

Parshas Emor 5772

THE SPREADING OF KNOWLEDGE

AND THE ANSWER IS...

The Gemara in Bava Kamma (66) reports that Rabbah asked R' Yosef a particular question (concerning the topic of *halachic* acquisition), and R' Yosef answered it. That in itself is nothing unusual, of course. The mainstay of Talmud Bavli is the vast record of *shakla-v'tarya* (“back and forth”) — the stimulating and intricate Talmudic discussions that took place among the Masters. What is striking about this particular dialogue is the sheer duration Rabbah had to wait to receive his answer:

אמר רבא: האי מילתא קשי בה רבה לרב יוסף עשרין ותרתין שנים, ולא איפרקה עד דיתביב רב יוסף ברישא ופרקה.

“Rava said: Rabbah asked R' Yosef about this matter and remained perplexed for a period of twenty-two years. It was not resolved until (at the conclusion of this period) R' Yosef was appointed to lead the Academy, at which point he supplied the answer.”

This is indeed a curious circumstance. If R' Yosef knew the answer, why didn't he respond immediately instead of waiting twenty-two years? Most likely, he himself was unsure and did not attain clarification until he spent years contemplating the issue: twenty-two, to be exact. But the Gemara's statement above supplies another interesting detail: right before he finally gave Rabbah his long-awaited answer, he first assumed the position of *rosh yeshivah*. What was the significance of this milestone in R' Yosef's career? While we are indeed happy for his achievement, it does not seem to bear much relevance to the issue at hand; why

mention this seemingly incidental tidbit at all?

The truth is that this appointment may actually have been the catalyst to resolve Rabbah's double-decade dilemma. This emerges from a fundamental idea based on this week's *parshah*.

SHEFA

The chief *kohein* is known as the *Kohein Gadol* — the High Priest. This week's *parshah*, however, makes reference to him with a slight variation: **מֵאֲחֵיו**. Literally: “The *kohein* who is greater than his colleagues” (*Vayikra* 21:10). This elongated title not only appears superfluous but may even carry somewhat “elitist” connotations. Is it necessary to “rub it in,” so to speak, to the other *kohanim* and stress that this one individual is somehow greater than everyone else?

The Hafla'ah, however, clarifies the significance of this appellation; according to his explanation, the phraseology in no way diminishes the dignity of the “common” *kohanim* but actually adds to their prestige, for the Torah here is identifying the source of the *Kohein Gadol's* greatness and enhanced status. It is precisely because he is placed at the helm of officiating in the Temple and serves at the head of the priestly caste that he is imbued with a greater measure of sanctity and spiritual influence. He receives his spiritual gifts directly from the Almighty and in turn shares them with the priestly charges whom he guides. But it is they who ultimately determine the magnitude of the *shefa* (spiritual emanation) that will be showered upon him, since he requires it in order to bestow it on them. The result of this arrangement is that the spiritual grandeur of the *Kohein Gadol* is principally derived from his brothers — his “*gedulah*” (greatness) is **מֵאֲחֵיו**.

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EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS

The Hafla'ah explains that this notion is manifest in the area of Torah education as well. One may have thought that a *rebbe's* store of knowledge is based on the extent of his preparation and his personal acumen. In reality, though, a *rebbe* is more than just a mere teacher of a discipline. He serves as Hashem's *shali'ach* (agent), transmitting His Torah. As such, the Almighty grants him knowledge and capabilities — in the measure necessary for his disciples' absorption. Through this idea, the Hafla'ah provides very novel interpretations to some familiar teachings.

There is a well-known Mishnah in Avos (4:1), which states:

בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם.

“Ben Zoma says: Who is a wise man? One who learns from every man.”

According to the conventional understanding, the Mishnah is praising an erstwhile knowledge-seeker: one who forgoes any airs and appreciates truth even if it originates from an individual of “lesser” stature or acumen. Such a person — possessing intellectual honesty coupled with a love of Torah knowledge — will surely accrue much wisdom. While this sentiment is certainly correct, the Hafla'ah perceives here a different message. He interprets the Mishnah as reflecting the aforementioned theme. It is on account of his disciples that the teacher is imbued from on High with Divine wisdom to impart. His wisdom thus comes from “every man.”

The Hafla'ah addresses the following Talmudic statement in a similar vein: “Rebbi said: I have learned much from my teachers; even more have I learned from my colleagues; but from my disciples, I have learned the most” (*Makkos 10a*). What accounts for this seemingly ironic situation? The commentators understand that the Master's own knowledge becomes honed and sharpened through the exchange he conducts when teaching his students. But the Hafla'ah once again finds a source for his principle. The *rebbe* “learns the most” from his disciples, for it is they who are primarily responsible for his wisdom. Hashem showers him with the Torah knowledge that *they* will need — and that he must impart to them (*Panim Yafos, parshas Emor*).

One other instance when this idea comes into play is the very issue with which we opened. Rabbah asked R' Yosef a question, whose resolution eluded him for twenty-two years. All of this changed, however, when R' Yosef was elevated to the position of *rosh yeshivah*. R' Ya'akov Emden explains (*Bava Kamma, ibid.*) that this was no mere coincidence. Now that R' Yosef stood to impart knowledge to a large body of disciples, he was granted an abundant measure of Divine Assistance, through which previously concealed matters now became lucid and clear.