

The Gemara (Chulin 92a) compares different segments of כנסת ישראל to components of a vineyard. This is consistent with the Torah comparing man to a tree (דברים 20:19). Rav Shimon Ben Lakish comments that the branches of the vine represent the בעלי בתים, a term that Rashi explains to mean the people involved in the various core community institutions, such as charity organizations. The scholars are compared to the grape clusters, the core fruit of the vine. The everyday people (עמי) (הארץ) are compared to the leaves that provide shade and protect the fruit and the vine. Each of these components of the vineyard are critical, as the fruit in particular and the vine in general, cannot survive unless all are present. Like the peel that surrounds the fruit, the leaves of the vine are referred to as שומר לפרי, the protector of the fruit, for without it the delicate fruit would not survive. The various components of the vine are indeed similar to their corresponding features in a human being, who cannot survive without the lungs and the various organs that support, protect and sustain life.

Judaism values every Jew, regardless of station. All Jews are required to assemble once every 7 years during the festival of Sukkot, from the wood chopper to the water drawer (דברים 31:11). הקהל was not limited to the intellectual or wealthy elites. The covenant that Gd forged with Moses on behalf of the Jewish people does not discriminate among classes or groups of Jews.

The Gemara mentions that the grape clusters refer to Moses and Aaron, the paradigm of what a Jew can be. However, while it is important to treat the scholars like Moses and Aaron with proper respect, one must not diminish the dignity of other Jews who are not at that level. Without these Jews, the scholar could not reach his level. Rashi (Chulin ibid) notes that the scholar must show gratitude and respect for the critical contributions of everyday Jews, who work the fields and provide the food and basic materials that the scholars benefit from.

(Note a similar idea can be found in מסכת ברכות which quotes a proverb that used to be prominent among the Scholars of Yavne:

מרגלא בפומיהו דרבנן דיבנה אני בריה וחברי בריה אני מלאכתי בעיר והוא מלאכתו בשדה אני משכים למלאכתי והוא משכים למלאכתו כשם שהוא אינו מתגדר במלאכתי כך אני איני מתגדר במלאכתו ושמא תאמר אני מרבה והוא ממעיט שנינו אחד המרבה ואחד הממעט ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים

The sages in Yavne would say I, who learns Torah, am Gd's creation and my compatriot is Gd's creation. My work is in the city, to study Torah, his work is in the field. I rise early to do my work, he does the same for his. Just as he does not presume to do my work, I do not presume to do his. If you would say that I am better than him because I engage in more Torah study than him, that is not the case for we have learned it is not the quantity of study time that is important, but the dedication to heaven that informs that study time.)

The scholar must never make demands on the community, the other components of the vineyard, i.e. to become a פוסע על ראשי עם קודש, one who treads on the heads of the holy nation. For example, a scholar should not expect or take pride in the honor accorded him when others stand up for him when he enters a room. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the scholar par excellence of his time, traveled for the first time to the city of Pinsk, Lithuania for the wedding of his son. When he arrived, the people of the city unhitched the horses from his wagon and carried his carriage into the city as a spontaneous display of honor for one of the greatest scholars of their generation. Rabbi Akiva Eiger wept quietly and recited the confessional prayer, as he was fearful that by the people carrying his coach he might have tread on the heads of the holy Jewish people. While there is an obligation on the rest of the community to honor the scholar, the scholar must be very careful never to take it for granted and to be mindful of the dignity of the Jewish people. (Note, a similar idea can be seen in Parshas Yitro, where Yitro rebuked Moses for making the people stand all day while he sat in judgement. Rashi notes that Yitro rebuked Moses for apparently taking lightly the dignity of the holy people, Exodus 18:13).

The Torah tells us that Gd spoke with Moses from various places. These included the Holy of Holies between the Cherubim, by the Altar of the Burnt Offering (מזבח) and in the courtyard of אהל מועד. In פרשת תצוה, Gd tells Moses ונועדתי שמה לבני ישראל, and I will meet regularly with Bnay Yisrael (Exodus 29:43, see Rashi). All the meetings and conversations between Gd and Moses were for the sake of the Jewish People. Moses was their representative. If there would be no Bnay Yisrael, there would be no need for Moses. As Rashi comments, Gd told Moses to descend from the mountain after the people sinned with the golden calf. For the only reason

Moshe was granted his higher status was for the Jewish people. Now that they sinned and were about to be rejected, there was no longer a reason for Moshe to continue to enjoy that status (Exodus 32:7, See Rashi). According to Rashi, Moses could not separate himself and remain aloof from the people if he was to be their intermediary for regular meetings between Hashem and כנסת ישראל. For had he chosen to be an elitist and isolated himself in the Holy of Holies, away from the rest of כנסת ישראל, he would have been like the fruit without the branches or the protecting leaves of the vine. He would lose his connection to the rest of Bnay Yisrael and could not represent them. Only by standing outside of the Holy of Holies could he maintain his critical role as that link between Gd and the people, to hear the voice that emanated from between the Cherubim on behalf of all of the Jewish People.

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