



Eloquent Expression, Elevated Torah

We've long known that Torah is eternal. But the vessels we use to convey it? Those can vary—and evolve. And in today's global world, one of the most potent vessels is English.

For many, it's the language in which they think, communicate, and connect. But beyond mere functionality, the question arises: Can English—when used properly—actually enhance the transmission of Torah? Can eloquence itself be a form of *hiddur mitzvah*?

It's more than just vocabulary. It's about syntax, rhythm, and tone. Anyone who's ever listened to a shiur knows the difference: the impact of Torah delivered with precision and grace, versus ideas that get lost in awkward phrasing or clunky expressions. When the language flows, the Torah shines.

A rav once proposed that talking and writing Torah in English eloquently can be a fulfillment of *zeh Keili v'anveihu*, this is my God and I will beautify Him (Shemos 15:2). The gemara (Shabbos 133b) interprets this as a call to beautify oneself before Hashem through the embellished performance of mitzvos—whether with a pristine esrog or a decorated sukkah. But perhaps, in our time, it can also mean beautiful expression. Torah deserves to be presented with dignity and clarity, not only in thought but also in form. And maybe, just maybe, a well-crafted sentence can be a small act of kavod Shamayim.

One prominent Rosh Yeshivah who understood this well was Rav Mordechai Gifter (1915-2001), Rosh Yeshivah of Telz. He once remarked that speaking English made him more effective as a Torah scholar. He was able to present Torah in a more eloquent and explanatory manner. In a letter to his grandson, Rav Gifter urged: "Perfect yourself in the English language, both in speaking and in writing." For Rav Gifter, English wasn't a concession—it was a tool, a means of expressing the depth and beauty of Torah with clarity and dignity.

Rav Emanuel Feldman, longtime rav in Atlanta and noted author, once had a jarring experience on a transatlantic flight. He spent some time immersed in *The Economist*, appreciating what he later described as its "felicitous style... elegant phrasing... supple prose." He then picked up an Orthodox Jewish periodical and was struck by the shift: "The alphabet and the words were English," he wrote, "but the sentence structure,

the rhythm, the syntax, the tone—they were of another language altogether."

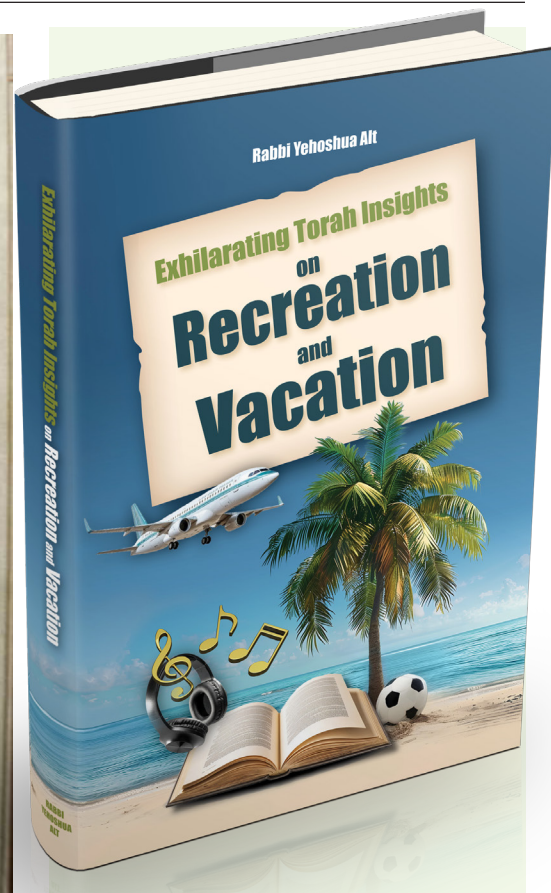
Rav Feldman later addressed the topic in his 1991 article, "Tefillin in a Brown Paper Bag," lamenting the lack of linguistic dignity in some Jewish writing. "Impoverished language," he wrote, "cannot accurately reflect the wealth of great concepts... The use of deficient language has practical negative consequences as well, for it prevents us from preaching to anyone but the Orthodox choir... After all, we don't wrap our tefillin in brown paper bags, or bind our sifrei Torah with coarse, ugly ropes."

That sensitivity is not new. Rav Akiva Eiger famously requested that his Torah be printed on quality paper, in attractive script and black ink. He understood that presentation impacts perception. When one sees a sefer with nice appearance, his mind is at ease, and his concentration is aroused (Shu"t R' Akiva Eiger, Hakdama, s.v. *v'hinini*). If aesthetic quality aids comprehension, then language—our most powerful medium—certainly does too.

The gemara (Kiddushin 29a) teaches that a father is obligated to teach his son a trade. A noted kiruv rabbi, whose work has taken him across continents, once suggested a modern interpretation—addressed to parents raising children in countries where English isn't the first language: teaching their child English. More job opportunities are available to those who know English as well as higher salaries (see Chut Hamshulash, p. 78 of what R' Shlomo Eiger wrote to his son). After all, English is either the primary or secondary official language in nearly 100 countries.

This of course is besides the other opportunities presented to such a person which include being able to learn more Torah since there is some Torah—be it books or shiurim—that is only available in English. Additionally, one can do more kiruv since many nonobservant Jews only speak English.

And sometimes, the cultural perception of English itself opens doors. Another kiruv rabbi observed that secular Israelis often show up to Torah events more readily when the advertisements are in English—even when Hebrew is their mother tongue. "English," he said, "is international. It's cool. It's open." That simple shift in language gave the message an added allure, drawing people in.



RABBI YEHOSHUA ALT

The newly released book "Exhilarating Torah Insights on Recreation and Vacation" is now available (as a paperback, hardcover and digitized version) for purchase and delivery on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DF4ZHPKJ> or by sending a WhatsApp to +972 54 849 5217. Alternatively, you can call 054 849 5217 (Israel) or 917 732 2371 (United States) or send an email to yalt3285@gmail.com.

Some of the questions discussed in this book are the following.

What role does recreation play in our service of Hashem?

What does the Torah teach us about music?

What lessons can we glean from specific types of recreation, such as sports?

Is there a mitzvah to take a vacation?

What does the Torah say about comedy and humour?

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