

TALMUD TORAH 4:3

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

[Moderators note: In every classic edition of MT, the glosses of RABD, R. Abraham ben David of Posquieres, are included. RABD was a contemporary of R, who lived in Provence. As R was working on the folios of MT, he would send them out, piece by piece, to the scholarly community in Provence for their perusal. RABD, who often contested his colleagues in acerbic terms, wrote glosses on the MT which became so central to any MT study that they were always included. For a fuller treatment of RABD, the haverim are referred to Twersky's Rabad of Posquieres, JPS, 1980. We will include RABD's glosses in our study. They will be preceded with "RABD" and be included in brackets.]

3: If [the teacher wants to] teach personally, he may do so. If he [wants to] teach through a *meturgeman* (spokesman), the *meturgeman* should stand between him and his students. The teacher speaks to the *meturgeman* and he announces the teaching to all the students. When they ask the *meturgeman*, he asks the teacher, the teacher responds to the *meturgeman*, who then responds to the inquirer. The teacher should not raise his voice above that of the *meturgeman*, and the *meturgeman*, when he is asking a question of the teacher, should not raise his voice above the voice of the teacher. The *meturgeman* is not allowed to detract from, to add to or to alter [the words of the teacher] unless the *meturgeman* was the father or teacher of the teacher. [RABD: This is an unheard-of event (that someone's father or teacher would serve as his spokesman) - the only case was that of Rav (BT Yoma 20b) who stood as *meturgeman* for R. Shila and changed and added (to his words) because he (Rav) was greater than him (Rav Shila).]

When the teacher tells the *meturgeman* "Thus said my teacher..." or "thus said my father, my master...", the *meturgeman*, when transmitting these words to the people, should quote the statement in the name of the [original] sage, and mentions the name of the teachers's father or teacher, and says: "Thus said the sage, (his name)" - even though the teacher did not mention the name of the sage, since he is not allowed to refer to his own teacher or father by name.

Q1: What was the function of the *meturgeman*?

JB([Jay Bailey](#)): There were two types of Merturgemens (translators/interpreters). The first is the kind who stood by the Torah reader in the synagogue and translated into Aramaic as the reader read, verse by verse. It is mentioned dozens of times in the Talmud; once the Jews were exiled to Babylon, their vernacular was Aramaic - only the scholars and elders spoke or understood Hebrew. Thus to make Torah reading understandable, it was translated. In the same way, the Meturgeman would also sit by the Rabbi in the synagogue or the study hall. When the Rabbi would share words

of Torah with the congregation or with his students, he would speak quietly in Hebrew and the trans. would repeat his words in Aramaic.

YE(Yitz Etshalom): It seems, from this selection in R, that the Meturgeman was not only a "translator" but also a "loudspeaker" for the teacher. This could either be the case if the teacher was too frail (or the study hall too big) for his voice to reach - or if it seemed more "respectful" to have such a procedure. R's wording seems to favor the second reason: If he [wants to] teach through a *meturgeman* etc.

Q2: Why all of the details about not raising the voice higher etc.?

JB: This seems to be an innovation by R. The Talmud (Brachot 45a) only discusses this in one specific situation: In Torah reading. The source is that when Moshe spoke to God, God answered him "B'kol", in a voice. The word seems superfluous, so the Talmud concludes that God answered him using Moshe's own voice, not to overwhelm him. So too, the Rabbi should not yell when talking to the Meturgeman. That aside, the Ma'aseh Rokeach mentions that it is an issue of respect; the Meturgeman should, of course, yell out so that the students hear him, but when the two men talk between themselves, it is more respectful to talk quietly.

YE: You raise a good point, Jay - and perhaps R is extending the Rebbe/Meturgeman relationship from Keriat haTorah (public Torah reading) to teaching Torah. There are several points in R's dealing with Keriat haTorah where he seems to make that connection. (see, for instance, Hilkhos Tefilla 13:6- Rabbi Soloveitchik gave a beautiful explanation to this Rambam, which I will share when we get to it, IY"H)

Q3: What is the reason for RABD's challenge (where he seems to indicate that even if the *meturgeman* is not the father or teacher of the teacher, if he is a greater scholar, he may alter his words)?

JB: RABD challenges for good reason. If the notion of having an interpreter is a Talmudic one, then examples should come from the Talmud. And guess what? there are NO examples in the Talmud of a greater Rabbi or father serving as a translator. And the one that RABD mentions, with Rav and Shila, mentions SPECIFICALLY that Rav was just passing through, and it happened to be that Shilah had no translator. At the end of the story, they actually disagree about a word, Shilah excuses Rav when he realizes who he is (and that he felt uncomfortable being translated by such a great scholar) and Rav stays anyway, etc. etc. The point is, that there's only one mention and it obviously is not something practiced traditionally..

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