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Torah Codes: Valid or Not?

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*Page 11 of the July 30, 2004 **Hamodia Magazine** contains a short boxed item entitled Torah Codes. In part this article states, "To oversimplify, if we take an event, name or phrase and look for it in the Torah, it can be found with a specific number of spaces between each letter. Statistically, a long phrase with a minimal number of spaces between each letter is significant. Though it is perhaps possible to find a short sequence in any book, the statistical likelihood of its occurring the way it does in the Torah are (sic) nowhere near the actual numbers. The Torah Codes are certainly not there accidentally."*

Before proceeding, let me point out that to the best of my knowledge the validity of the Torah Codes has never been asserted by a Godol in a Torah Journal, Psak or Teshuva. "The most serious claim of scientific evidence for the Codes was made by three Israelis: Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg (WRR). They claim that biographical information about medieval rabbis is "encoded" in the Hebrew text of Genesis. Specifically, the rabbis' names and other appellations are claimed to be encoded closer to their dates of birth and death than should be expected by chance. WRR's 'experiment' appeared in the respectable journal Statistical Science in 1994, volume 9, no 3, pages 429-438. (See http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/torah.html and the link there to the paper.) Thus, anyone who claims that the Codes are invalid is merely disagreeing with an article in a statistics journal, not with something that has been put forth by a Torah personality.

With this in mind Hamodia readers may be interested to know that there are those who claim that there is no validity to the Torah Codes. Indeed, they assert that one can find similar codes referring to past events by using the same search techniques on such books as Moby Dick and War and Peace! Several mathematicians and statisticians have gone to great lengths to try to demonstrate that the assertion that the Torah contains unique codes is invalid. Professor Barry Simon, a strictly observant Jew, has been in the forefront of those who claim that the idea of Torah Codes has no basis.

Professor Simon is no academic/intellectual lightweight. At http://www.wopr.com/biblecodes/biotag.htm one reads:

> Dr. Simon received a Ph.D. in physics from Princeton in 1970; all of his professorial appointments have been jointly in mathematics and physics. He remained at Princeton on the faculty being promoted to tenure in 1972 and to full professor in 1976. He accepted a position at Caltech in 1981, where he is currently the IBM Professor of Mathematics and Theoretical Physics and Department Chair for Mathematics. He is a former vice president of the American Mathematical Society, a fellow of the American Physical Society and a winner of the gold medal of the International Association of Molecular Science for work related to quantum chemistry.

> He is the author of 12 scientific books (graduate level texts and advanced monographs) and approximately 300 research papers in his field of mathematical physics, especially in questions related to quantum mechanics. Regarding the preparation of this article, he stated: "I am not a specialist specifically in probability and statistics, the subject most relevant to codes analysis (neither is Prof. Rips) but I have used probability theory in my research and taught the Caltech Freshman math course that includes 5 weeks of probability including extensive discussion of paradoxes and pitfalls." Dr Simon also writes about computers and was the *Jewish Action* computer columnist for several years.

Professor Simon published an article in the March, 1998 issue of *Jewish Action Magazine* entitled "**A Skeptical Look at the Torah Codes.**" In summary he writes, "My conclusion is that there is much to be skeptical about in looking at the codes. Not only are some of the claims that have surrounded them unfounded, the various examples are far from convincing if analyzed carefully. Doubts that I may have had about publishing my conclusions are overridden, I feel, by a gemara in Shabbos, which says, 'The seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is Truth'."

Others have gone so far as to claim that they can find codes in secular novels. In the article "**Equidistant Letter Sequences in Tolstoy's "War and Peace**" by Dror Bar-Natan and Brendan McKay the authors assert, "In a recent paper, Witztum, Rips and Rosenberg found a surprising correlation between famous rabbis and their dates of birth and death, as they appear as equidistant letter sequences in the Book of Genesis. We make a smaller or equal number of mistakes, and find the same phenomenon in Tolstoy's eternal creation 'War and Peace'." (http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/WNP/)

The following challenge was made by Michael Drosnin, a proponent of the Codes: "When my critics find a message about the assassination of a prime minister encrypted in Moby Dick, I'll believe them." *(Newsweek, Jun 9, 1997)* The article "Assassinations Foretold in Moby Dick!" was written in response to this

challenge. Using selections from the text of Moby Dick the authors show how one can find codes that predict the assassinations of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, President Rene Moawad, The Reverend Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, Yitzhak Rabin, Lady Diana and others. (http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/moby.html)

The above comments are in no way meant to be definitive as to the validity or lack thereof of the Torah Codes. The goal is to give the readers of Hamodia a framework within which to make their own informed, intelligent decisions.