

?? ?? ?? ????? ?? ??? ??? ??? ??? ?? ????? ?? ??? ?????

In his commentary, *Rashi* notes the difference between Hashem's instructions to Moshe *Rabbeinu* as to the manner of *semichah*, leaning/placing his hand on Yehoshua, and the actual performance in which Moshe placed both hands upon Yehoshua. *Rashi* writes: "He leaned his hands" – generously, much more than he had been commanded. For Hashem said to him, "And lean your hand, and he leaned with both hands – like a vessel which is full and brimming over and filled him generously with his wisdom." *Rashi* clearly writes that Moshe gave extra wisdom of his own to Yehoshua.

The *Talmud* (*Bava Kamma* 92b) asks: "What is the source of the popular adage, "Though the wine belongs to the owner, the thanks is given to the butler (who pours it)"? They reply by citing the *pesukim* concerning Moshe's *semichah* to Yehoshua, which implies that the wisdom which was transferred to Yehoshua was Moshe's doing – when, in fact, wisdom comes from Hashem. Likewise, in *Devarim* 34:9, the Torah writes: "And Yehoshua bin Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moshe had laid his hands upon him." The credit is given to Moshe, when, in all reality, he was merely the "butler."

The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, questions the disparity between *Rashi* in *Chumash* and *Rashi's* commentary to the *Talmud*. The *Talmud* attributes Yehoshua's wisdom to Hashem, while, in his commentary to *Chumash*, *Rashi* writes that Moshe laid both hands on Yehoshua, thus conferring added wisdom to him. Moshe's generosity with his wisdom went beyond the role of being a "butler."

The *Brisker Rav* explains that actually Moshe conferred three entities upon Yehoshua: he gave him *semichah*, laid his hands upon him; he anointed him with *shemen ha'mishchah*, anointing oil (This is because Yehoshua was *halachically* considered to be/have the rank of a *Melech Yisrael*, king, since whoever did not listen to Yehoshua was liable for capital punishment); and he transmitted the *mesorah*, tradition, which meant that he would be the conduit (next in line after Moshe) to teach *Klal Yisrael*, to become (after Moshe) the nation's next quintessential *Rebbe*. *Semichah*, *meshichah*, *mesorah*. In other words, Yehoshua was to be much more than a *talmid*, disciple, of Moshe. He was to become his successor.

*Rambam* writes that Moshe taught Torah to Yehoshua, Elazar *HaKohen* and Pinchas. Yet, it was Yehoshua who received the *mesorah* from Moshe. This is delineated in the opening *Mishnah* of *Pirkei Avos*: *Moshe kibail Torah mi'Sinai u'mesarah l'Yehoshua;*" Moshe received the Torah at *Sinai* and he gave it to Yehoshua (to continue the chain of transmission). *Bnei Yisrael* had many teachers, but Yehoshua was responsible for the *mesorah*, insuring that the Torah would be transmitted in the pristine manner in which it had been received at *Sinai*.

Yehoshua became the repository of *Torah She'Baal Peh*, the Oral Law, receiving it from Moshe. Thus, Moshe designated Yehoshua to transmit this *mesorah* to the next generation. The

continuation of the *mesorah* is proof-positive that Hashem gave both the Written Law and the Oral Law on *Har Sinai*, and transmitted them throughout the generations by individuals who were responsible leaders of their individual generation. In his introduction to his work, *Mishneh Torah*, the *Rambam* lists these Torah giants of whom Yehoshua (following Moshe) was the first. When *Chazal* compare Moshe to the “butler” who is “pouring” his master’s wine, they refer to the *mesorah*, to underscore the verity: all *chochmah* is derived from Hashem via *Har Sinai*.

Perhaps the easiest way to approach the concept of *mesorah* is to envision our every *Tanna*, *Amora*, *Gaon*, *Rishon*, *Acharon* together with us as we learn Torah. Their writings and teachings are not isolated, abstract didactics, but represent the words of our nation’s greatest and most erudite Torah leaders throughout the generations who come alive with us as we study.

While in most cases *mesorah* is analogous to Torah, historically it has become the foundation upon which our Torah leaders have stood up to those who would usurp the Torah way of life by creating and introducing change – from discarding customs that have been part of the fiber of Jewish life to introducing modernity; from egalitarianism to all forms of secular incursion. The tension that exists between tradition/*mesorah* and modification/eradication is not new. It goes back millennia. Never has it reached such proportion, however, as it has in the last two centuries with the introduction of the *Haskalah*/Enlightenment movement which was the progenitor of the secular streams and their antecedent “isms.”

In more recent times, *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, whose *modus operandi* as *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of his generation, was to be involved in every aspect of building and maintaining Torah life as we know it. He presented his *hashkofos* in a well-known declaration: “I know nothing on my own. When I need to make a decision concerning an issue, I think (ask myself) what would the *Chafetz Chaim*, *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky*, the *Chazon Ish* and the *Brisker Rav* have done in this case? We do what we saw from them, and what we did not see, we do not do.”

*Rav Shach* was wont to say that the greatest curse is when young people see themselves as superior to their leaders and discard all that has been passed down to us throughout the generations. A delegation of lay leaders petitioned his approval to do something that would eventually reap great benefit for the Jewish community. His response was, “No. We saw the *Chafetz Chaim* act differently.” Hearing his negative response, these lay leaders asked if they could explain and demonstrate that the potential far outweighed the negative side-effects of the slight change.

The *Rosh Yeshivah*’s reply is telling. “I do not contest your reasoning. Indeed, you may be correct, and logic may support your position. However, we do not lead *Klal Yisrael* with logic – as sound as it may appear. *Klal Yisrael* can only be led with *mesorah*. The tradition we have from the *Chafetz Chaim* is that what you want to do should not be done, and that tradition overrides all of your logic.”