

# The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Week of 7-13 Sivan 5758 / 1-7 June 1998

Eirubin 28-34

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Since this week's issue is in such proximity to the Shavuot Festival of the Giving of the Torah we have chosen two selections from the seven pages of Talmud which highlight the importance of the scholars who study Torah.

## Respect for Torah Scholars

When Rabbi Zeira felt too exhausted to continue his regular Torah study he was in the habit of seating himself at the entrance to the yeshiva of Rabbi Yehuda bar Ami. He did this so that he would be required to stand up in honor of the Torah scholars who entered and exited, and thus receive a reward for this activity.

Rabbi Zeira was certainly deserving of a heavenly reward for fulfilling the mitzvah of "You shall show respect for an elder (Torah sage) (*Vayikra 19:32*).” But how do we reconcile his motivation of seeking reward with the counsel of the Sage Antigonos of Socho (*Pirkei Avos 1:3*) who urges us not to be like servants motivated by a desire for reward?

The answer lies in a closer look at the conclusion of the aforementioned passage and at the beginning of another passage much later on in the Torah. Right after the command to show respect for a Torah scholar we are told "and you shall fear your G-d." This connection between respect for the Torah scholar and fear of G-d is reiterated in the verse (*Devarim 10:20*) "You shall fear Hashem, your G-d." This command is preceded by the seemingly superfluous word "es." Wherever such a word appeared in the Torah passage it was interpreted by the Sage Shimon the Amsonite to include something not explicitly stated in that passage. But when he came to this particular "es" he abandoned this approach even though it cast a doubt on the validity of all his other interpretations of this word. It was Rabbi Akiva, who did offer an interpretation here as well "to include Torah scholars." (*Mesechta Pesachim 22b*)

Shimon the Amsonite hesitated to interpret the "es" in this passage because it was inconceivable that the respect due to Hashem could be extended to anyone else, even a Torah scholar (especially since *that* respect also stemmed from a fear of retribution of which Hashem is the only source). Rabbi Akiva, however, may have viewed the respect due to a Torah scholar not as an equivalent of that due Hashem but rather as a step towards achieving a full sense of awe for Him.

This concept of showing respect for the person who studies Hashem's Torah as a building block towards full respect for Hashem may be why the Torah follows the command to respect a Torah scholar with the need to fear Hashem, since one inevitably leads to the other.

This approach gives us another perspective of Rabbi Zeira's declaration that he was going to stand up for the Torah scholars in order to gain a reward. The reward he had in mind was not compensation, but rather the result which the Torah says will come from showing respect to sages — the reward of achieving a full fear of Hashem.

Eruvin 28b

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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# The Indispensable Sage

After eating a particularly toxic vegetable, Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa became mortally ill. His colleagues prayed for his recovery because he was indispensable to them at that hour, and he did indeed recover.

Maharsha calls attention to the fact that there are many instances in the Talmud of sages praying for one another without any mention of their doing so because of the indispensability of the sick man. His explanation is that the *gemara* wishes to point out why Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa, who is so frequently mentioned in the Talmud as the great *tzadik* who successfully prayed for others, could not be relied upon to achieve his recovery with his own prayers, but rather needed to rely on the prayers of others. The prayers of the *tzadik* for himself, say our Sages (*Mesechta brachos 5b*), are not as effective as those of others in his behalf "because the prisoner is incapable of releasing himself from his confinement." As powerful as the prayers of Rabbi Chanina were, his colleagues, who so desperately needed him, were reluctant to rely on those prayers when they were offered in his own behalf, and they therefore made a collective effort of prayer to achieve his recovery.

*Iyun Yaakov* offers another approach. Even though Rabbi Chanina's colleagues might have been tempted to think that his questionable action — endangering his life by eating dangerous food — might preclude him from their consideration and prayers for his recovery, they nevertheless prayed for that recovery because he was indispensable to them as a teacher and guide.

It should be added to this explanation that Rabbi Chanina certainly was not guilty of premeditated suicidal action; rather, he ate the toxic vegetable not knowing of its poisonous nature. His colleagues, however, might have been critical of a sage of Rabbi Chanina's stature failing to exercise proper caution in his food intake. Nevertheless, they prayed intensely for his recovery because of his importance to the world.

*Eruvin 29b*

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