

Tekhelet and Timna – Truth Springs from the Earth

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Imagine R. Ovadya deciding one day to travel to San Diego California to visit Sea World? What would possibly drive a prominent rabbi in charge of a community to take an extended vacation to visit an aquarium? Well, the truth is I don't know if R. Ovadya ever did such a thing, however another great Rabbi did.

In 1887, R. Gershon Hanoch Leiner, the Radzyner Rebbe embarked on a mission. He left home and hearth to travel to the great aquarium in Naples, Italy – known to hold the largest known collection of sea creatures on earth. Why would an established Hassidic Rebbe be so interested in an aquatic museum? The answer is purpose. The purpose of creation no less.

And what, you ask, is this purpose?

The fact is that we can phrase the answer in all kinds of language – to perfect ourselves, to perfect the world, to connect to God. Interestingly, all of these can be captured in one word: Mikdash. Or in the words of the parsha:

שמות פרשת תרומה פרק כה פסוק ח - (ח) וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם :

It is said of the Rebbe that he was driven to bring the Mashiach, to do everything in his power to make the purpose of creation a reality. He knew that the Mashiach is to come and build the Mikdash, so he said to himself: why not do everything we can to prepare for his coming?! Why not get everything ready for his building of the Mikdash?! So he looked, as it were, in this week's parsha at the list of materials needed for the Mikdash:

שמות פרשת תרומה פרק כה

(ג) וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֵתֶם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנִחְשֵׁת : (ד) וּתְכַלֶּת וְאֶרְגָּמֹן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים : (ה) וְעֹרֹת אֵילָם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעִצֵּי שֵׁטִים : (ו) שֶׁמֶן לְמָאֵר בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטָרֶת הַסַּמִּים : (ז) אַבְנֵי שֵׁהָם וְאַבְנֵי מַלְאִים לְאַפֵּד וְלַחֲשׂוֹן :

With list in hand, the Rebbe dropped all of his communal duties and went on a mission for the greater community, for all of Am Yisrael, in essence for the community of the world. He went to find the source of the long lost tekhelet dye: the hillazon.

Now, as many of you may know, the Rebbe found that a sea creature by the name of *Sepia officinalis*, popularly known as a cuttlefish, was the closest candidate to be the coveted hillazon. The Rebbe had one major problem: the dye out of the cuttlefish is pure black, not blue. Not one to be deterred, the Rebbe pulled out the Gem. (Men. 42b) that says chemicals (samanin) are to be used to make the dye:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מנחות דף מב עמוד ב

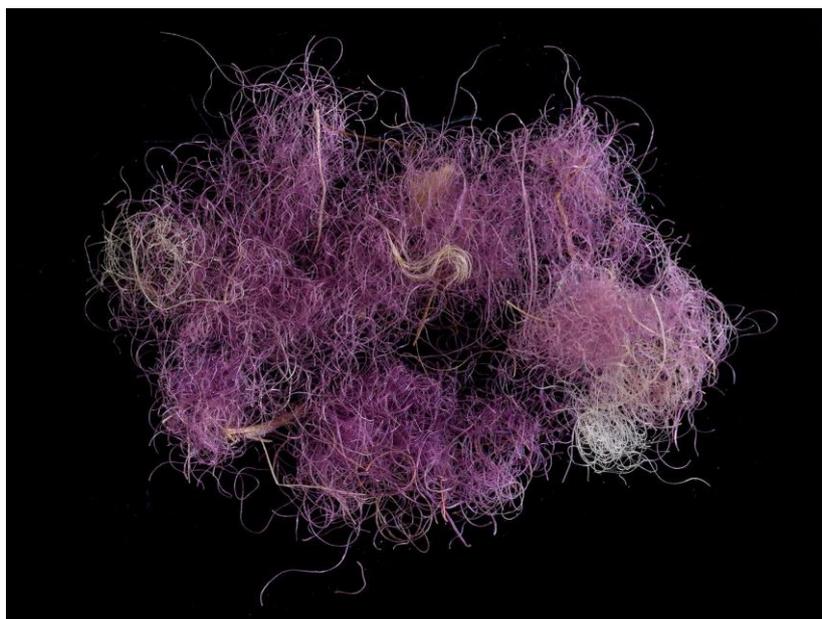
מר ליה אביי לרב שמואל בר רב יהודה : הא תכילתא היכי צבעיתו לה? אמר ליה : מייתנין דם חלזון וסמנין ורמינן להו ביורה [ומרתחינן ליה],

So the Rebbe went to the chemists of his day and asked if it was possible to add chemicals to the black dye from the cuttlefish that would reveal its blue. That is, the Rebbe knew that chemicals were part of the process, but he also knew (and wrote explicitly) that the blue *must* come from the hillazon itself. The chemists realized that a lot of money was involved and were only too happy to supply the Rebbe with the recipe for the well-known synthetic dye called “Prussian blue”. This dye formula has no need for the cuttlefish juice as its blue coloring is supplied from metal filings used in the dye solution. Unfortunately, the Rebbe was duped. And unfortunately, this has caused many people to be very leery of those who propose to have found the coveted hillazon.

And that brings us to the hillazon being proposed today: the *Murex trunculus* (argamon keheh kotzim). Now, in contrast to the *Sepia officinalis* for which the Rebbe did his investigation over the course of a year or two, the *Murex* has been studied, investigated, and written about for approximately 40 years!!

There are indeed many many reasons to believe that the Murex is indeed the very creature used ever since the commandment to wear tekhelet was given. But the reason I chose to talk about this today, is not only because it is parshat Teruma but because yet another very interesting archeological find has added further support to the authenticity of the *Murex trunculus*.

For those of you who missed it [in the news](#) a couple of weeks ago, it was announced that archeologists had found, on a Tel in the Timna valley, an amazing swath of purple cloth dyed with the Murex snail. Yes, I said purple.



For those of you who are not familiar, it is possible to obtain both blue and purple from the same snail depending only on how you process the dye. In the sun the dye solution produces blue dye, in the shade, it produces purple dye. This was known to the ancients as evidenced by the writings of first century Roman architect Vitruvius.

So why is this purple find important to people looking for evidence of blue? Because ten years ago a blue swath was found on Masada which provided incontrovertible evidence that the Murex was used in ancient times for blue (see [here](#)).



But skeptics said, not so fast, it may have originally been dyed purple and then, over the years, may have simply faded to blue. Today, with the Timna find, we know that is not necessarily so because the new find of brilliant purple dye – that is literally 1000 years older than the earlier blue find – surely would have had enough time to fade to blue if such were the expected phenomenon (hat tip to Baruch Sterman).

In conclusion, once again we see how fortunate we are to live at a time when, time and again, we are witness to the verse in Tehillim, “Truth shall spring from the earth”:

תהלים פרק פה פסוק יב, יב - אמת מארץ תצמח

It is time that we realize, like the Radzyner Rebbe, that bringing about the fulfillment of creation is in our hands. It is up to us to fulfill every mitzvah that we have the ability to fulfill.

The time has come to fulfill the mitzvah of tekhelet.

Contact me to take get your first set of tekhelet for your tallit gadol – free!