

They shall teach Your ordinances to Yaakov and Your Torah to Yisrael. (33:10)

Sforno views this blessing as a prayer, an entreaty to Hashem that He grant Shevet Levi the qualities and character of the ideal Torah teacher: one whose piety, virtue and sincerity is such that people will seek him out and listen to what he has to say, as though he is Hashem's messenger. This is consistent with the well-known statement of Chazal in the Talmud Moed Katan 17a, "If the rav is like an angel/messenger of Hashem, they will seek Torah from his mouth." Sforno seems to be telling us that, despite the virtue of Shevet Levi, regardless of the fact that they were clearly the most spiritually-correct of all the tribes and, hence, most suitable to serve in a position of spiritual leadership, they still needed Moshe Rabbeinu's prayer/blessing. Apparently, achieving the position of rav u'moreh b'Yisrael, teacher and halachic arbiter in Yisrael, is a position which requires great merit. Having Torah knowledge and being a G-d-fearing person are not sufficient. One needs special z'chusim, merits.

Horav Chaim Elazary, zl, quotes a powerful lesson taught by Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, to support this idea. He cited the incident in Pirkei Avos 6:9, which is a story related by Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma: "Once when I was walking down the road, a certain man met me. We greeted each other. He then asked me, 'Rebbe, from what place are you?' I said to him, 'I am from a great city of scholars and sages.' He then asked, 'Rebbe, would you be willing to live with us in our place? I would give thousands upon thousands of golden dinar, precious stones and pearls.' I replied, 'Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah.'" This Mishnah has served as a foundation for much commentary and exegesis by Torah scholars from all perspectives. After all, let us face it, if the man had been willing to part with an untold amount of money so that he could bring Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma and an august group of Torah scholars to his town, he could have established a school, a yeshivah, and staff it with the finest Torah educators. He would "buy" him a place that would compare to his current city of scholars and sages. He would get the finest Torah scholars that money could buy. Why did Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma refuse the offer?

Rav Isser Zalman explained that the success of a yeshivah is not determined by the distinction of its founder, his scholarship, his virtue and piety; neither is it decided by its financial base and the baalei batim, lay leadership, and the effort they put in to supporting the yeshivah. A makom Torah, true place that earns the appellation "place of Torah," a place whose essence is Torah, is

catalyzed by unique special z'chusim, merits. Not everyone is endowed with such merits. In other words, the Rosh Yeshivah's scholarship, his yiraas Shomayim, his ethical conduct, do not necessarily play a role in the success of the yeshivah. It is z'chusim, and not everyone merits the z'chus of being a Torah builder. One may give an excellent shiur, lecture; another may be an incredible baal Mussar, individual whose ethical demeanor is outstanding – it still does not guarantee success. Certainly, money is not the determining factor in the success of a yeshivah.

This was Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma's reply to the man: "You are certain that with money at my beck and call, I will succeed in establishing a yeshivah. A yeshivah is not built only on money; nor does one Torah scholar of great repute serve as the answer to all problems. A yeshivah needs a unique z'chus, a blessing from Heaven, something that has eluded others. Yeshivos do not survive on money alone. It is the merit and self-sacrifice of its Roshei yeshivah that catalyze its success. Likewise, the members of the tribe of Levi were, without question, the spiritual elite of the Jewish People, but that did not ensure their success. Prayer and blessing make the difference. Thus, Moshe gave them the added ingredient they needed for success.