



THE HAKUK EDITION
ENGLISH TOPICS ON THE DAF

לעילוי נשמת Eilana Luna

RABBI MORDECHAI PAPOFF

Chagigah Daf 15

It says, “The lips of a Kohen guard wisdom; Torah should be sought from him, because he is an angel of G-d.” The Gemara explains this as, “If your Rav is like an angel, seek Torah from him; if not, do not.” How, then, could Rabbi Meir learn from Acheir? Reish Lakish answered that R’ Meir found another source which would permit it. Asks the Gemara aren’t the verses contradictory? To which the Gemara answers: No – Big people may learn from them, but those of lesser stature may not. (Rashi: “Big” people can take care not to learn from their practices. Ein Yaakov understands “gadol” and “koton” as distinguishing between adults and minors.)

Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 4:1) teaches that one should not teach a student who is not acting according to the Torah. Rather, he should first bring him back to the right path, and only then allow him to join the other students. Similarly, one should not learn from a Rabbi who is not on the derech, until he does teshuvah.

The Rambam is based on our Gemara, but he omits the distinction we see here – that if one is already a great man, he may learn from an apostate Rav. The Lechem Mishneh asks how come the Rambam omits this distinction?

Lechem Mishneh suggests that since the first part of the Gemara – take a Rav only if he's like an angel – appears unqualified in several places in Shas, we take it at face value. Although here we find a difference, perhaps it is only to explain R' Meir's actions, and we don't hold like it halachically. (Therefore, Hashem Himself didn't want to repeat Torah thoughts that originated from Acheir.)

Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 246:8) echoes the Rambam, and the Shach asks the same question on him. He offers that nowadays nobody can assume he is on a high enough level to be unaffected by the notions of such a Rav, so it is not relevant (the Lechem Mishneh rejects such a resolution to explain the Rambam since the Rambam will even bring the halacha even if will only be in practice when Moshiach arrives).

Another resolution is suggested by Tachlis Chochma on the Shulchan Aruch (ibid, by Rabbi Aharon Gottesman). The poskim forbid studying under such a person, but to read his books could be allowed if one is holy enough. The personal association of live teaching is too dangerous, but in book form, it is possible to select that which is appropriate and ignore the rest. Thus, Rambam himself read books of non-Jewish scholars, and he introduces his Moreh Nevuchim with the possuk from our Gemara to excuse his practice.

Aside from this rule about selecting a Rebbe, others apply it to any teacher. Rabbi Mordechai Gelber shlit" (co-author of Orchos Shabbos) emphasizes that even secular studies should be learned only from G-d-fearing people. Otherwise, they may transmit terrible influences upon our children, chas v'sholom, intentionally or otherwise! (Malbushei Mordechai, Yichud 13:2) We must be very careful, if we find ourselves in such situations, to maintain our standards of spirituality.

He references many sources criticizing the use of teachers and rebbeim who are not properly G-d-fearing. The Chasam Sofer (Bava Basra 21a) writes that melamdim must have great fear of Heaven, for then their lessons enter the hearts of their young charges and ignite them with love and fear of Hashem. On the other hand, even if a man is very scholarly, if his heart does not cleave to Hashem, he is cheating his employer and destroying the children!

The Chazon Ish in his Emunah U'Bitachon (4:16) exhorts: One of the worst causes of damage to our youth is rebbeim who are lacking in their middos. They don't know how to rebuke and guide with refinement, in the right way and at the appropriate time. Even if the child accepts his message, if it is given with anger and shouting, he will imbibe the example of his teacher as well. Students imitate their teachers, and they will also learn to act with coarseness and intolerance toward others. The loss is far greater than the gain. Anyway, usually such people can't achieve anything with their harsh criticism, and accomplish little in their Torah instruction...