

Bytes & PCs

Two Blue

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

ONE: TECHELET

Techelet is still pretty rare in Israel. If these words make you think of *chilazon*, and the dye this aquatic creature provided for the blue thread on our *tzitzit*, your Jewish IQ is in good shape.

The remarkable work of a small group of enthusiasts and their indefatigable spokespeople has given the blue strand new life after many centuries of neglect. The folks from P'til Tekhelet offer a wonderful website, <http://www.tekhelet.co.il>, where you can learn all about contemporary attempts to revive this *mitzvah*. You will find a discussion of the source-texts in the Gemara, the description of ancient historians, the divergent paths taken by the Radzyner Rebbe and Chief Rabbi Herzog in rediscovering *chilazon*, and an illustrated, modern chemistry of the dye. A database of related articles (including Rabbi Herzog's famous doctoral dissertation on *techelet*, hailing back to his days in Ireland) allows the user to place orders by email.

(Inexplicably, there is no index of these articles. You search by keyword, but that only works if you know what you are looking for!)

While the tenor of the site is confident and assured, there is no hard sell — which is the way it should be. Embracing a practice that disappeared for so long is a major halachic decision; no one should make it without the counsel of halachic authorities who have mulled over all the pros and cons. But if you and your halachic advisor are convinced by the arguments of P'til

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein directs outreach at the Yeshiva of Los Angeles, and serves on the editorial board of Jewish Action.

Tekhelet, you can order your new *tzitzit* right on the site. Convenient service, and no strings attached...

TWO: TECHELET

There is another *techelet* in the Jewish world, of much more recent vintage. It is the Hebrew version of *Azure*, a journal that may make quite a mark on the State of Israel in the near future.

Part of the supposed schism between religious and secular in Israel owes to the pitting of religion against democracy, as if the two were incompatible. Secular



Israelis have long been fed a single choice: either dine on a diet of left-leaning thought, or accept intrusive religion as the only alternative.

Azure is a project of the Shalem Center, which began as a sort of politically conservative think-tank. It is not an Orthodox organization (although Dan Polisar, the incoming editor-in-chief is observant, and David Hazony, *Azure's* senior editor, happens to be an American *oleh* who is a Yeshiva University alumnus), but it is pledged to offering a political alternative to the usual fare. Its young leadership wants to show Israelis that there is a different way of doing things. They envision an Israel that is economically free,

democratic in character and Jewish in its nature. They argue the last point not on religious grounds, but on the strength of great conservative thinkers of the last century who taught that a commonly held sense of morality is a necessity for the function of a state, and that moral fiber cannot survive without a national and religious tradition. This means that they can effectively argue embracing the Jewishness of the Jewish State even to secular Israelis.

Their modus operandi is intriguing. Hard as it is to believe, intellectual journals are a rarity in Israel. With all we assume about the brain-power of the Jewish state, there are only a handful of journals devoted to intellectuality applied to public life. *Azure* seeks to raise the ante of intellectual discourse in Israel. Within its pages, you will find some of the best and brightest thinkers in the country.

Articles in *Azure* have reappeared in other incarnations in American journals. When writers in the American Orthodox community needed a thoughtful analysis of the judicial excesses of the Barak court, they turned to a number of excellent articles in *Azure*. *Ha'aretz* had this to say about it: "A periodical...whose aim is to try to grapple with the intellectual success of post-Zionism, and to present us with a positive Jewish-nationalist alternative to it" (Books supplement, October 9, 1996). In other

words, post-Zionism, the current intellectual darling, has succeeded in some circles in further distancing the Jewish state from its Jewish roots, and the folks at *Azure* are doing something about it.

Nothing competes with the real thing, but *Azure's* website (<http://www.azure.org.il>) provides more than a generous sampling of the contents of all issues. Try this site, and you will speak with more knowledge and conviction about the ideas facing the Jewish nation. You will likely refer it to friends. And that may help create a kinder, gentler political climate within our beloved and embattled country.

And more...

OTZAR HA-SHUT

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it," advises a familiar bit of Americana. Until recently, the thousands of years of rabbinic responsa were handled exclusively and well by **Bar-Ilan's Judaic Library**. It seemed unlikely that anyone would try to compete with the gargantuan task of inputting thousands of volumes — precisely what Bar-Ilan did. A different and complementary approach, however, has arrived with **Otzar HaShut** (Davka/Win/\$199).

Otzar is essentially the massive index card file of the venerable Otzar HaPoskim project, which attempts to catalogue virtually everything that has seen print on a given halachic topic. In over 50 years of labor, each question and answer in over 5,000 works of responsa were recorded on cards (over one million to date), and have now been computerized.

The current release covers half of *Shulchan Aruch: Choshen Mishpat* and *Even HaEzer*, with the other sections still to come. You can search by section of *Shulchan Aruch*, or by word. The most distinctive difference from Bar-Ilan, though, is in the searches by topic. The compilers of Otzar HaPoskim organized their material according to logical areas.

Say you were interested in halachic aspects of intellectual property. To use Bar-Ilan, you would have to know something of the early discussion about copyright to go further. With Otzar, you could jump in with a close approximation like *hasagat gevul* — encroachment. This would suggest to you to check *zechuyot yotzrim* — creative rights. Following this lead would turn up no fewer than 42 citations of individual responsa!

Unlike Bar-Ilan, the vast majority of references in Otzar do not come with the full source text. You will still need to find a good Torah library to follow up. Not all of the citations actually give you questions and answers; many simply provide a line about the topic of the responsum. While you do not need

have any prior familiarity with a halachic issue to start searching through the literature (although it helps!), you must be comfortable with Hebrew.

There is a price you pay for sharing the knowledge base of this prestigious group. The people who financed it want you to know about it. Thus, when you open the program, you must endure the nuisance of a few screens of donor acknowledgment, something we hope will not become a trend. The organization of topics is not always intuitive, and some of the sub-categories are overly broad and



some overlap, necessitating searching through several of them. The documentation is as poor as the program itself is rich. The drawbacks pale in comparison to the utility any student of *halachah* will find in it. If you can't wade through *halachah* yourself, buy Otzar for your rabbi. Someone you know needs to have it.

As you might expect, Bar-Ilan is not going to be caught napping while competitors steal its thunder. The people behind this project have consistently shown their determination to excel. They have always plowed back money and time into improving the quality and scope of the program. Newly released Bar-Ilan 7.0 adds many exciting features — including the topical indexing of some responsa — and additional works. There is so much that is good about it, that it will have to await the next column for fuller treatment.

DAVKAWRITER

The most frequent question that I am asked is, "What is the best word processor to buy if you need to work

with both Hebrew and English?"

While the answer to this question certainly depends on individual requirements, my very informal survey of merchants I know shows that **DavkaWriter 2000** (Davka/Win/\$149) is making a very strong showing.

I can understand why. It is simple and intuitive to use, especially for beginners. One of the most important features in my experience is the ease with which you can toggle between one language and another, and nothing could be simpler than the single-click it takes with DavkaWriter.

As we get more and more comfortable with computers, we expect word processors to behave more elegantly, and DavkaWriter delivers. By the time you read this review, a new revision will be available that will include even more! (Make sure you ask for it.) It goes without saying that you can paste mixed text to Word without a hitch. DavkaWriter comes with multiple Hebrew and English

fonts, and you can change the appearance of one without affecting the other. You can insert full *nikud* (whose position can be tweaked to suit the individual font) and *trop*. Lots of clipart comes with it, and graphics coordinates well with text. Even Hebrew text wraps around graphics. Columns and tables are easy insertions. The FlexiText feature turns words into dramatic graphics, like the Wordart feature in Word. Bilingual spell-checking, and Hebrew *Tanach* and *Mishnayot* come along for the ride. Headers and footers appear on the page as you create them, rather than in a separate text box.

On my wish-list for future development are capability to numbered and outline lists, and displaying the font list with samples of what each font actually looks like, to make it easier to choose between alternatives. These are for the future. At the moment, DavkaWriter is a wonderful choice for many people, clearly the answer to a prayer! **IA**