

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING, THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING...A RAV

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

In the Talmud (Sanhedrin 101a) we find that "when Rabi Eliezer fell sick, four elders went to visit him: R' Tarfon, R' Yehoshua, R' Elazar ben Azariah, and R' Akiva. Rabi Tarfon observed, 'You are more valuable to Israel than rain; for rain is [precious] in this world, whereas you are [so] for this world and the next. Rabi Yehoshua observed, 'You are more valuable to Israel than the sun: the sun is but for this world, while my master is for this world and the next.'"

Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz explains (Behar 5731) that the sages were describing the relationship that existed between teacher and student, "rav" and "talmid." Why did Rabi Tarfon analogize the relationship to rain? A seed, he explains, cannot grow on its own. It needs nurturing to grow. Specifically, water is required in order for growth to occur. Each individual has within him the seed, the kernel, from which great accomplishments can spring forth. It is the influence of a Rav that unleashes the power of growth in an individual. Just as a seed absorbs rain, and in essence absorbs the ability to grow from the rain, so too does a student react to the teachings of his Rav. The Rav imparts the power of growth into his students.

Rabi Yehoshua, however, analogized the relationship to the radiance of the sun. As we know, the sun's rays enable plants to grow. In this respect, the sun is like the rain. However, the sun also provides light. It enables man to see what is before him so that he does not get injured. A Rav, through his teachings, enables his students to more clearly view what is correct in life. He enlightens his students so that they can properly assess doubts and then make proper choices. A Rav, therefore, not only provides the ability to grow; he also provides the ability to thrive.

The importance of a Rav, and the effect a Rav has, is immeasurable.

At the close of Megillas Esther, we find that "Mordechai was accepted by the majority of his brothers." The Talmud (Megilla 16b) explains that he was accepted "by the majority of his brothers, but not of all his brothers; this informs us that some members of the Sanhedrin separated from him." Why did members of the Sanhedrin separate themselves from Mordechai? Rashi explains that because Mordechai accepted upon himself a leadership position, given to him from Achashverosh, he therefore "wasted Torah study time," and this was not viewed positively by members of the Sanhedrin. It is hard to imagine that Mordechai, as one of the Torah leaders of his generation, would waste Torah study time. But clearly part of the Sanhedrin was not pleased with his actions. Why?

The Talmud (Megilla 11a) tells us that at the time of the story of Esther, the nation indulged in slothfulness by not busying themselves with the Torah. Mordechai knew that this was a problem, and he took action to fix it. The Talmud (Megilla 16a) tells us that upon Achashverosh's command to Haman that he parade Mordechai around Shushan in royal finery, Haman took the requisite apparel and the royal horse. He went and found Mordechai with the Rabbis sitting before him while he showed them the rules of the "Kemitza," the proper measure for a flour offering. Rashi explains that Mordechai was teaching the matters relevant to that particular day: it was the 16th day of Nissan, the day the Omer offering (which involved flour) was brought. Rav Shlomo Brevda comments that we see from this episode how entrenched Mordechai was in his learning. The evil decree had been handed down: the Jews were to be annihilated. One might expect that the reaction from the Sages of the generation would be to increase fasting and prayer. While that did occur, Mordechai knew that Torah learning could not suffer. He made sure that people realized that it was because of Torah learning (or the lack thereof) that they were in a perilous situation. He strengthened the resolve and dedication of the people to study Torah. He did not get distracted from this missive. He was so devoted, that even while facing danger, he continued to teach the laws relevant to that given day.

So what could Mordechai have done that would have disturbed members of the Sanhedrin? The Mishna in Avos (1:6) states that R' Yehoshua ben. Perachya used to say: Appoint for yourself a teacher. The Rambam explains that each individual has to accept upon himself a Rav - even if that person may not necessarily be up to the job because of his knowledge or experience. A person, through give and take, sharing ideas, and interacting with his chosen Rav will come to see that the Rav is in essence teaching him and enabling him to learn more and more. If the Rav is of superior knowledge and experience, obviously the lessons learned are intensified and the benefit incalculable. One cannot live without a Rav.

The Megilla (9:27) tells us "Kimu V'Kiblu" - after being saved from Haman, the Jews fulfilled and accepted upon themselves the Torah anew. Mordechai, as mentioned, was the individual who had spearheaded this renaissance. Mordechai encouraged the people to learn, to grow, and to thrive. He was the individual whom the people accepted upon themselves as their Rav. He was the individual who had accomplished so much as a Rav. And then he was presented with a leadership opportunity by working for Achashverosh. This position would enable him to secure peace and prosperity for the Jews. They would be safe and protected. Mordechai decided to take this position, which had the impact of lessening his ability to act as a Rav. Most of the Sanhedrin agreed with this decision. But there were those that did not. They felt that the people needed Mordechai as their Rav - he had brought them so far, and now was the opportune time to maximize their potential! There would be no better service to the nation than to ensure their continued development in Torah by remaining their Rav! But Mordechai, by not choosing that path, was viewed by some in the Sanhedrin as being one who "wasted Torah study time," even if that time has not his own.

Clearly, the importance of a Rav, and the effect a Rav has, is immeasurable.

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