

A Rebbe's Personal Growth

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Mechanchim often find themselves facing the challenge of balancing time for themselves and their talmidim, especially when deciding how much time to spend on personal Torah learning. Rebbeim may want to continue to learn at a high level like they did during their yeshiva years and at the same time feel that it's hard to justify such an effort which seems to be irrelevant to the material they're teaching. Can a rebbe continue to focus on learning that is related to his personal growth without a guilty conscience?

ואצלתי מן הרוח אשר עליך

We can find some guidance from the incident in Parshas Behaaloscha when Hashem told Moshe ואצלתי מן הרוח אשר עליך ושמתיו עליהם. Hashem was telling Moshe that He would grant prophecy to 70 zekeinim to help Moshe lead the nation by causing Moshe's nevuah to spread to them. ואצלתי is a hard word to translate but it refers to Moshe's prophetic ruach being extended and drawn onto the 70 zekeinim.

Rashi brings a midrash that explains this process by comparing it to an oil lamp: למה משה דומה באותה שעה? לנר שמונח על גבי מנורה. והכל מדליקין הימנו ואין אורו חסר כלום. The Chazal concludes, כך לא חסרה משה כלום. Moshe was like an oil lamp that was situated upon a larger lamp so that others could draw light from it without the lamp losing any of its ability to give off light.

There are a few questions that present themselves and by answering these questions we will better understand this process of **ואצלתי**. First of all, there is an implication that in the course of regular teaching the teacher becomes **חסר**, losing something, while Moshe, in this process of **ואצלתי**, was **לא חסרה כלום**. What is usually lost that Moshe didn't lose? Second, what is the imagery of the lamp upon the menorah? What is the process of **ואצלתי** that this illustrates? And finally, why was this process of **ואצלתי** necessary at all? Why couldn't Hashem bestow prophecy on the zekeinim directly without drawing it from Moshe?

What a Rebbe Gives Up

The **חסרון** that a rebbe experiences is the inability to use his time and energy to pursue personal growth, whether in learning or other areas. Teaching takes much of the rebbe's time and a lot of his energy, and while some are **zocheh** to teach **תלמידים** **המחכימים את הרב**, that is unusual. Most rebbeim spend much of their time teaching things at a level that is well below meaningful for their growth, and this is a very real sacrifice. This is why we would describe the rebbe as being **חסר**.

In the case of Moshe teaching these new **נביאים**, it couldn't be this way. On the one hand, Moshe needed to be fully connected to Hashem to fulfill his role as leader and teacher of Klal Yisrael. On the other hand, the **נביאים** had to be the talmidim of Moshe. In Parshas Shoftim it says that **לך יקים** **נביא מקרבך מאחריך כמני יקים לך** – all **נביאים** draw their power from Moshe. This was a necessity so that **נביא** can come later and contradict Moshe.

The Process of **ואצלתי**

Rabbeinu Bachaye explains that **ואצלתי** was a process that took place at the time that Moshe himself was talking to Hashem. It wasn't merely Moshe gathering these people and teaching them, but it was having them in Moshe's proximity while Hashem spoke to Moshe. This is the meaning of **ואצלתי**, which comes from the word **אצל**, meaning adjacent. Instead of Moshe giving knowledge or spirit to them, Moshe was receiving directly from Hashem and they got **ruach** from Moshe simultaneously because of their proximity.

We can use an example from everyday life to illustrate this kind of process. Intuitively, we understand that things interact when they are in contact with each other. If someone's hand pushes something, that thing moves. Even if he pulls on a rope that's attached to something, although he's not in direct contact with the object, it's apparent that it's connected to his hand through the rope and that is why it moves. But there are other interactions which seem less intuitive. A magnet can draw or repel something without touching it, but before the understanding of electromagnetism, this mystified people. Likewise, we understand that when something is plugged in or hard-wired, the electrons can flow through the wire and power it. But nowadays we have things that charge wirelessly with induction and it's harder to understand what's happening and how it all works.

כנר שמונח על גבי מנורה

This is what happened with **ואצלתי**. The zekeinim's presence and proximity while Moshe was getting **nevuah** from Hashem allowed them to have **nevuah** as well. It's not a process that is easy for us to understand, but this is the unique process that Rabbeinu Bachaye describes, and it needed to be this way to allow Moshe to remain full – **לא חסרה כלום** – while drawing **nevuah** from Hashem, and at the same spreading **nevuah** to the others. Through this process of **ואצלתי**, Moshe could teach them without losing anything personally.

This is what is meant with the illustration of the **נר שמונח על גבי מנורה**. Generally, a **נר** has a finite amount of fuel, and when it exhausts that fuel, it no longer can provide light. But if the **נר** can remain attached to a fuel source like a **מנורה**, it can continue to

give light without any concern of it running out of fuel. Moshe was able to remain connected to Hashem – the infinite chochmah – while giving over to the zekeinim, so he didn't lose anything in the process.

Two Modes of Chinuch

The bulk of a rebbi's time is spent teaching and it demands a lot from him in terms of time and energy. This process of teaching, which is the most effective way to give over Torah to talmidim, is in conflict with his personal needs, including his ability to be learning on his own. But there is another process in chinuch that is like the *ואצלת* of Moshe Rabbeinu, and this process is also very effective and doesn't demand that the rebbi sacrifices.

To illustrate this, I'm reminded of a story from my childhood. There was a man in my father's shul who was a retired Prussian officer from World War I. He was a dignified man, a university graduate, and although he wasn't that knowledgeable in Torah, he came to shul on Shabbos. My father encouraged him to learn Torah and invited him to a shiur the rav was giving. He told my father that he had once tried coming to the shiur, but he found the discussion of what to do if one finds a lost object unimpressive compared to the ideas of the great thinkers whose works he had studied in college. Instead, he invited my father to come with him to the tish of the Kapishnitzer Rebbe. My father obliged, and a few weeks later, we went to the tish on Friday night. The Rebbe's bais medrash was a simple, even decrepit storefront, and there were just a few people around the table with some simple food and drink. They sang a bit, the Rebbe said a few words, and they sang some more, and then it was time to go home. My father couldn't understand what the appeal was to the man, yet while walking home the man said to my father, "Now you see?" My father was baffled.

Looking back, the reason this man connected to the Kapishnitzer Rebbe's tish but not the Gemara shiur was that there was no way for a man like this to appreciate the Gemara, since he was missing so much of the context, skills, and the training needed. But the Kapishnitzer Rebbe had presence. There was something about his self, his avodah, that cast an aura and affected the people in his proximity. Even a mostly assimilated German Jew was able to sense this ruach Elokim and feel connected to a Rebbe who was a relic from 19th century Poland.

When I think of my own rebbeim, this is true as well. My rebbi in learning was Rav Nochum, z"l, and while his Torah is now well-known, I think of him somewhat differently. I can feel his presence when I learn and can sense whether something was a pshat Rav Nochum would say or not. One of my high school rebbeim was Rav Zaidel Epstein, z"l, and while I can say so much about him, the main sense of him that stays with me is his aura of emes and chochmah.

These transmissions from rebbi to talmid have to do with the person of the rebbi. The bigger the rebbi is, the more he is connected to Hashem, the more he is able to be mashpia on his talmidim. While the bulk of the material taught comes from the direct teaching, the hashpa'a comes from who the rebbi is. Any person who has been influenced by a great rebbi will say that there was something intangible that he got from his rebbi.

This is an important perspective to have. Instead of there being a tension or a conflict between the rebbi's personal growth and his teaching, this perspective suggests that the rebbi's personal growth is integral to his teaching. Like Rabbeinu Bachaye explains, the optimal teaching is when the rebbi is connected to a reservoir and the Torah is flowing from Hashem to the talmidim through the rebbi. Of course, he can't teach and do his own learning at the same time, and there will be some sacrifice needed. The idea is that it's not selfish to devote time to himself; the rebbi's personal growth will help the talmidim in the long run. □

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