

Parashat Vayikra – The Humility of the Journey
Rav Hanan Schlesinger

There wasn't any fanfare. No one but the participants took notice. Nevertheless, a significant event took place this week on the Schultz Rosenberg campus that houses Akiba Academy, Yavneh Academy, and the Community Kollel of Dallas. The Rabbinical Association of Greater Dallas chose the campus as the site of this month's meeting. What, you might ask, is so significant? That an orthodox institution is eager to host the rabbis of all three major Jewish denominations does not happen every day. More than that – Orthodox rabbis who are willing to sit together around the same table with their Conservative and Reform colleagues and tackle substantive issues affecting the Jewish community, are not to be found in every city. The fact that this is the case in our city is a real cause for celebration.

So, as an Orthodox rabbi, and the Rosh Kollel of the Community Kollel of Dallas, why have I chosen to follow the lead of Rabbi Ari Perl, the spiritual leader of Congregation Shaare Tefilla, and join the Rabbinical Association fellowship? From my perspective the question should be 'why not'? There are a myriad of reasons for doing so. The religious philosophy of the Mei haShiloach, a Hasidic work I often cite in my teaching sessions that open each monthly meeting of the Rabbinical Association, provides one of the foundations for my conviction.

The Torah commands us not to make an idol. An idol, explains the Mei haShiloach, is something which is carved in stone or cast in iron. It has very exact dimensions and clear boundaries; it is solid and unchanging. Don't make your understanding of Torah into an idol, warns the Mei haShiloach. Don't reduce Torah to a clear, static and unequivocal package that you can carry around on your shoulder. Never think that your present understanding of Torah is the full and final authorized version.

And why not? Because, according to Rav Mordechai Yosef of Izbich, the author of the Mei haShiloach, God gave us only a partial glimpse of his truth when he revealed the

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Torah at Sinai, in order that we spend our lives in an eternal search for additional pieces of the puzzle. God wants us to be on a quest, to be involved in a process. We must never rest on our laurels, must never let the Torah become static. The Torah that we know, *Torat Haim*, the Torah of life, is to always be alive, to always be dynamic, growing and developing. When we think we know it all and there is nothing more to learn, we have reduced our Torah to an idol, a mere graven image. Paradoxically, when we think we have it all, that is when we have lost it all.

So yes, I may differ seriously with the way some of my Reform and Conservative colleagues interpret Torah. We may have some fundamental disagreements concerning how one ought to live a Jewish life in the twenty-first century. But I also try to temper my zealotry with a large dose of humility. I don't carry all the truth in my back pocket. Neither does the religious denomination that I represent. All of us see through the prism of our personalities and experiences; our refractions of the truth contain both conceptions and misconceptions. Our understandings are all partial. I must be continually open to new perspectives and different vantage points. I must remain sensitive to hearing other voices and absorbing them into my understanding of Torah.

So among all its other merits and accomplishments, the Rabbinical Association of Greater Dallas enables its members to learn about each other and from each other, thereby insuring that the Judaism of its members remains dynamic and continues to grow. And it is this ever-expanding perspective on Judaism – filtered of course through our denominational affiliations - that we in turn teach our congregants and students. In light of the teachings of the Mei haShiloach, it is entirely possible that our association does nothing less than save us - and our students - from idolatry. Now that's a cause for celebration.



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