

TALMUD TORAH 4:1

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

1: One should only teach Torah to a proper student - one whose deeds are pleasant, or to a person whose behavior is unknown. If someone had bad customs, one should first bring him back to the good ways, makes sure that he sticks to these ways, and then take him to the *Beit haMidrash* (Study Hall) and teach him Torah. The Sages said that anyone who teaches a dishonest person is like someone who throws a stone at Mercury, (which is the way that that idol was worshipped), for it is written, "As one who binds a stone in a sling, so is one who gives honor to a fool". (Mishlei [Proverbs] 26:8) Honor refers to Torah, as it is written, "The wise shall inherit honor". (Mishlei 3:35). Similarly, one should not learn from a teacher who does not have good ways, even though he may be very learned and everybody needs him (= his knowledge), until he returns to the proper path, for it is written, "For the Kohen's lips should keep knowledge, and they will seek Torah from him, for he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts". (Malakhi 2:7) The Sages said: If the teacher resembles a messenger of God, seek Torah from his mouth, and if not, do not seek Torah from his mouth.

Q1: Why shouldn't we teach Torah to everyone? Shouldn't we trust that the greatness of the Torah's instructions and wisdom will bring these "unpleasant" people back to the right path?

HH (H.H.): There is the risk that the "unpleasant" people become learned but do not go back to the right path. In this case there would be desecration of the Name.

YE (Yitz Etshalom): I believe that there are two levels of inclusion in the process of Torah - what we commonly refer to as "outreach" and "membership". Certainly, we should reach out to every Jew, no matter how far from Torah, and encourage him or her to come closer to a life of Torah and Mitzvot. However, in order to be included in the membership of the Beit Midrash, we want to insure that the person is not a negative influence, nor will he bring a bad name to our Beit Midrash and its members.

Q2: The metaphor (teaching a lout = worshipping Mercury) is odd. Why idol-worship at all, and why this particular form of idol-worship?

Q3: The Talmud (Hagiga 15b) discusses the problem of studying with a teacher whose behavior is not praiseworthy - yet, in the end, justifies such study, at least in the case of R. Meir's studying from Acher. Why doesn't R accept this justification?

YF (Yitzchok Fishman): On the subject of not learning from a teacher with bad Midos I heard something in the name of Rabbi Aharon Kotler zt'l. In the Sephira period we are in right now 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students died because they showed disrespect to each other. Their disrespect was

on their level and even Rabbi Akiva - who preached your your friend like you love yourself - did not notice it, beacuse if he had he would have surely told them to ment their ways so that they shouldn't die. Rabbi Aharon Kotler said that these 24,00 students were going to be the ones to teach Torah to the next generation, but we see that it is better that if the torah is going to be taught by someone with even the slightest flaw it is better that it should not be taught.

YE: Refer to the Yahrzeit shiur at the end of this posting.

Q4: How much does the teacher need to resemble a messenger of God? Can he be human? May the teacher play basketball with his students? May the teacher share his experiences at a concert the night before? May he even go to a concert? In short - what does it mean to resemble a messenger of God - and how far do we take that idea?

HH: IMHO, resembling a messenger of God refers to righteousness, not to asceticism.

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