

The Chashivus of Melamdei Tinokos

Introduction

Chazal tell us that we live in an *Olam Hasheker*. In a world of falsehood, the true beauty or value of things are not appreciated to the extent that they deserve to be. One of the places this is most recognizable is regarding Rebbeim and Moros, teachers of children. Teaching is one of the most important professions in this world. In some aspects, perhaps even **the** most important one. Nevertheless, teachers are usually not given the recognition they deserve. But if this is true of the general population, it isn't true of Chazal! Throughout Shas and Midrashim, we see again and again the high esteem in which *melamdei tinokos* are held. Let's take a look at some of the sources.

Koach HaTefillah

The Gemara in Taanis tells us the following story:

Rav came to a certain place. He decreed a fast, but rain did not come. A shaliach tzibbur descended to lead the service before him and recited, "He Who makes the wind blow," and the wind blew. He continued and said, "And Who makes the rain fall," and the rain came. Rav said to him, "What are your deeds?" He replied, "I am a teacher of children, and I teach to the children of the poor as to the children of the rich, and if there is anyone who cannot pay, I do not take anything from him. And I have a fishpond, and any child who neglects his studies, I bribe him with the fish and prepare it for him, and appease him until he comes and reads."

Many people may regard a Rebbe or Morah as just a regular person, but in the eyes of Heaven, he is so important that his prayers can bring rain even when others can't! And this power of Tefillah extends to giving a *bracha* as well! the sefer Umatzdikei Horabim Kekochavim (p. 7) writes:

I heard from HaGaon HaTzaddik Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l who once said...: what a shame for people who travel the entire world to obtain a bracha and look for all kinds of segulos, when they could just go to a teacher of children and ask for a bracha...

Protectors of The City

The Talmud Yerushalmi in the first chapter of Chagigah gives us yet another perspective on the importance and power of *melamdei tinokos*:

Rabbi Yudan Nesiah sent Rabbi Chiya, Rabbi Assi and Rabbi Ammi to traverse the towns of Eretz Yisrael to establish sofrim and mishnin (teachers who teach children Tanach and Mishna). They came to a city and found neither Tanach nor Mishna teacher. They said to them, "Bring us the guardians of the city". So they brought to them the guards of the city gates. They said to them, "Are these the guardians of the city? These are the destroyers of the city!" So the people said to them, "And who then are the guardians of the city?" They replied, "The sofrim and mishnin..."

Remarkable! Melamdei tinokos are the protectors of the city! Who knows how many more accidents, illnesses and other mishaps would, Heaven forbid, happen in any city, were it not for the protection of the dedicated teachers of that city!

Stature in Olam Haba

Having seen the spiritual power and importance of teachers in Olam Hazei, it is obvious that this must be a reflection of their stature in Olam Haba. We don't have to rely on inferences, however, as Chazal explicitly describe the stature of *melamdei tinokos* in the world to come. And when we read their words, we realize that it is loftier than we could have imagined. Let's take a look at the Midrash Rabbah (ויקרא רבה ל"ב):

"[Let me know] ...the fullness of joys in Your Presence" (Tehillim 16:11) - these are the seven groups of tzaddikim who will greet the face of the Shechinah in the future. And their faces resemble the sun, the moon, the firmament, the stars, lightning, lilies, and the pure menorah that was in the Temple... "Pleasant things are ever in Your right hand" (Tehillim 16:11). And who will inform us which group is the most beloved and pleasant among them? Two Amoraim; one said, "It is the one that comes with the power of Torah and the power of mitzvos." And the other said, "They are the sofrim (who teach Tanach) and mishnin (who teach Mishnah) who teach children truthfully and who will in the future stand to the right of the Holy One, blessed be He." This is [the understanding of] that which is written, "Pleasant things are ever in Your right hand."

The Midrash tells us that there are seven groups of tzaddikim who will merit greeting the Shechinah in the future. Not only are melamdei tinokos one of those groups, but according to one opinion, they are the most beloved by Hashem of all

seven! The Midrash ends off by saying that the *melamdei tinokos* will merit to stand to the right of Hashem!

The same Midrash appears in the Yalkut Shimoni (Nevi'im 670:4), but with a slightly different, yet no less inspiring, ending:

These are the sofrim, mishnin and melamdei tinokos, who are destined to sit in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He.

How fortunate are those who teach Torah to children, to merit such extraordinary closeness to Hashem!

Level of Torah in Olam Haba

The Gemara in ע"א פ"ה בבא מציעא tells us the following:

For Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, and some say: Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, and some say: Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: Anyone who teaches Torah to the son of another, merits and sits in the heavenly academy, as it is stated: "[Therefore so says the Lord:] If you return, and I (will) bring you back, you shall stand before Me" (Jeremiah 15:19)

What does "merits and sits in the heavenly academy" mean? Rav Gershon Edelstein zt"l, in a *sicha* to *melamdim*, explained as follows:

This means that he merits to engage in Torah in the heavenly yeshiva together with the Holy One, blessed be He, (and) even if in this world he was from the weak (in learning), he will merit in the world of truth to a level of Torah (understanding) greater than that which he had while alive.

There are two separate aspects here to the Torah-related reward which the *melamed* will merit: First, he will learn Torah with Hashem(!) and second, his level of learning will be greater than what it was in this world. While either one of those on its own would already be a tremendous reward and a sure sign of how great being a *melamed* is, getting both is simply amazing beyond words.

The Incredible Zohar

There are countless more sayings in Chazal regarding the importance of teaching children and the incredible reward destined for those who do so. As a prelude to the one which may perhaps be the most awe-inspiring one of them all, I would like to quote what Rabbi Avraham Erlanger, Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah in Eretz Yisrael, wrote in the name of the Alter of Kelm, Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv Broide:

I saw in the name of the Alter of Kelm zt"l who said that he doesn't want to expand on the extent of the reward for teachers of Torah who benefit the public, because he is worried that they will no longer be afraid of Gehennom, and their fear (of Heaven) will thereby be diminished.

This saying from the Alter is surprising. It is true that there are many *maamarei* Chazal regarding the reward of *melamdei tinokos*, but why would those cause a *melamed* to not fear *Gehennom*? While he will receive reward for the great *mitzvah* of teaching children, why would he not first be punished for his sins, just like any person who gets rewarded for his *mitzvos* but punished for his *aveiros*?

There is a truly extraordinary Zohar which sheds light on the question we just asked. The Zohar (Zohar Chadash parshas Lech-Lecha) cites a conversation between Avraham Avinu and the *malach* in charge of *Gehennom*. The angel asks Avraham not to pray for the *neshamos* of sinful Jews (as Avraham's prayers could prevent those *neshamos* from going to *Gehennom*). Avraham agrees that *neshamos* who did not do *teshuvah* for their *aveiros* belong to the angel. The Zohar then adds:

And it says, "except for what the lads ate", (meaning) except for those who taught Torah to the lads, "and the share of the men who went with me" in that world, know that I will hold on to them, and I will not give them to you, even though they are worthy of punishment. So much does the neshama of the tzaddik (Avraham) have (the power to contend) with "the king of Sedom", who is the minister of Gehennom, who rules over the reshaim. Additionally he tells him, not only I will hold on to them, but "Aneir, Eshkol and Mamreh" who are the Avos, they will take their part.

The Zohar tells us that Avraham Avinu and the other Avos get involved and prevent the *neshamos* of *melamdei tinokos* from going to *gehennom*, even if they are worthy of punishment!

It should be noted that I heard from Rav Aharon Feldman *Shlita* that the Zohar is only applicable to teachers who are עושין מלאכתן באמונה. For a discussion of how that is defined, and for many more quotes regarding the *chashivus* of teachers, see the book "The Master Mechanech".