



### What are the two middle words of the Torah?

What is a 'scribe' in Hebrew? It's 'sofer', but isn't that astonishing?

Sofer literally means somebody who counts, so the scribe who writes a Torah scroll, is a person who counts numbers.

What's the connection? The Talmud explains that it was so important for scribes to know how many words and how many letters there are in a Torah scroll, so that they are able to determine that they had not left anything out.

This is quite astonishing. In pre-computer times, the scribes knew how many words and how many letters there were in the entire Torah.

As a result, they were able to say, the Torah has an even number of words and the two middle words, are found in this week's portion of Shemini, Vayikra chapter 10, verse 16.

They are 'darosh darash', which means 'Moshe enquired', he asked, he demanded to know what was happening. From there we have the word 'derasha' – a discourse.

I think that this is so powerful. What a message! What a teaching! Right at the heart of the Torah, the essence of it all is that we need to have an inquiring mind.

We need to be asking questions, we need to be demanding answers with regard to that which troubles us in life.

The Gemara Masechet Shabbat daf lamud tells us, that Hillel the elder, was famous for being a very sweet natured, calm and patient person, nobody ever saw Hillel in a rage.

So, two friends made a bet and one said to the other, I bet you that I will make Hillel angry.

So how did he do this?

He posed ridiculous questions to Hillel, such as, 'Why do the Tarmudians have oddly shaped eyes?' 'Why do the Babylonians have oval shaped heads?'

Hillel's answer to every question was 'she'elah gedolah sha'alta' – you have asked a great question, and he went on to give an answer, nothing was going to upset Hillel.

The man lost his bet, and the Talmud tells us as a result of this anecdote, that this is the reason we follow the Halachic decisions of Hillel, and not of Shamai, because, he was a person who loved questions, he appreciated an opportunity to explain, regardless of how great or poor the questions were.

From the middle of the Torah, let us never forget not to be shy about asking and indeed, that's a message of Pirkei Avot, which tells us 'lo habbayshan lamed' – a shy student will never do well.

Shabbat Shalom.