

Now Avram was very laden with livestock, silver and gold. (13:2)

The mere mention of the word *Ruzhin* conjures up images of wealth and royalty. Indeed, the saintly *Ruzhiner Rebbe, zl*, was a legend in his own time. Everything about him, from his clothes to his living quarters to his total demeanor was resplendent with wealth and monarchy. Nonetheless, he was regarded as one of the greatest *tzaddikim*, righteous leaders, of his time. The greatest *gedolim*, Torah giants, of his generation would travel for weeks just to spend a brief visit with him. They viewed him as a Heavenly agent, dispatched to this world on a Divine mission to reach out and inspire *Klal Yisrael*, to infuse them with love for the Almighty, His Torah and to glorify His Name.

The *Rebbe's* fame spread far and wide, and people from all over came to him just to bask in his greatness. Once, when the *Ruzhiner* visited Germany, the distinguished *Rav* of Frankfurt, the saintly *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, came to visit him. Following the visit, *Rav Hirsch* was asked his impression of the *Rebbe*. *Rav Hirsch* replied, "It is quite unbelievable to see how all the money and honor is brought to him, and he himself is totally disinterested in it. His one and only concern is how to increase *kavod Shomayim* and the *kavod* of *Klal Yisrael*."

The *Maskillim*, members of the Enlightenment – self-loathing Jews who looked for every opportunity to demean and denigrate Judaism, its religious adherents and especially its expositors and disseminators – found in the *Ruzhiner* an example of one whom they viewed as pretentious and insincere. How could the *Rebbe* reconcile piety with ostentatious wealth? Clearly his saintliness (they felt) was a sham, conjured up to curry favor and amass even greater wealth from his unsuspecting *chassidim*.

The holy *Ruzhiner* responded to their hate-filled critique by citing Avraham *Avinu's* method of outreach as an example of employing wealth as a means for garnering the esteem of people. When Avraham commenced his journey of outreach, he took with him a large cache of wherewithal with which he hoped to impress people. "Why did he do this?" the *Rebbe* asked. "Our Patriarch was well aware that simple people gravitate to those who are blessed with material abundance." Our society is obsessed with materialism, to the point that the more someone earns, the more they are likely to be admired by strangers and perceived to be interesting, exciting and even erudite. Respect appears all too often to be directly correlated to one's earnings. Concomitantly, one who does not have high earning power struggles to convince his peers to take his views or character seriously.

The *Rebbe* quoted *Chazal* (*Gittin* 59a), "From the days of Moshe *Rabbeinu* until the days of Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi*, we do not find unparalleled greatness in Torah knowledge and unparalleled greatness in secular matters, including wealth and high political office, combined in one place, i.e., a single individual (*Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*). Likewise, from the days of Rabbi Yehudah

HaNasi until the days of *Rav Ashi*, we do not find Torah *u'gedulah b'makom echad*." "Why specifically these three?" the *Rebbe* asked. "Were these Torah giants the only ones who had achieved *Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*? The *Rebbe* explained that each one of these giants was a *nosein ha'Torah*, disseminator of Torah without peer. Moshe gave us the Torah. Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* redacted the *Mishnah*. *Rav Ashi* compiled the *Talmud*. It is one thing to put forth the effort and prepare the redaction and compilation, but how does one ensure its acceptance? People are fickle and have large egos. They could contend that if they would have prepared it, they would have done a better job. When one is wealthy, however, people listen to him. Wealth begets esteem and power which, in turn, generate acclaim and acceptance by the masses. Sadly, this external caveat was necessary in order to achieve immediate acceptance by the people.

In an alternative exposition, the *Maharam Shif* writes that anyone who completes a component of the Torah in such a manner that (upon his completion) no one will dispute it, it is critical that he possess the qualities of *Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*. He must be the greatest and wealthiest, because if someone supersedes him either in erudition or in material bounty, he may feel that he can impugn the integrity of his predecessor's teaching. The Torah was concluded by Moshe, leaving no room for opposition. Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* redacted the *Mishnah*, so that no one may dispute or append it. Likewise, *Rav Ashi* sealed the *Talmud*, circumventing the opportunity for challenge. The *Chasam Sofer* adds that this is why the despotic Korach raved about his enormous wealth. He felt that if he could demonstrate to the people that his wealth superseded that of Moshe, then Moshe would no longer represent *Torah u'gedulah b'makom echad*, thus allowing the opportunity for Korach to oppugn his teachings. This was another area in which Korach confirmed his shortsightedness.

Perhaps we might suggest another approach which focuses more on the Torah than on the *gedulah*. Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* and *Rav Ashi* represent the ultimate achievement of Torah study in that they took the enjoinder of *lilmod u'le'lameid*, to learn and to teach, to its apex. Hashem wants us not only to study Torah, but to see to it that every single person in *Klal Yisrael* studies it. *Le'lameid*, teaching Torah, defines the *mitzvah* of *limud ha'Torah*, study of Torah. Each of these giants reached the apogee of Torah learning, because he personally saw to it that the Torah was available to the masses. Each of them ascertained that Torah would never be forgotten, as it was accessible to everyone, anywhere, all the time.

Avraham *Avinu* studied Torah, but until he reached out to the masses, the period of *tohu*, void, in the world continued to exist. It was only after *v'es ha'nefesh asher asu b'Charan*, that he reached out to the multitudes and brought them under the protective wings of the *Shechinah*, in order to usher in two thousand years of Torah.