

תלמידי ר' עקיבא הרב שעפטל נויברגר

Because of *simchos* and otherwise, the *Yemay HaSefira* have basically been reduced to the days between the second and eighteenth of *Iyar*. People make *chassunos* until *Beis Iyar*, on Lag BaOmer, and after *Yud-Ches Iyar* up until Shavuos. Part of what's happened because of this, I believe, is that we don't fully appreciate and realize the importance of the *yemay aveilus* of *Yemay HaSefira*. That is what I would like to share.

The famous *gemara* about R. Akiva losing his *talmidim* and starting anew is found in : מס' יבמות סב, and it needs a *be'ur*. The *gemara* brings a *posuk* from *Koheles* which states that one must plant seeds when still young but should continue even when older because you don't know which ones will grow well or at all. R. Akiva says that one must learn when young and still when old, to which the *gemara* says that for this reason, R. Akiva had students when he was young and also when he was old.

The *gemara* continues to recount how R. Akiva had 12,000 pairs of *talmidim* spanning the whole length of Eretz Yisroel. They all died in one period of time (between Pesach and Shavuos) because, "שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה". The world was left in a state of destruction until R. Akiva went to *Raboseinu shehbiDarom* and taught them Torah. They were R. Meir, R. Yehuda, R. Yose, R. Shimon, and R. Elazar ben Shamua, and they lifted the Torah up at that time. The *gemara* then closes by stating that the *tekufah* which his original *talmidim* died was between Pesach and Shavuos.

There are a number of questions which need to be understood:

Number one, what does "שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה" mean? We are talking about *Tannaim*, *talmidim* of R. Akiva. They were great people. So, what exactly did they do to create a situation in which they all needed to be killed?

Number two, why did it happen then? Why between Pesach and Shavuos?

Number three, what does it mean "ויהיה העולם שמים", that the world was in destruction after the *talmidim* died until R. Akiva came to the *Raboseinu shehbiDarom*?

I think we need to understand this *gemara* in a very interesting *oyfen*. First of all, the *Raboseinu shehbiDarom* and their *talmidim* are solely responsible for the totality of the *Torah Shebi'al Peh* that we have. The *gemara* in סנהדרין says, "סתם משנה ר' מאיר, סתם תוספתא ר' נחמיה, סתם ספרי ר' שמעון, סתם ספרא ר' יהודה", "סתם מכילתא דר' ישמעאל וכולם אליבא דר' עקיבא". This comprises the entire body of *Torah Shebi'al Peh* in its Mishnah state. (*Gemara* is of course an expansion of it.)

This is the *peshat* in "ויהיה העולם שמים". Once *talmidei R. Akiva* died, there was a terrible break in the *mesorah*. And a world without the *mesorah* of *Torah Shebi'al Peh* is an עולם שמים. That is what makes this such a devastating tragedy for Klal Yisroel.

What is the meaning of, "שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה"? I believe it has to be understood in the following way:

The first thing to realize is that it was certainly in the *bechina* of "הקב"ה מדקדק בצדיקיו כחוט השערה", and surely it was a subtlety which they erred in. Yet, it was a significant subtlety which makes a difference. I think we can understand the importance of that subtlety based on the following statement from the *gemara*: "I learned much from my *Rebbeim*, and more from my friends, and I learned to the most from my *talmidim*."

Those of us who are *zoche* to teach *talmidim* realize that "ומתלמידי יותר מכולם" is a *gevaldigge zach*. When you give over Torah to your *talmidim*, when you pay attention to their body language and to how they react to what you are saying, you know that sometimes you have to make adjustments. Often, those adjustments that you make in order to help them understand better give you better insight into the whole situation. You

know the Torah that you prepared beautifully beforehand, but you know it even better after you've given it over.

The Maharsha writes that there are places around *Shas* where his *peirush* is absent. Those *gemaros* were the ones he learned while his *talmidim* were away. He continued learning even when they took leave, but did not write down the Torah which he did not say over to his *talmidim*. He understood that the clarity of that Torah needed the presentation to *talmidim*.

"ויותר מחבירי" is also an important issue which needs *hesber*. This is the issue of a *chavrusa shaft* which requires a mutual respect between the *chavrusos* in order to be successful. Some of you may even have *chavrusos* today which you had when you were in yeshiva. Why do those *chavrusos* work so well? Because the level of mutual respect, of understanding that "I have what to gain from my *chavrusa*" and the appreciation of growing from the *chavrusa* adds a dimension to one's learning which cannot be had from learning from a *rebbe*.

I believe that the "שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה" was in this respect. *Talmidei R. Akiva* did not have the proper recognition for each other and because of that were not able to benefit from the "ויותר מחבירי" which comes and adds to one's learning with a *chavrusa*.

Now let us understand why we have an *aveilus* for this terrible loss. R. Akiva's second group of *talmidim* were a very prescribed group, only five in number. We know what a world looks like that has the *mesorah* of five *talmidei R. Akiva*. Even if we were to assume that not all 12,000 pairs of *chavrusos* of R. Akiva's first group of *talmidim* were not on the level of these five, it is not inconceivable that five hundred of them were, or even one to five thousand were on that level. There certainly was a significant portion of the first group that were on the same, or even higher level, than that of the second group of *talmidim*.

Imagine if we had a world whose *mesorah* was from five hundred *talmidei R. Akiva*! That would have elevated all the *doros* until this very day and we would all be on a different level. We have to understand that because of *misas talmidei R. Akiva*, we live in a lesser world. That is what this *aveilus* is about. We have to come to grips with the fact that their loss was the loss of every single ensuing generation, including us.

Now the question becomes why this all happened between Pesach and Shavuos?

Derech Hashem states the following: Just like in the year of *Yetziyas Mitzrayim*, Hakadosh Boruch Hu was *mashpia* to the world an incredible *shefa* which allowed Klal Yisroel to climb from *מ"ט שערי טומאה* through *מ"ט שערי קדושה* in a short period of time, that same *shefa* continues annually. This means that the *tekufah* between Pesach and Shavuos contains so much more *siyata dishmaya* for *aliya* in Torah. Because of this, not only are the opportunities to take advantage of this *shefa* greater, but the *pekida* from Hakadosh Boruch Hu if we do not utilize it is also greater.

[Maybe this is the reason why, *Rachmana litzlan*, many of the communities destroyed during the Crusades which we talk about in our *Kinnos* took place during this time. *Magensa*, *Vermaisa*, and *Ashpira*, which were *mekomos* of *Rishonim*, suffered greatly around Rosh Chodesh Sivan. In the *kina* of "תורה תורה שק" there is reference to the time when some say the *peirush Rashi* on *mesechtos Nedarim* and *Nazir* were lost.]

Therefore, even if this was a problem in the relationship between the twelve thousand *chavrusa shafts* of R. Akiva's *talmidim*, the time of greatest vulnerability was in this *tekufah* between Pesach and Shavuos which is the time of greatest potential benefit from the "ויותר מתלמידי", due to the extra *shefa* which comes down. That is why this loss happened during this *tekufah*, and it is still *aveilus* for us because we live in a diminished world from it.

This is the time of year where each and every one of us can be *mesaken* the situation by being *mechazek* our relationships with our *chavrusos* and understanding that this is the time of year where *aliya* and *havonas haTorah* can be increased to greater levels because of the *shefa min Shomayim* which increases during this time. It is up to us to take advantage of it and to *shteig* from it, and to use that as a *tikkun* of developing mutual respect of our *chavrusos* and gain the "ויותר מתלמידי" in our own learning.