

# THE TORAH IS NOT JUST FOR RABBIS

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*"[Moses said,] 'I cannot carry the entire burden of this nation alone, for it is too great for me'... G-d said to Moses, 'gather for me 70 men from the elders of Israel...' [Numbers 11:14,16]*

"And Moses left and spoke the words of G-d to the people, and he gathered 70 men from the elders of the nation, and he stood them around the Tent. HaShem descended in a cloud, and He spoke to him, and He took from the Spirit which was upon him, and He gave it to the 70 elders, and it was that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again.

"And two men remained in the camp, the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the second was Meidad, and the Spirit rested upon them; they were among those written down, but they did not go to the Tent, and they prophesied within the camp.

"And the boy went and told it to Moshe, and he said, 'Eldad and Meidad are prophesying within the camp.' And Yehoshuah Bin-Nun, the servant of Moshe from his early days, responded and said, 'my master Moshe, stop them!'

"Moshe said to him, 'are you being jealous on my behalf? Let the entire nation of HaShem be prophets, when HaShem will place his Spirit upon them!'" [Numbers 11:24-29]

This fascinating passage provides a wealth of insights into the Torah's attitude towards scholarship, humility, and closeness to G-d.

Moshe complained that he could not lead the nation alone, and G-d responded by asking Moshe to select 70 elders. Moshe did so, and they came forward -- and G-d briefly gave them prophecy, a stamp of Divine recognition of their elevated stature.

Two scholars, however, were "among those written down" -- but nonetheless they did not go forward. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 17a) says that Eldad and Meidad considered themselves unfit for this honor. I once heard, although I did not find a source now, that 72 names were written down -- six from each of the 12 tribes. These two decided to take their names off the list, preventing any sort of argument between the tribes over the 70 who would be selected.]

How did G-d respond? The Talmud tells us. "The Holy One, Blessed be He, said 'Since you have reduced ourselves, behold, I am adding further heights upon your existing greatness.' And what greatness did He add? That all the (other) prophets prophesied and then stopped, while they prophesied and did not stop. How do we know this? Because [concerning the others] the verse says

here 'they prophesied, but they did not do so again,' while elsewhere [verse 27, concerning Eldad and Meidad] it says 'they are prophesying' -- they are still continuing to prophesy."

Those who worked under Moshe were concerned for his honor -- "the boy," whom Rashi says some identify as Gershom, son of Moshe, ran to tell him, and Yehoshua wanted Moshe to stop them. The students were concerned for the honor of their teacher, as students should be. We should recognize and honor scholars, and seek to follow them.

But Moshe, who was "more humble than any man," was not concerned. He would have been delighted if every Jew had the same gifts as he. And Eldad and Meidad behaved the same way -- they withdrew from honor, and instead prophesied among the nation. Not only were they great scholars, but they remained truly approachable. They were 'within the camp,' sharing their knowledge. Eldad and Meidad considered themselves 'regular Jews' despite their scholarship, and for this they were richly rewarded.

The Talmud [Brachos 28a] says that when Rebbe Elazar ben Azaryah became Head of the Yeshiva, replacing Rabban Gamliel, "On that day, they took away the guard from the door, and permitted all of the students to enter. For Rabban Gamliel had declared, 'any student who is not the same on the inside as he is on the outside, he should not come in to the House of Study.' On that day, they added many benches -- Rebbe Yochanon said, this is an argument between Aba Yosef ben Dustai and the Rabbis, one said [that they added] 400 benches, and one said 700 benches..." The Talmud goes on to say that a tremendous amount of Torah was learned and shared on that very day.

Rabban Gamliel had said that only a certain elite, who were truly worthy, should have access to the best resources for learning. Rebbe Elazar ben Azaryah threw open the gates and welcomed all who wanted to enter -- and the Talmud declares that Rebbe Elazar was right.

Torah scholarship is to be shared. Torah cannot be reserved for a certain select group; rather, all who know Torah are encouraged to share it with others, to teach without limit. Seeing others reach their own heights in Torah should inspire admiration and love.

Every Jew should have the opportunity to study. It's not just for the Rabbis -- on the contrary, everyone should have the opportunity to know as much as the Rabbi! This is how Torah study has continued for thousands of years. So please -- find a Rabbi, join a class, and study, and surprise yourself with how much you can learn!