

Qualities of a Torah Instructor

Parshas Vayakhail-Pekudai
and Parshas Hachodesh
by Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The standards of qualitative Torah instruction as established by the sages are psychologically sound, and stand up against the most modern techniques of education. However, one Talmudic statement seeks qualities in a teacher that seem beyond attainment. Upon the passage (Malachi 2:7) "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is a MALACH (angel or messenger) of the L-rd of hosts," the rabbis comment (Moed Koton 17a); "If the teacher is like an angel you should seek Torah at his mouth, but if not, then do not seek Torah at his mouth." To take this Talmudic statement literally would leave most Torah students without an instructor. Rather is the intent to inspire the would-be teacher to incorporate certain angelic qualities that will enhance his capabilities.

The RaMBaM states that the purpose of the cherubim on top of the ark containing the tablets of the covenant (Shemos 37:9) was to imbue us with the faith in the existence of angels (Guide For the Perplexed 3:45, and see RaMBaN and R' Bechaya Shemos 25:21). In light of the above one may suggest that it was placed on top of the ark in order to impress upon us the Talmudic principle of education, that a Torah pedagogue must strive to attain certain angelic traits in order to succeed in raising a generation of Torah.

One such angelic quality is indeed spelled out in the very injunction to make cherubim. They were to be fashioned "facing each other" (ibid.). This symbolized the positive relationship toward one another. Before the angels recite the KEDUSHA "they call upon one another, "V'KORO ZEH EL ZEH, and together they say KODOSH. A teacher of Torah must emulate the angel regarding this characteristic. He must discuss subjects of Torah with his colleagues and occasionally meet with his equals face to face. This will help not only in cementing a strong Torah viewpoint, but also in gaining wider acceptance in Jewry at large.

It is related that when the great sages of the past generation, the Chofetz Chaim and Reb Chaim Ozer, would meet at a public gathering, they would embrace and kiss each other, as they had utmost reverence and esteem for the Torah greatness of each other. This is a quality made immensely easier to achieve today with the superb advancement in communication. Even when Torah authorities reside long distances from each other, a consensus can be reached in a conference call.

Surely was discussion encouraged when scholars met in one Beth Medrosh. The Talmud quotes a prayer a scholar would recite upon entering the Beth Medrosh: "May it be your will, Hashem, that I shall not stumble in a matter of law, so my colleagues may rejoice in considering my opinion" (Brochos 28b, according to Maharsha).

The law of the Paschal lamb (Parshas Hachodesh, Shemos 12:1-20) is introduced with the Al-mighty speaking to Moshe and Aaron: "Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel..." From the use of the plural "speak ye" it would appear that Aaron was to join Moshe in communicating the laws of the Paschal Lamb to the people. Yet this was not the case. It was Moshe's sole prerogative to address the communications to the people. However, quotes Rashi from the Mechilta, Moshe and Aaron paid great respect to each other, saying one to the other, "Tell me how to explain it," and the Divine message is issued from both of them, though Moshe was the sole messenger.

Immediately preceding the law of the Paschal lamb is the law to proclaim, through the Beth Din, Jewish court, the day of Rosh Chodesh, the new month, starting with Nissan. This, too, is told to both Moshe and Aaron. (12:1,2). The sense of unity of the members of the Beth Din, the reverence and honor for each other, is reflected in the oneness of all Israel. For it is in the name of the One people Israel that Rosh Chodesh and the Festivals are proclaimed, "Mekadesh Yisroel V'Hazmanim." This may be the reason that even today before announcing the new moon it is proclaimed "Chaverim Kol Yisroel."