



The Joy of Torah - For Life

Parshas Chayei Sara - Striving for Perfection

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The Midrash Rabba in this week's Parsha brings down the story of R' Akiva's 24,000 students (according to this Midrash 12,000), and says that after R' Akiva's first students perished, R' Akiva warned his new students that the reason his first students died was because their "eyes were bitter towards each other", so make sure not to do what they did. The Midrash goes on to say that the new talmidim "got up and filled Eretz Yisrael with Torah."

The Eitz Yosef explains "eyes were bitter" to mean that they had some very tiny, infinitesimal feeling of dislike towards each other, and therefore didn't want to fully give each other the pleasure of Torah, meaning to share their Torah with each other. The new talmidim, however, were careful to share and benefit each other, and they therefore were "Amdu" – "got up" to teach Torah to the masses and were extremely successful in filling Eretz Yisrael with Torah.

One may ask, how does one idea connect to the other? Just because the first talmidim had a tiny dislike towards each other doesn't mean they didn't like everyone in the world. Of course, the first talmidim also wanted to spread Torah! They just didn't want to share it with their fellow talmidim because they may have wanted, on some very small level, to be recognized and appreciated in their own Beis Midrash. And yet, it was only the second group of talmidim that truly got up "Amdu" to teach Torah!? Why was it only the second group that really went out to teach Torah?

The answer appears to be that since the first talmidim lacked the eagerness to teach their Torah to their colleagues for whatever reason, that squelched their feelings of wanting to spread and give over Torah in their own Beis Midrash, they therefore weren't able to be very effective in spreading Torah even outside to the masses of Klal Yisrael. By squelching their feelings amongst their colleagues, they didn't have the necessary level of fire/brenn to want to spread Torah – they therefore lacked the "Amdu" in their commitment and desire to teach Torah. Just sitting in the Beis Midrash accomplishing in our own learning is not enough to become an effective Marbitz Torah. We must also cultivate the fire in us to give over Torah, to love Torah, and to love all Yidden and want to give Torah over to them. We need to exercise our yearning to give over the sweetness of Torah because if we squelch that feeling and do not work on it now, we won't have the proper desire to spread Torah when we go out into the world to be Lomaid Torah l'amo Yisrael!