

Toldot Shimshon

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Chapter IV – Mishnah 15

רבי אלעזר בן שמוע אומר, יהי כבוד תלמידך חביב עליך כשלה, וכבוד חבירך פמוךא רבך, ומורא רבך פמוךא שמים.

Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua said: let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own, and the honor of your colleague as the reverence for your teacher, and the reverence for your teacher as the reverence of Heaven.

המפרשים ז"ל רדפו אחרי הכבוד של התנא, לעלות ולהגיע אל תכלית פונתו.

The commentators of blessed memory “pursued after the honor”¹ of the Tanna, to ascend and reach the purpose of his intent.²

ולפי דרכנו, התנא אזיל לשיטתיה, והדבר ברור, שהרב שזכה לנשיאות ולגדלה, קשה לו לירד ממנה, כדאמר ר' יהושע בן פרחיה בפרק י"ג דמנחות דף ק"ט, בתחלה פל האומר לי עלה לה, אני פופתו ונותנו לפני ארי. עתה, פל האומר לי רד ממנה, אני מטיל עליו קומקום של חמין. ופרשנוה למעלה בפרק א' משנה ו'. וכמה מעשים פדומה לזה בגמרא. והכי נמי אמרינו בירושלמי דכלאים, רבי הנה ענותו סגיא, והנה אמר, פל דיימא לי בר נש, אנא עביד, חוץ ממה שעשו זקני בתיא לזקני, דשרון גרמון מנשיאותו ומנוגיה וכו'.

By the way, the Tanna followed his own opinion. This is clear: that for the rabbi who has merited leadership and greatness, it is difficult for him to step down from it. Thus Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya said in Menachot, chapter 13, page 109b:

Initially, [if] anyone who would say [to me]: Ascend to [the position of *Nasi*], I would tie him up and place him in front of a lion [out of anger for his suggestion]. Now [that I have become the *Nasi*, in response to] anyone who tells me to leave [the position], I [would] throw a pot of boiling [water] on him.

- Menachot 109b

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¹ The term appears, e.g., Bahya ben Asher, 1255-1340, *Commentary on Torah*, Introduction; Isaiah HaLevi Horowitz (c.1555-1630), *Shnei Luchot HaBrit*, Torah She'bi'ctav, Sh'lach, Torah Ohr 45.

² For example, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac Levi (1532–1600), *Lev Avot* (Thessaloniki 1565); Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac de Uçeda (1500s), *Midrash Shmuel* (Venice 1579).

³ The *Nasi* was a Jewish leader who represented the community to the non-Jewish rulers.

This is explained above, in Chapter I, Mishnah 6. There are similar events like this in the Gemara. Thus it also says in the Yerushalmi, in tractate Kilayim, chapter 9, halacha 3: Rabbi Yehuda haNasi was very meek and said, all a man might ask from me I am ready to do, except what the elders of Bathyra did for my ancestor: they divested themselves of their presidency and appointed him.

ובסוף פרק הערל דף פ"ד, אמר רבי, כְּשֶׁהֲלַכְתִּי לְלַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה אֶצֶל רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ, חִבְרוּ עָלַי תַּלְמִידָיו כְּתַרְנָגוּלִים שֶׁל בֵּית בּוּקְיָא, וְלֹא הִנְיַחוּנִי לְלַמּוֹד אֶלָּא דָּבָר אֶחָד. וּפְרַשׁ רַשִׁ"י, "שֶׁל בֵּית בּוּקְיָא", בְּקִיָּאִים וְחָרִיפִים, וְאִין מְנַיְחִין תַּרְנָגוּל נְכָרִי בֵּינֵיהֶם, עכ"ל. וְקָשָׁה, לְמַעַן לֹא הוֹכִיחֵם ר' אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ שֶׁנִּיחוּ מְקוֹם אֶף לְרַבִּי לְלַמּוֹד עִמּוֹ. אֶלָּא שֶׁכָּשֶׁם שֶׁהָרַב קָשָׁה לוֹ לִירֵד מִמְּקוֹמוֹ, כִּי אֵלּוּ הַתַּלְמִידִים הָיָה קָשָׁה לָהֶם שֶׁיֵּבֵא אֶתֶר וְיִסַּח מְקוֹמָם, וּמִשּׁוּם הַכִּי, לֹא גָעַר בָּהֶם ר' אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ, מִשּׁוּם יְהִי כְּבוֹד תַּלְמִידָךְ חֻבֵּיב עָלֶיךָ כְּשֶׁלְּךָ.

And at the end of the 8th chapter of tractate Yevamot, entitled “An uncircumcised man”:

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: When I went to learn Torah from Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua, his students joined together against me like the roosters of Beit Bukya [highly aggressive animals that do not allow other creatures to remain among them], and they only let me learn one matter.

- Yevamot 84a

Rashi explained: “ ‘of Beit Bukya’—[They were] well-educated and sharp, and they wouldn’t make room for a foreign rooster among them.”

A difficulty is why didn’t Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua reprove them, that they should give space for Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to learn with him? However, just as it was difficult for the rabbi to leave his place, so too it was difficult for these students to have another come and take their place. Because of this, Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua did not scold them, because the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own.

וּתַלְמִידָיו שֶׁל ר' אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ עֲצָמָם הָיוּ נוֹהֲגִים כְּבוֹד וּמוֹרָא זֶה לְזֶה כְּמוֹרָא הָרַב, דְּאִמְרִינוּ בְּפֶרֶק ה' דְּעֵרוּבִין, אָמַר רַבִּי, כְּשֶׁהָיִינוּ לוֹמְדִים תּוֹרָה אֶצֶל ר' אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שְׁמוּעַ, הָיִינוּ עוֹמְדִים שִׁשָּׁה שִׁשָּׁה בְּאַמָּה. וּפְרַשׁ רַשִׁ"י, שֶׁהָיוּ מְתַקְרְבִים לְשְׁמוּעַ מִפְּיֹ, וְדוֹחְקִים זֶה אֶת זֶה. עכ"ל. וְכָל אֶחָד מֵהֶם הָיָה סוֹבֵל דוֹחַק הַמְּקוֹם, וְלֹא הָיָה דוֹחָה חֻבֵּירוֹ לְאַחוֹר, לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה לָהֶם כְּבוֹד וּמוֹרָא זֶה מִזֶּה. וְנִהוּ "וּכְבוֹד חֻבֵּירָךְ כְּמוֹרָא רַבָּךְ".

The students of Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua themselves were accustomed to respect and revere each other as they revered their teacher, that it says in the 5th chapter of tractate Eruvin (53a), “Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] said, when we learned Torah with Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua,” we would stand six in each square cubit.”⁴ Rashi explains that they would approach closer to hear the teachings from his mouth, and they would push each other in an attempt to

⁴ Our current edition of Eruvin, as well as every manuscript shown at <https://bavli.genizah.org>, show “we would sit six in each cubit.”

get closer. Each of them suffered from the constricted place, but they would not push their fellows backwards, as they had respect and reverence for each other. This is the meaning of “and the honor of your colleague as the reverence for your teacher.”

ומהרש"א תמה איך היו יכולים לישב במקום צר כזה. ותיירז, דדרך גס הנה, כמו אותן המקומות שהתחזיק מועט את המרבה. עכ"ל. וזהו "ומורא רבך כמורא שמים", שגם כזה הנה נעשה בבית המקדש במקום השראת השכינה, שעומדים צפופים ומשפסוים רגליהם, ואף כאן נעשה בזכותו של הרב שעליו שורה השכינה, ומקומו הנה מקום מקדש.

The Maharsha wondered how they were able to sit in such a narrow space.⁵ His solution was that it was by way of a miracle, such as similar places “where the smaller contained the greater.”⁶ This is the meaning of let “the reverence for your teacher as the reverence of Heaven,” that a miracle like this occurred in the Temple where the Shechinah dwells, that “people stood pressed together, yet bowed down and had room enough.”⁷ Even here it occurred in the merit of the rabbi upon whom the Shechinah rested, and his place was a sacred place.

ואם תאמר, והא אלו המעשים של רבי קשו אהדדי. כבר הרגישו בזה התוספות בפרק ג' דמנחות דף י"ח, ותיירצו שמתחלה לא היו מניחים אותו ללמוד, ואחר כך אחר זמן נתברצו, ועיי"ש.

And if you say, weren't these actions of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi counter to each other? I.e., in Yevamot 84a, he is quoted as saying that he was only allowed to learn one thing from Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua, but then in Eruvin 53a, he testified about the tight conditions, as though he had spent a longer time there. The Tosafists already felt this in the third chapter of Menachot, page 18a, and they solved, that initially they didn't give him room to learn, but afterward, after a while they accepted him.

ואף למי שגורס לעיל בפרק ב' משנה י"ב בדברי רבי אליעזר, "יהי כבוד תלמידך חביב עליך כשלך", מפל מקום, אין העניינים דומים, דהתם מזהיר את הרב שלא יקפיד עם תלמידו, וכאן מזהיר אדרבא, לעשות לו כבוד ונחת רוח.

Even for those who hold above, in Chapter II, Mishna 12 in the words of Rabbi Eliezer, “Let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own,” in any case, these are not similar matters. There, [Rabbi Eliezer] warns the rabbi not to be strict with his student, and here, [Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua] warns, to the contrary, to show him respect and ease.

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⁵ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidel's ("the Maharsha") (1555–1631), *Chiddushei Agadot*.

⁶ Gen. Rabbah 5:7; Lev. Rabbah 10:9; Rashi on Lev. 8:3; Rashi on Num. 20:10; Rashi on Joshua 3:9.

⁷ Pirkei Avot 5:4; Yoma 21a; Gen. Rabbah 5:7; Lev. Rabbah 10:9.