

# TALMUD TORAH 2:5

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

**5.** 25 children study with one teacher. If there were more than 25 but no more than 40, we place another [adult] with him to help him in their studies. If there were more than 40, we give them two teachers.

**Q1:** What is the reasoning behind the 25/40 breakdown?

**YE** ([Yitz Etshalom](#)): We have to first examine the value of the classroom experience, as opposed to the tutorial (or home schooling) on one hand, and the lecture hall on the other. I believe that part of R. Yehoshua ben Gamla's goal (see archives at 2:1) in establishing the educational system described by R was to create not just a place for transmitting information, but also an environment which was conducive to educational, social and spiritual growth. I am sure that much of this is eisegetical and anachronistic (my reading 1995 educational goals into much older material), but it seems that having a group of children, roughly the same age and sex studying with a teacher in one room created a rhythm of learning, an environment of learning that transcended the information. I recall the Batei Midrash at Kerem B'Yavne, YU and Har Etzion and easily remember the aura of Torah which was more than the page of Gemara or the Halakha in the Rambam being discussed at a particular table.

When we have less than 10 students, it often lacks a certain dynamic - I know that if a few of my students are absent on a given night, the spark of excitement is dimmer in the room. I have always found that 18-25 students is the optimum number for creating that "juice". Conversely, too many students (as any major metropolitan area public school teacher can attest) makes the learning unruly - where you either resort to quiet individual work or to a lecture. I realize that there are wonderful creative teachers who know how to energize a group of 50 - and techniques such as cooperative learning etc. - yet that is not the norm and is beyond the ability of most teachers to consistently pull off with success.

By the way, there is a \*Mahloket Rishonim\* (dispute among the early commentaries) about the number breakdown. Whereas R maintains that until 25, there is one teacher (meaning, even if there are less than 25, the city council is forced to hire a teacher); if there are more than 25, we hire the "T.A." -and if there are more than 40, we hire a second teacher. Rosh (R. Asher) has a different understanding (Bava Bathra 2:7). He maintains that unless there are 25 children, the town cannot be forced to hire a teacher - from 25-40 there is one teacher; from 41-49 we add the "T.A" and from 50 and up we already have two teachers (separate rooms?).

**Q2:** What does the second adult do (in case there are more than 25, but less than 41 students)?

**YE:** According to Rashi (Bava Bathra 21a s.v. Reish Dukhna), he listens to the lesson, along with the children, and then reviews it with them. Other commentaries, including Ri Migash, Ramah and Rabbenu Gershom, (all on the \*sugya\* (section of Talmud) in Bava Bathra) seem to indicate that he is there to assist in the teaching (Ramah adds that he is not an expert, but if he doesn't know how to answer/teach something, the master teacher is right there to help).

**Q3:** JF (Jeff Fox): If one teacher is needed for 25 students, then why do you need two for 41? You should only need 2 teachers once the total number of students would be double the amount needed for one teacher - 50.

**JF:** Perhaps R was worried about a teacher becoming a cult figure. When a person becomes the sole educator for many, many students there is a great danger that the students may see in their teacher more than there really is, as students will often do. Adding the teacher's assistant at 40 may be related along the same lines.

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