# "This Too is Torah and I Must Learn it!" – Models of the Relationship between Student and Rabbi

## This Too is Torah and I Must Learn it!

### ברכות ס"ב א:א'

תַּנְיָא, אָמַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: פַּעַם אַחַת נִכְנַסְתִּי אַחַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְבֵית הַכִּּסֵא, וְלָמַדְתִּי מִמֶּנוּ שְׁלֹשָה דְּבָרִים: לָמַדְתִּי שָׁאֵין נִפְנִין מִזְרָח וּמַעֲרָב אֶלָּא צָפּוֹן וְדָרוֹם, וְלָמַדְתִּי שָׁאֵין נִפְּרָעִין מְעוּמָד אֶלָּא מְיוּשָׁב, וְלָמַדְתִּי שָׁאֵין מְקַנְּחִין בְּיָמִין אֶלָּא בִּשְׂמֹאל. אָמַר לוֹ בֶּן עַזַּאי: עַד כָּאן הֵעַזְתִּ פָּנִיךּ בְּרַבְּךְּ?! אָמַר לוֹ <u>תּוֹרָה היא,</u> וֹלִלְמוֹד אַנִי צָרִיךְּ.

#### Berakhot 62a:1

It was taught in a baraita in tractate Derekh Eretz that Rabbi Akiva said:

I once entered the bathroom after my teacher Rabbi Yehoshua, and I learned three things from observing his behavior:

- 1. I learned that one should not defecate while facing east and west, but rather while facing north and south;
- 2. I learned that one should not uncover himself while standing, but while sitting, in the interest of modesty;
- 3. and I learned that one should not wipe with his right hand, but with his left.

Ben Azzai, a student of Rabbi Akiva, said to him: You were impertinent to your teacher to that extent that you observed that much? He replied: It is Torah, and I must learn.

### ברכות ס"ב א:ב'

תַּנְיָא, בֶּן עַזַּאי אוֹמֵר: פַּעַם אַחַת נִכְנַסְתִּי אַחַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא לְבֵית הַכִּּסֵּא, וְלָמַדְתִּי מִמֶּנוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים: לָמַדְתִּי שֶׁאֵין נִפְּנִין מִזְרָח וּמַעֲרָב אֶלָּא צָפּוֹן וְדָרוֹם, וְלָמַדְתִּי שָׁאֵין נִפְּרָעִין מְעוּמָד אֶלָּא מְיוּשָׁב, וְלָמַדְתִּי שָׁאֵין מְקַנְּיְחִין בְּיָמִין אֶלָּא בִּשְּׁמֹאל. אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי יְהוּדָה: עַד כָּאן הֵעַזְתָּ פָּנֶיךְ בְּרַבְּךְ?! אָמַר לוֹ: תִּוֹרָה הִיּא, וְלִלְמוֹד אָנִי צִרִיךַ.

#### Berakhot 62a:2

Similarly, we learned in a baraita: Ben Azzai said:

I once entered a bathroom after Rabbi Akiva, and I learned three things from observing his behavior:

- 1. I learned that one should not defecate while facing east and west, but rather while facing north and south;
- 2. I learned that one should not uncover himself while standing, but while sitting;
- 3. and I learned that one should not wipe with his right hand, but with his left.

Rabbi Yehuda said to him: You were impertinent to your teacher to that extent? He replied: <u>It is Torah</u>, and <u>I must learn</u>.

ברכות ס"ב א:ג'

ַרַב כָּהֲנָא עָלֹ, גְּנָא תּוּתֵיה פּוּרְיֵיה דְּרַב. שַׁמְעֵיה דְּשָׂח וְשָׂחַק וְעָשָׂה צְרָכִיו. אֲמַר לֵיה: דָּמֵי פּוּמֵיה דְאַבָּא כִּדְלָא שָׁרֵיף תַּבְשִׁילָא. אֲמַר לֵיה: כָּהֲנָא, הָכָא אַהְ? פּוּק, דְּלָאו אֹרַח אַרָעָא. אַמַר לֵיה: תּוֹרָה הִיא, וְלַלְמוֹד אָנִי צַרִידְּ.

### Berakhot 62a:3

On a similar note, the Gemara relates that Rav Kahana entered and lay beneath Rav's bed. He heard Rav chatting and laughing with his wife, and seeing to his needs, i.e., having relations with her.

Rav Kahana said to Rav: The mouth of Abba, Rav, is like one whom has never eaten a cooked dish, i.e., his behavior was lustful.

Rav said to him: Kahana, you are here? Leave, as this is an undesirable mode of behavior.

Rav Kahana said to him: It is Torah, and I must learn.

## The relationship between Elisha ben Abuya ("Acher") and his student, Rabbi Meir

## חגיגה ט"ו א:י"ב

תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן: מַעֲשֶׂה בְּאַחֵר שֶׁהָיָה רוֹכֵב עַל הַסּוּס בְּשַׁבָּת, וְהָיָה רַבִּי מֵאִיר מְהַלֵּךְ אַחֲרָיו לִלְמוֹד תּוֹרָה מִפִּיו, אָמַר לוֹ: מֵאִיר, חֲזוֹר לְאַחֲרֶיךְ, שֶׁכְּבָר שִׁיעַרְתִּי בְּעִקְבֵי סוּסִי עַד כָּאן תְּחוּם שַׁבָּת. אָמַר לוֹ: אַף אַתָּה חֲזוֹר בָּךְ. אָמַר לוֹ: וְלֹא כְּבָר אָמַרְתִּי לְךְ כְּבָר שָׁמַעְתִּי מֵאֲחוֹרֵי הַפַּרְגּוֹד: "שׁוּבוּ בָּנִים שׁוֹבָבִים" — חוּץ מֵאַחַר.

## Chagigah 15a:12

The Gemara cites a related story: The Sages taught: There was once an incident involving Aher, who was riding on a horse on Shabbat, and Rabbi Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah from him. After a while, Aher said to him: Meir, turn back, for I have already estimated and measured according to the steps of my horse that the Shabbat boundary ends here, and you may therefore venture no further. Rabbi Meir said to him: You, too, return to the correct path. He said to him: But have I not already told you that I have already heard behind the dividing curtain: "Return, rebellious children," apart from Aher? [...]

## חגיגה ט"ו ב:ו'

ְוַרָבִּי מֵאָיר, הֵיכִי גְּמַר תּוֹרָה מִפּוּמֵיהּ דְּאַחֵר? וְהָאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר חַנָה אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: מַאי דִּכְתִיב: "כִּי שִּׁפְתֵי כֹהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ דַעַת וְתוֹרָה יְבַקְשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ כִּי מַלְאַךְ יהוה צְבָאוֹת הוּא". אָם דּוֹמֶה הָרַב לְמַלְאַךְ יהוה צְבָאוֹת — יְבַקְשׁוּ תּוֹרָה מִפִּיהוּ, וְאִם לָאו — אַל יְבַקְשׁוּ תּוֹרָה מִפִּיהוּ!

## Chagigah 15b:6

The Gemara poses a question: And Rabbi Meir, how could he learn Torah from the mouth of Aḥer? But didn't Rabba bar bar Ḥana say that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek Torah from his mouth; for he is an angel of the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:7)? The verse teaches: If the rabbi is similar to an angel of the Lord of hosts, perfect in his ways, they should seek Torah from his mouth; but if not, they should not seek Torah from his mouth.

#### חגיגה ט"ו ב:ז'

אָמַר רֵישׁ לָקִישׁ: רַבִּי מֵאִיר — קְרָא אַשְׁכַּח וּדְרַשׁ: ״הַט אָזְנְדְ וּשְׁמַע דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים וְלִבְּדְ תָשִׁית לְדַעְתִּי״, ״לְדַעְתָּם״ לֹא נֶאֱמַר, אֶלָּא ״לְדַעְתִּי״.

## Chagigah 15b:7

Reish Lakish said: Rabbi Meir found a verse and interpreted it homiletically: "Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to My knowledge" (Proverbs 22:17). It does not state "to their knowledge," but "to My knowledge." In other words, one must listen to the words of the Sages, despite their flaws, provided that their opinion concurs with that of God.

## חגיגה ט"ו ב:י'

פִּי אֲתָא רַב דִּימִי, אֲמַר, אָמְרִי בְּמַעְרְבָא: רַבִּי מֵאִיר אֲכַל תַּחְלָא, וּשְׁדָא שִׁיחְלָא לְבָרָא. דָּרֵשׁ רָבָא: מַאי דִּכְתִיב: "אֶל גִּנַּת אֱגוֹז יָרַדְתִּי לְרְאוֹת בְּאִבֵּי הַנָּחַל וְגוֹי", לָמָה נִמְשְׁלוּ תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים לֶאֱגוֹז — לוֹמַר לָךְ: מָה אֱגוֹז זֶה, אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁמְלוּכְלָךְ בְּטִיט וּבְצוֹאָה — אֵין מַה שֶּׁבְּתוֹכוֹ נִמְאָס; אַף תַּלְמִיד חָכָם, אַף עַל פִּי שֵׁסָּרַח — אֵין תּוֹרָתוֹ נִמְאֵסֵת.

## Chagigah 15b:10

When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia, he said: In the West, Eretz Yisrael, they say: Rabbi Meir ate a half-ripe date and threw the peel away. In other words, he was able to extract the important content from the inedible shell. Rava taught: What is the meaning of that which is written: "I went down into the garden of nuts, to look at the green plants of the valley" (Song of Songs 6:11)? Why are Torah scholars compared to nuts? To tell you: Just as this nut, despite being soiled with mud and excrement, its content is not made repulsive, as only its shell is soiled; so too a Torah scholar, although he has sinned, his Torah is not made repulsive.

## Metaphors for the process of learning Torah

### משנה אבות ה':ט"ו

אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּיוֹשְׁבִים לִפְנֵי חֲכָמִים. סְפוֹג, וּמַשְׁפֵּךְ, מְשַׁמֶּעת, וְנָפָה.

- 1. סִפוֹג, שַהוּא סוֹפֵג אֵת הַכֹּל.
- 2. מַשְׁפֵּךְ, שֶׁמַכְנִיס בְּזוֹ וּמוֹצִיא בְזוֹ.
- 3. מְשַׁמֶּרֶת, שֶׁמוֹצִיאָה אֶת הַיַּיִן וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַשְׁמָרִים.
  - 4. וְנָפָה, שֶׁמּוֹצִיאָה אֶת הַקֶּמַח וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַסֹּלֶת:

### Pirkei Avot 5:15

There are four types among those who sit before the sages: a sponge, a funnel, a strainer and a sieve.

- 1. A sponge, soaks up everything;
- 2. A funnel, takes in at one end and lets out at the other;
- 3. A strainer, which lets out the wine and retains the lees;
- 4. A sieve, which lets out the coarse meal and retains the choice flour.

## מאור עינים, בשלח וי

הנה כששומע דברי תורה עושה רושם במוחו האותיות שיצאו מפי המדבר ואף שאחר כך מסתלק ממנו מכל מקום נשאר רושם במוחו ועל ידי זה יוכל לקבל דבר חדש וההסתלקות של הראשון גורם שיוכל לקבל שנית כמשל כלי שמלאוהו ורוצה למלאותו שנית צריך להתרוקן תחלה וכן הדבר הזה אך הרשימו שנשאר הוא הכלי שיקבל בו עוד דבר חדש שאילו לא היה נשאר אפילו הרשימו לא היה יכול לקבל יותר כי על ידי הרשימו שנשאר תחלה מזדכך המוח שיקבל יותר שכל וכן אחר כך גם זה נסתלק ומהרשימו שנשאר הוא מזדכך ונעשה כלי לקבל עוד עד עולם:

## Me'or Einayim, Beshalach 5-6

Now, when someone hears words of Torah, the letters, once they leave the mouth of the teacher, make a *Roshem* (impression, imprint)

in their mind. But even though these words leave them, a *Roshem* (impression, imprint) is left in their mind. And on account of this experience, they will be able to receive something new. The loss of the first teaching enables them to receive a second one.

This is analogous to a full vessel that one wants to fill again: it has to first be emptied, and it is the same here. But the *Roshem* (impression, imprint) that is left behind forms the vessel that will receive another new substance. If the *Roshem* (impression, imprint) was not left behind, it would not be able to receive more. Only through the *Roshem* (impression, imprint) that is made, does the brain get purified in order to receive more knowledge. But yes, after that, even that knowledge will be lost. And from the *Roshem* (impression, imprint) that is left, he gets purified some more and becomes a vessel that can receive more, and this process repeats through infinity.