources of Oral Torah and well acquainted with the passages under discussion. The Netziv uses a great number of expressions borrowed from the Gemara’s language, and he makes numerous references to the literature of the *Rishonim* and the *Acharonim*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The style of the commentary, its contents and themes, testify to the fact that the commentary is designed mainly for Torah scholars. Similarly, in keeping with the aims of the commentary, it is designated in particularly for his contemporaries, their problems and needs. Therefore, while the thoughts of the Netziv are nice even not in their time, in order to get to the depth of his commentaries, one should expend effort to understand the background of their writing.

**D. Relationship between Written and Oral Torah**

In his commentary on the Torah, the Netziv stresses the compelling connection between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The Netziv’s expansive exploration of this topic appears to be an attempt to contend with the disrespect of the Maskilim towards the Oral Torah, who saw it as a human creation that often contradicts the Written Torah. It is worth noting that more than a few of the yeshiva students struggled between traditional Judaism and the Haskalah movement.[[6]](#footnote-6) In order to produce and strengthen the status of the Oral Torah among his students, the Netziv posits a view of the Written Torah according to which it does not contradict the Oral Torah.[[7]](#footnote-7)

An example of this may be seen in his commentary to *Shemot* 21:20, “When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod, and the slave dies under his hand, he shall surely be avenged.” The Netziv asks the following question on this verse:

According to tradition, this comes to teach us that one who kills his slave must be put to death by sword, like any murderer. If so, what is to be derived from “with a rod”? Also “he shall surely be avenged,” aside from the Sages’ commentary, has an additional intent.

The Netziv begins by addressing the apparent contradiction between the Oral Torah, which sees this verse as the source for the law of killing one’s slave in a general way, and the *peshat* of the verse, which talks about striking him or her with a rod. Similarly, the Netziv wants to understand the *peshat* of the words “he shall surely be avenged” without the commentary of the Sages, who use textual analogy to derive that the punishment for homicide is decapitation by sword (*Mekhilta,* *Mishpatim* 7).

The Netziv explains the verse through a *peshat* interpretation that does not contradict the Sages’ hermeneutics:

This indicates that if he hits him with a rod and he dies, then aside from the punishment of murder, that one is liable to receive the death penalty as per the Sages’ tradition, this sin is compounded by exceptional cruelty. It is much worse than if he kills him with a sword and the like, for with a rod he extinguishes his life with great suffering, over a number of hours. Therefore, “he shall surely be avenged” — from the heavens.

In other words, someone who kills his slave is liable to be put to death by the sword, as the Sages expound; but in addition to this, someone who is killed in an torturous manner (because killing with a rod is a slow, cruel death, as the rod is not designed for killing), incurs an additional punishment from the heavens: “he shall surely be avenged.”

**E. The Ethical Imperative**

As we said above, the second aspect of studying Torah is finding contemporary wisdom, ethics, and good traits in it. There are a number of ethical topics that the Netziv stresses explicitly a number of times; apparently, he believes that there is a need for his contemporaries to address and improve in these areas. In the Netziv’s introduction to his commentary on the Torah, he relates at length to the central reason that led to the destruction of the Second Temple, baseless hatred. The Netziv explains that although there were great Torah scholars in the era of the destruction, they were not as morally impeccable as the Patriarchs:

This was the praise of the Patriarchs: aside from their being righteous and saintly and lovers of God to the greatest extent possible, they were also morally impeccable. Indeed, they followed this model of behavior even with the nations of the world, even the ugly idolaters; regardless, they regarded them with love and concern for their welfare…

This is all opposed to the Second Temple generation:

Because of the baseless hatred in their hearts, they suspected that anyone who acted in a way not accordance with their own view of the fear of God was a Sadducee and a heretic. This led them ultimately to bloodshed, by way of hyperbole, and to all of the evils in the world.

It is difficult not to see here some deep criticism of the Netziv’s contemporaries. It may be that specifically in the Volozhin Yeshiva, the mother of all *yeshivot*, which put a great emphasis on the toil and effort required to fulfill the *mitzva* of Torah study, the Rosh Yeshiva was concerned that the students might indeed be wise and understanding, but they were not moral in terms of their behavior and good manners. They might fight for truth, but at the price of the honor of and love for the other. Therefore, he warned of a situation such as this.[[8]](#footnote-8)

There are other possibilities as well. It may be that his words are based on the negative attitude of many Orthodox national leaders towards the Zionist movement and the members of the Haskalah.[[9]](#footnote-9) Finally, it is possible that this relates to the fierce debate between the Hasidim and their opponents. (Despite the Netziv’s own opposition to the Hasidic approach, as we shall see below, he avoided direct confrontation with the Hasidim.)

The Netziv relates to this once again in his explanation of the first verse of the priestly blessing (*Bamidbar* 6:24), “May God bless you and protect you”:

For blessing needs[[10]](#footnote-10) protection, so that it will not become an obstacle; one well-versed in Torah requires protection from arrogance, desecration of the Name and the like…

The fact that the Netziv spends so much time addressing the moral behavior of Torah scholars testifies to the great ethical sensitivity of the Netziv and his relationship to the actions of the yeshiva students and scholars of his generation.

In this context, one may cite his words concerning the issue of the dangers of religious zealotry, to which he relates more than once in his commentary (apparently, on the basis of the difficult arguments ravaging the Jewish People in his period, which we have mentioned above). Thus, for example, in his comments on the vengeance which Shimon and Levi wreak upon the citizens of the town of Shekhem, the Netziv criticizes the behavior of the brothers:

“Yaakov’s two sons” — “Two” is superfluous… but it comes to teach us that even though they were united in their great fury to destroy a city in its entirety, and they were united also to put themselves in great jeopardy, nevertheless, they were two. In other words, they were of two minds in what ignited this fire.

One came with the human view of being zealous for the honor of his father’s house, which may enflame one in this manner. However, this is a foreign fire, as is known. The other comes with the view of being zealous for God, without any impetus and inclination away from “fire, the very flame of the God” (*Shir Ha-shirim* 8:6). In any case, from a fire such as this, one must also be very careful, to address the place and the time…

Yaakov Avinu explains in his rebuke the two views which were in this, but he did not consent even to the sublime fire…[[11]](#footnote-11) (*Ha’amek* *Davar,* *Bereishit* 34:25)

Thus, the Netziv warns us about the dangers of religious zealotry. First, it may spring from less-than-pure motives; in such a case, there is no *mitzva* in the endeavor, but rather a sin. Even in a situation in which one’s zealotry is based on pure motives, one must be very careful about it. Therefore, the Torah distinguishes between Levi and Shimon (“Yaakov’s two sons”): Shimon’s motivation is personal, while Levi’s motivation is pure. Nevertheless, Levi’s acts are just as dangerous, and therefore Yaakov rebukes him about this before his death.

**F. Anti-Hasidic Interpretations**

A clear opposition to Hasidism is expressed in the commentary of the Netziv. He relates many times to the concept of a “foreign fire” in God’s service; out of one’s great enthusiasm, there is a risk in this that it may ruin the normal standards of decency and humanity. In his commentary on the “foreign fire” of Nadav and Avihu, the Netziv writes:

Because they entered in order to offer this fire out of the enthusiasm of God’s love, the Torah says that even though God’s love is precious in God’s eyes, He does not desire it in a way which He has not commanded. (*Ha’amek* *Davar*, *Vayikra* 10:1)

In other words, the service of God that is appropriate is the form in which the person subordinates himself to God’s will and accepts upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven; he does not act out of internal pressure, but as a servant before his master.

As for the principle of “foreign fire”, the Netziv expands on it in a number of places. For example, in his explanation of the sin of Korach and his assembly, he explains in a very original way the distinction between the sin and punishment of Korach and his two hundred fifty men on the one hand and the sin and punishment of Datan and Aviram on the other:

It appears that the two hundred and fifty men[[12]](#footnote-12) were indeed greats of Israel in every aspect, including in the fear of God. Their motivation was the priesthood, which is the impetus of clinging to and loving God, like a fire burning in their midst. This was not for the sake of imagined office and honor, but to become holy and to acquire this great distinction by service. They also knew that the word of God was true as transmitted by Moshes, and there was no cause to question it, God forbid. They only thought, in their hearts, about the will of God, and they chose to surrender themselves to death for God’s love, “for love is as strong as death” (*Shir Ha-shirim* 8:6)…

This is called, “Those who sin with their lives” (*Bamidbar* 17:1): they sought to lose their lives only in order to acquire the height of love and saintliness, which He, Blessed be His Name, does not desire…

Now, since they regardless intended to act for the name of heaven, on account of this they were punished by the burning of the fire which came out of the Holy of Holies, and there was in this a matter of honor… (*Ha’amek Davar, Bamidbar* 16:1)

The two hundred and fifty men sinned in aspiring to excessive closeness to God, despite the fact that they knew that they would die by doing so. In other words, giving oneself over to closeness to God can be a sin, if it is done by contravening God’s command. The danger which ambushes God’s servant is born of enthusiasm; by shrugging of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, one crosses the borders which the Torah defines.

It is clear that these words reflect the attitude of the Lithuanian *yeshivot* which opposed the Hasidic movement. We should note that the Netziv, who teaches religious tolerance, expresses the positive side of the enthusiasm of the two hundred and fifty men; their unique punishment, he argues, is an expression of honor and respect.

Another anti-Hasidic allusion may be found in *Bamidbar* 15:40:

“So that you shall remember and perform all My commandments” - This is the remembrance for a person of distinction who is totally absorbed in loving God. The verse commands him to make strings of sky-blue, which tell of the connection to lofty thoughts; regardless, he must recall the performance of the mitzva in its time… Then his holiness will be truly Godly.

The Netziv here criticizes the men of distinction who are not punctilious about the proper times for the performance of *mitzvoth*. Apparently, this is directed against those Hasidim who were less than careful about prayer times and the like.

We may add in this connection the Netziv’s attitude towards to holiness. The Netziv stresses that there is no immanent holiness in man; sanctity emanates from man’s behavior, not man’s nature.

“Holy shall they be to their God” — This means separation from men for God’s name, in every way by which the name of heaven may be sanctified; thus, they must excel in good traits, modesty and the like, unlike those who separate themselves from other people not for the sanctification of heaven’s name, but only out of superciliousness and arrogance. *(Ha’amek* *Davar*, *Vayikra* 21:6)

It may be that his words are directed towards the “rebbe” phenomenon, which became more widespread in his generation. Alternatively, he may be addressing certain students who thought highly of themselves because of their supposedly great wisdom. To all of these, the Netziv turns and says: if Israel does not sanctify God, it cannot be sanctified.

**G. Original Interpretations**

The Netziv has many innovative commentaries, and we will note some of them:

1. Concerning the Levites, the Torah commands in *Parashat* *Bamidbar*, “And they shall not come when the sanctuary is being swallowed (*ke-valla*), lest they die” (*Bamidbar* 4:20). Every exegete has attempted to explain this verse, particularly the word “*ke-valla.*”[[13]](#footnote-13) The Netziv explains this in a very sharp and simple way:

“*Ke-valla*” — this means in the blink of an eye; as in eating, one who swallows without chewing does not benefit from the eating, just a moment of swallowing. Similarly, one who sees something which does not satisfy the eye is referred to as swallowing, and the verse warns that they [the Levites] should not look even when the sanctuary is being swallowed.

In other words, the Levites are not allowed to look at the vessels of the *Mishkan* when they are exposed, even for the shortest time of “*ke-valla*.”

1. The Netziv, like the Malbim, explains synonyms, precisely dissecting in different grammatical forms and different prepositions. A good example of this is the distinction between *“va-yikra el”* and *“va-yikra l-”*:

“Pharaoh called to Moshe (*el Moshe*) and to Aharon (*le-Aharon*)” — it does not say *le-Moshe* and *le-Aharon*… and this is because calling has two aspects, one of which is that other is not present, and he sends to summon him. The second is that even if he is there, he calls him by name to indicate geniality and all love and honor, and in this aspect, it says “*el*” as with “*Va-yikra*… *el Moshe*.”*(Ha’amek* *Davar*, *Shemot* 8:21)

In other words, “*va-yikra* *el*” is calling with affection or respect, while “*va-yikra* *l-*” is summoning, inviting a person of lower social stature.

1. In the following example, the Netziv explains the parallelism of “wayward and rebellious” in the verse (*Devarim* 21:18), “If a man has a wayward (*sorer*) and rebellious (*moreh*) son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him.”

In the verse in the Book of *Mishlei* (1:8), “Listen, my son, to your father’s discipline (*musar*), and do not abandon your mother’s teaching (*tora*),” the explanation is as follows. The father knows the way[[14]](#footnote-14) to teach his son God’s Torah, which is called discipline, and the mother teaches by way of good manners and good custom, and this is the mother’s teaching. Thus, the son who does not listen to the father’s discipline (*musar*) is called wayward (*sorer*) and one who does not listen to the mother’s voice is rebellious (*moreh*). The idea is that he does not follow the way of the Torah or good manners.

1. We will conclude with the Netziv’s commentary praising the settlers of the Land of Israel, even those who do not study Torah:

The essential will of the Blessed One is that they should be dwelling in Israel for the security of the Land of Israel — that is, they should not trade with those outside the land…

This indicates that when a person does not study Torah himself, he requires greater protection, and there is no place better protected than the Land of Israel, the main residence of Israel.

1. He wrote a volume of responsa, *Panim Me’irot*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Netziv’s sister was married to R. Yechiel Michel Ha-levi Epstein, author of *Arukh Ha-Shulchan*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Czar Alexander III (1845-1894) made these rules with the vision of one nationality, one language, one religion, and one government throughout his empire. Throughout his rule (beginning in 1881), he sought to do this by forcing the Russian language and Russian education upon all of his subjects. On the basis of this reality, one may understand the Netziv’s interpretation of the sin of building the Tower of Bavel (in his comments to *Bereishit* 11:4, “Come, let us build a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and we shall make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed upon the surface of the entire land”):

   They thought that all cities would be close and subordinate to this city, in which they built the tower, and the tower would allow them to see far off, across all of civilization, so that they would not be spread out in another land…

   “And we shall make a name for ourselves” — this refers to people who would watch over things, those who would be appointed over others as military officers to punish the transgressors…

   All of this was due to the concern of “lest we be dispersed upon the surface of the entire land”…

   Now, whoever would turn from the “common speech” (*ibid*. v. 1) among them, his penalty was to be incinerated, as they did to Avraham Avinu. It turns out that this “common speech” was for them an obstacle, for they decided to kill anyone who thought differently…

   The Netziv presents a totalitarian society, akin to the Russian government which he was all too familiar with: a society which wants to build a tower in order to allow the observation and strict control of people, compelling them to adopt a unified view. Such a society would certainly be united, but necessarily it would lead to the elimination of anyone having the temerity to defy it. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kibbutz Ein Ha-Netziv was named in his honor, in tribute to his Zionistic activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In addition to his scholarly style, the Netziv uses many acronyms (although these abbreviations may be the work of the publisher). Sometimes, one may find sentences written almost completely in acronyms and bizarre permutations. Thus, in his commentary to *Devarim* 22:7, we find:

   |  |  |  |
   | --- | --- | --- |
   | Concerning sending away the mother bird, it is written | ובשילוח הקן כתיב | ובשלוה"ק כתיב |
   | That there is reward in this world | שכר בעולם הזה | שכר בעוה"ז |
   | All the more so for honoring one’s father and mother | מכל שכן בכבוד אב ואם | מכש"כ בכבוד או"א |

   [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Among the students who left the way of the yeshiva was the poet Chayim Nachman Bialik. Aside from his famous creation “*Ha-Matmid*”, which describes yeshiva life, and additional poems that explicitly deal with topics such as these, he hints to his theological struggles even in such apparently innocent context as the nursery rhyme “*Nadneda*.”

   The Mishna (*Chagiga* 2:1) writes:

   Whoever reflects upon four things would have been better off had he not been born: what is above and what is below, what is before and what is beyond…

   Bialik writes in “*Nadneda”*:

   See, saw, see, saw

   Up, down, down and up!

   What’s up?

   What's down? –

   Only me,

   Me and you,

   Two of us balanced

   on the scales

   In between the earth

   and the skies. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Netziv relates to the relationship between the Written Torah and Oral Torah when he analyzes the double *mitzva* of *tefillin*. In his view, the head *tefillin* symbolize the Written Torah, which is revealed to all the nations, while the hand *tefillin* symbolize the Oral Torah, which is hidden from other peoples and unique to the Nation of Israel. He explains the significance of the formulation, “And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a frontlets between your eyes” (*Shemot* 13:16):

   Because of this, it is said in the head *tefillin*, “and as frontlets between your eyes,” which means an adornment, and this is because the Written Torah, in which it says, “And all the nations of the land” (*Devarim* 28:10). The hand *tefillin* is so that the power of the Oral Torah. According to this reason, the head *tefillin* is put before the hand *tefillin* because it is like the sword, that the scabbard is an adornment only when the sword is placed in it, but without the sword, there is no point of it at all even to be adorned with it. This is not true of the sword, even without a scabbard; its aim is the same, but it has no glory, for its bearers when it is unsheathed. Similarly, the point of the Written Torah is only achieved when we believe in the Oral Torah and we know of it if it was less or more, but without this it does not help at all…*(Harchev* *Davar*, *Shemot* 13:16) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. We may find evidence of conduct unbecoming Torah scholars in the memories of a student in the Volozhin Yeshiva, the author Abba Balosher, who describes the opposition of the students to the Netziv’s desire to appoint his son, R. Chayim, to become RoshYeshiva after his retirement, in the following way:

   Every day and every hour, the Netziv would find anonymous messages, many written with heavy hands, filled with words hard as sinew against him, and they caused him a grievous injury. Like the frogs in Egypt, these letters arose and engulfed the Netziv — in his bedchamber and upon his bed, in the Holy Ark and his lectern, in his *tallit* bag, among his bookshelves and in the pockets of his clothing — there was no place clear of them. This showed great cruelty… (Abba Balosher, “*Bialik Be-Volozhin*,” *Moznayim* 4 [1935], pp. 123-124). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. We may find evidence of this in a letter he wrote to Hovevei Zion in the year 5649 (1888-1889):

   I have been shocked to see how lies and hypocrisy have arisen, to devise evil schemes against our brothers those who live in the colonies in our Holy Land…

   “May God cut off all duplicitous lips” (*Tehillim* 12:3), for with duplicity they make the mitzva of settling the land a sin, and they dissuade the many from performing this *mitzva*. This is one of the ten things precluding repentance!(*Iggerot Tziyon* [Jerusalem, 5683], 101). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This means that one must be circumspect in receiving the good. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See also his commentary to *Bereishit* 49:6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. These are consumed by a heavenly fire, while the faction led by Datan and Aviram are swallowed by the earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For example, Rashi explains that the Levites must not look at the time when the vessels are “swallowed” by their coverings, and the Rashbam explains that the Levites may not look when the *Mishkan* is disassembled (“swallow” means to take apart and disassemble, as in *Eikha* 2:5, “He has swallowed all of her palaces”). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Apparently, this should say “his way”. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)