

TALMUD TORAH 2:1

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

1: We set up *melamdei tinoqot* (children's teachers) in every *medina* (state) and in every *plach* (region) and in every city. If a city does not maintain *tinoqot shel beit rabban* (lit. children of the teacher's house - i.e. a school) we excommunicate the residents of the city until they hire a teacher. If they do not hire, we destroy the city; because the world only exists [by the merit of] the speech of *tinoqot shel beit rabban*.

Q1: Once we are establishing schools in every city, obviously they will exist in every region and state - why mention it?

JB ([Jay Bailey](#)): This probably refers to the responsibility of the various officials/rabbis/laymen...The king must make sure his country has an educational system, as must a governor and a mayor (and the other comm. leaders. The king will not handle it all, nor must he assume that others will. It's a shared responsibility .

YE ([Yitz Etshalom](#)): Interesting to note the terms used in the original *sugya* (section from the gemara) - in Bava Bathra 21a. It is worth citing:

"R. Yehuda said in the name of Rav: That man is remembered for good, his name is Yehoshua ben Gamla, for without him, the Torah would have been forgotten among Yisrael; for originally, someone who had a father, he would teach him Torah and someone who didn't have a father would not learn Torah...they ordained to establish teachers in Yerushalayim...then they ordained to establish teachers in every region (*plach*) and to bring them [to study] at the age of 16 or 17, such that if his teacher became angry with him, he would rebel and leave the class, until Yehoshua ben Gamla came along and ordained that they establish teachers in every city and every state (*medina*) and to bring them in at age 6 or 7..."

It seems that R is learning that Yeshoshua ben Gamla's ordinance was not a replacement/usurpation of the previous ordinance (to have teachers in every region) - rather, it was an extension of it. Therefore, he learns that Yehoshua ben Gamla ADDED each city and state to the original regional schools.

Q2: What is the nature and scope of this *Herem* (excommunication)?

YE: We would assume that it is normal Herem - not doing business with them, avoiding their company etc. As Jay points out below, it seems that the sequence is: first we excommunicate the

residents - i.e. those who have the personal responsibility of maintaining educational institutions. Then, if that doesn't work, the whole town falls under this Herem. It is significant to point out that Rashi (Shabbat 119b) seems to learn this "herem" differently; such that it means that the town is laid waste - not as a Beit-Din procedure, rather as a Heavenly punishment.

Q3: We will assume that R does not literally mean that we declare a holy war against this town - what then does he mean "we destroy it"? -Q4: Following Q3, how is this destruction - whatever it means- justified by the last clause?

JB: My text has a footnote indicating that only the Oxford text uses the term destroy, all others repeat "excommunicate." The seems like it may have been a typo - we destroy a city that, in its entirety, practices idol worship. There are all kinds of rules about it. It's not like R to throw out a statement like this. That said, his reasoning quote works fine. We don't deal with them because they are negligent in an area we hold so fundamental.

EF ([Ezra Frazer](#)): The justification for applying the *herem* to the city is clear. Any city which doesn't have an educational system is not going to last very long. If the children of the city lack knowledge of the Torah and its values, they are not going to form a proper society. The society created by uneducated boors without Torah values is not worth associating with. Rather than waiting until the society gets to this point where it must be cut off, we threaten the city with destruction before it becomes amoral. Hopefully, this threat of *herem* will be an effective deterrent. If not, the threat must be followed through on, so as to prevent an evil society from spreading its influence. We also have this idea elsewhere in Judaism (like the commandments to completely destroy Amalek and the 7 Canaanite nations) that unusually harsh measures must be taken when a whole society is founded on evil.

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