

The Torah Scholars Emanate from the White Fire of the Torah Placing Them above the Letters which Emanate from the Black Fire

In this week's parsha, parshas Ki Seitzei, we learn about the punishment administered to a person who transgresses a mitzvas lo sa'aseh (Devarim 25, 1): **“כי יהיה ריב בין אנשים ונגשו אל המשפט ושפטום והצדיקו את הצדיק והרשיעו את הרשע, והיה אם בין הכות הרשע והפילו השופט והכהו לפניו כדי רשעתו במספר, ארבעים יכנו לא יוסיף, פן הרשע והפילו להכותו על אלה מכה רבה ונקלה אחיך לעיניך”** -- **If there is a quarrel between men, and they approach the tribunal, and they [the judges] judge them, and they acquit the innocent one and condemn the guilty one; and it shall be, if the guilty one has incurred the penalty of lashes, that the judge shall cast him down, and flog him in front of him, commensurate with his crime, in number. He shall administer forty lashes; he shall not exceed; lest he give him a much more severe flogging than these [forty lashes], and your brother will be degraded before your eyes.**

Although the Torah specifies: **“ארבעים יכנו”**—that forty lashes be delivered to the guilty part, Chazal teach us that, in reality, he is given only thirty-nine lashes—one less than forty. We learn this in the Mishnah (Makkos 22b): **“כמה מלקין אותו, ארבעים”** -- **how many lashes are administered to him? Forty minus one, as it states: במספר ארבעים, a count adjacent to forty.** Rashi explains: **“חשבון המשלים סכום של ארבעים, שגורם לקרות אחריו ארבעים, והיינו שלשים”**—**a number which completes the count of forty, which leads up to the number forty, in other words, thirty-nine.**

Regarding this subject, we find a fascinating passage in the Gemara (ibid.): **“אמר רבא, כמה טפשי שאר אינשי, דקיימי מקמי ספר תורה ולא קיימי מקמי גברא רבה, דאילו בספר תורה כתיב ארבעים ואתו רבנן בצרו חדא—Rava said: How foolish are some people, who stand up in honor of a sefer Torah, but they do not stand up in honor of a “gavra rabbah.” For it is written in the sefer Torah “forty”; the Rabbis came along and subtracted one.** In other words, people who show respect for a sefer Torah but

not for the great men who interpret the Torah are truly foolish. For the Torah specifically states: **“He shall administer forty lashes,”** and yet the sages possess the power to override the Torah's specific prescription and establish the maximum number of lashes as thirty-nine.

Thus, we learn from Rava that the honor and respect due a great Torah-scholar exceeds the honor due a sefer Torah. After all, the Torah-scholars were empowered to interpret and actually override the punishment specified by the Torah. The Ran and along with him the Maharsha, the Pnei Yehoshua, the Maharit and others find this extremely perplexing. For this seems to be a blatant contradiction to that which we have learned elsewhere in the Gemara (Kiddushin 33b): **“איבעיא להו, מהו לעמוד מפני ספר תורה, רבי חלקיה ורבי סימון ורבי אלעזר אמרי, קל וחומר, מפני לומדיה עומדים, מפניה לא כל שכן”**—**they asked: What is the law regarding standing before a sefer Torah? R' Chilkiyah, R' Simon and R' Elazar said that the following “kal vachomer” is applicable: Since one rises before those who study the Torah, how much more so should one rise before the Torah itself?!** In other words, the honor and respect due a sefer Torah is greater than that due Torah-scholars.

The Maharit (ibid.) provides us with an answer based on the Parshas Derachim (Drush 24). He explains that there is a big difference between a Torah-scholar who is a **“גברא רבה”** and one who is not a **“גברא רבה”**. The latter's greatness stems exclusively from the fact that he is learned and well-versed in the Torah. His greatness is due to the Torah. Therefore, the honor of a sefer Torah surpasses his honor, prompting the statement: **“Since one rises before those who study the Torah, how much more so should one rise before the Torah itself?!”**

This, however, is not the category of Torah-scholar of whom Rava spoke. He was referring to a scholar who had already achieved the status of a **“גברא רבה”**—**a great, renowned**

personage. This scholar has distinguished himself through his tireless devotion to Torah-study—clarifying and refining difficult, obscure halachot that are not explained in the Torah; they require extensive debate and dialectic. The honor of such a “גברא רבה” surpasses the honor of a sefer Torah. For, he is capable and adept at clarifying points of law that are not stated explicitly in the Torah. To substantiate his point, Rava brings an example from the words in this week’s parsha “ארבעים יכנו”. Based on the simple reading and understanding of the text, the guilty party should receive forty lashes. Yet, the sages reveal to us that he in fact only receives thirty-nine lashes. They were able to reveal points of halachah that are not apparent from the simple reading of the text. Therefore, they deserve a greater degree of respect than a sefer Torah itself.

A “Gavra Rabbah” Is a Great Scholar Who Provides Novel Interpretations of the Torah

Let us elaborate on this subject based on a wonderful introduction from the incredible teachings of the author of the Tanya in his siddur. He attempts to reconcile an apparent contradiction regarding HKB”H’s status vis-à-vis the congregation of Yisrael. According to the Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 3, 12) elucidating the passuk (Devarim 10, 1), HKB”H was, so to speak, the “chasan”—the bridegroom; He betrothed “Kenesset Yisrael,” the “kallah”—the bride—by means of the Torah. The Midrash states:

”בעת ההיא אמר ה' אלי בסל לך. הלכה אדם מישראל שקידש אשה, מי צריך ליתן שכר כתב קידושין. כך שנו חכמים אין כותבין שטרי אירוסין ונשואין אלא מדעת שניהן והחתן נותן שכר, וממי למדנו, מהקב”ה בשעה שקידש לישראל בסיני, דכתיב (שמות יט-י) ויאמר ה' אל משה לך אל העם וקידשתם היום ומחר, ומי כתב השטר הזה משה, מנין, שנאמר (דברים לא-ט) ויכתוב משה את התורה הזאת, ומה שכר נתן לו הקב”ה זיו הפנים, דכתיב (שמות לד-כט) ומשה לא ידע כי קרן עור פניו.”

When a Jewish man proposes marriage to a woman, who pays to have the contractual document drawn up? The sages teach us that the contract must be agreeable to both parties and that the “chasan” pays the fee. Who do we learn this from? From HKB”H, when He betrothed Yisrael at Sinai, as it is written (Shemos 19, 10): “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow.’” Who wrote this document? Moshe. From where do we know this? For it states (Devarim 31, 9): “Moshe wrote this Torah.” How did HKB”H compensate him for this act? His countenance glowed with splendor, as it is written (Shemos

34, 29): “And Moshe did not realize that the skin of his countenance glowed.”

According to this Midrash, Yisrael represented the “kallah”; they were betrothed to HKB”H by means of the Torah. Yet, elsewhere we find that the people of Yisrael represented the “chasan,” while the Torah represented the “kallah,” betrothed to Yisrael. This is consistent with the elucidation in the Gemara (Berachos 57a) regarding the passuk (Devarim 33, 4): תורה “—צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב, אל תקרי מורשה אלא מאורשה—”**The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov.” Now, do not read the word in this passuk as “morashah”—meaning an inheritance—but rather as “m’orasah”—meaning a betrothed one.** It is precisely for this reason that the Gemara (Sanhedrin 59a) states that an idol-worshiper who engages in Torah-study is subject to the death penalty. For, it is as if he had sexual relations with a married woman, since the Torah is betrothed to us; she is our “מאורשה”.

The author of the Tanya resolves this apparent contradiction based on a teaching in the following Gemara (Pesachim 68b): רב “ששת כל תלתין יומין מהדר ליה תלמודיה ותלי וקאי בעיברא דדשא ואמר חדאי Rav Sheishes would review what he had learned every thirty days; he would stand and lean on the bolt of the doorway and say: “Rejoice, my soul; rejoice, my soul. For you I read; for you I learned.”

The Gemara challenges Rav Sheishes’s statement that he engages in Torah-study for the sake of his soul: איני והאמר רבי “אלעזר אילמלא תורה לא נתקיימו שמים וארץ, שנאמר (ירמיה לג-כה) אם לא —בריתי יומם ולילה חוקות שמים וארץ לא שמת” **is this so? But Rabbi Elazar has said: Were it not for Torah, heaven and earth would not endure; for it is stated: “If not for My covenant of day and night, I would not have established the statutes of heaven and earth.”** Thus, we see that the purpose of Torah-study is not for the sake of the soul but rather for the sake of maintaining the heaven and the earth. The Gemara answers: “מעיקרא כי עביד אינש אדעתא דנפשיה קא עביד”—when a person initially begins to learn Torah, he learns for the sake of his soul.

The author of the Tanya explains the significance of this statement. Initially, a person engages in Torah-study in order to rectify his soul, to elevate it and to bind it to the light of the blessed Almighty. Subsequently, having accomplished this tikun of his soul, he can move upward to the next level and engage in Torah-study l’shma—for the sake of the Torah itself. Then he adds the following:

”ובזה יובן מה שפעמים אמרו שהתורה נקראת מאורסה והעוסקים בה נקראים חתן, ופעמים אמרו להיפוך ביום חתונתו זה מתן תורה, שהתורה הוא החתן וישראל הם הכלה. אך הענין הוא דשניהם אמת על פי הנ”ל, דכשהוא לומד לתיקון הנפש, התורה הוא החתן המשפיע, ונפש האלקית היא המקבלת ההשפעה, וכשהוא לומד לשמה לשם התורה הוא כהיפוך, שישראל הוא החתן המשפיע וממשיך אור אין סוף בתורה, והתורה היא המקבלת ונקראת מאורסה“.

In this manner, we can understand why the Torah is sometimes referred to as the betrothed—“m’orasah”—and those who study her are referred to as the “chasan”; while at other times, they reverse the roles. On the day of His marriage refers to the day the Torah was given; the Torah is the “chasan” and Yisrael are the “kallah.” In reality, both are true based on the above. When a person learns for the tikun of his soul, the Torah represents the influential “chasan”; the divine soul is the one receiving the influence. When a person learns l’shma, for the sake of the Torah, the opposite holds true. Yisrael is the “chasan” providing the influence, introducing an infinite light into the Torah; while the Torah is the beneficiary and is referred to as the “m’orasah.”

In this manner, he also explains the following statement of Chazal (Pesachim 50b): “לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ומצוות אף על פי -- שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה” a person should always engage in the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot even though his actions are not purely motivated—not l’shma; because from these activities that are not purely motivated, he will eventually come to learn Torah and perform mitzvot for its own sake, with the purest of intentions—l’shma. Initially, a person engages in Torah-study not for the sake of the Torah but for the sake of rectifying his own soul. By performing this tikun, he can advance to the next level; he can engage in Torah-study for the tikun of the Torah rather than for the tikun of his soul.

This then is also the implication of the following Gemara (A.Z. 19a): “אמר רבא, בתחילה נקראת [התורה] על שמו של הקב”ה ולבסוף נקראת על שמו [של הלומד]. שנאמר (תהלים א-ב) בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה.” Initially, when a person engages in Torah-study for the tikun of his soul, the Torah is referred to as belonging to HKB”H, Who remedies a person’s soul. Ultimately, when this person engages in Torah-study l’shma, for the sake of the tikun of the Torah, she is then referred to as belonging to that person; for, it is now he who is influencing the Torah. This concludes his holy remarks.

The Author of Chiddushim is the Chasan Extending His Influence to the Torah—the Kallah

I saw in the Neos HaDesheh, from the great author of the Avnei Neizer, that he cites the author of the Tanya and adds the following: “ובפשוט כשמחדש חידושי תורה הוא באופן הנ”ל”—it seems clear that when a person comes up with chiddushim in the Torah, he falls into this category. In other words, when a person introduces his own novel interpretations of the Torah, illuminating the Torah with wisdom and deeper understanding, he has attained the level of learning Torah l’shma. He is extending his influence to the Torah with new insights that had not been revealed previously.

With this in mind, he adds the following: “ונראה לי שעל זה נוסדו שתי הברכות, המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל, כמו אב המלמד את בנו תורה, כמבואר במדרש שהקב”ה לומד לישראל תורה כמו אב לבנו והוא לתיקון בנו, והברכה השניה נותן התורה, שהתורה מאורסה לישראל שיפיעו בה.” It appears to me that this is the basis of the two Berachos. The berachah “המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל” is analogous to a father teaching his son Torah. As the Midrash explains, HKB”H teaches Yisrael Torah like a father teaching his son, for the tikun of his son. The second berachah “נותן התורה” expresses the fact that the Torah is betrothed to Yisrael, so that Yisrael will extend their influence to her.

Reflecting upon his holy remarks, he is telling us that there is a type of “talmid-chacham” that studies Torah and understands very well what is written in it. Yet, he lacks the ability to come up with original ideas—chiddushim; he cannot explain and clarify Torah issues and grasp their deeper meaning on his own. This “talmid-chacham” receives a tremendous amount of influence from the Torah, enabling him to rectify his soul, but he is unable to originate chiddushim. Therefore, in his relationship with the Torah, the Torah is the “chasan” providing the influence; he is the “kallah,” the recipient.

Then there is the “talmid-chacham” who is able to generate chiddushim; he understands how things relate to one another and achieves a deeper understanding of the Torah issues at hand. Now, this “talmid-chacham,” as it were, exerts his influence on the Torah, providing insights and knowledge that were heretofore unknown. In this relationship, he represents the “chasan” influencing the Torah; the Torah is the “kallah” receiving his influence. Now, without a doubt, all of these seemingly new insights were already inherent in the Torah. Nevertheless, since he revealed them and presented them in

a clear, comprehensible manner, he represents the influential “chasan” and the Torah represents the “kallah.”

Taking this notion one step further, it becomes evident that these two categories are in essence Torah she’b’chtav and Torah she’b’al peh. HKB”H gave Yisrael the Torah she’b’chtav via Moshe Rabeinu. It is immutable; we are not allowed to add to it or detract from it even one iota—such as the tip of the letter “yud.” Adding anything to one of the letters of a sefer Torah invalidates it. From this aspect, the Torah is the “chasan”; it provides the influence a Jew requires to purify and sanctify his soul. A Jew is not permitted to change a thing in the written Torah.

On the other hand, the Torah she’b’al peh was given to Yisrael in order to expound on the Torah she’b’chtav by means of the thirteen hermeneutic principles. It includes all of the chiddushim of the Torah generated by Yisrael’s Torah scholars throughout the generations. In this regard, the scholars of Torah she’b’al peh, who originate new interpretations and insights, represent the “chasan.” They exert their influence daily on Torah she’b’chtav with their novel perceptions. Thus, the Torah she’b’chtav represents the recipient, the “kallah.”

Now, we have successfully reconciled the contradiction between the two statements above. On the one hand, the Gemara states that the status of a sefer Torah is greater than that of a “talmid-chacham.” Therefore, if one is required to stand up out of respect for a Torah-scholar, it goes without saying that one is required to stand in the presence of a sefer Torah. This statement is speaking of a Torah-scholar who lacks the ability to originate chiddushim. As such, he receives the holy Torah’s influence in order to achieve the tikun his soul requires. He, however, lacks the ability to exert his influence on the Torah. Therefore, in this scenario, the status of the sefer Torah surpasses that of the “talmid-chacham.”

On the other hand, Rava’s statement: **“How foolish are some people, who stand up in honor of a sefer Torah, but they do not stand up in honor of a ‘gavra rabbah,’”** indicates that the honor of a great Torah-scholar surpasses the honor of a sefer Torah. He is speaking of those scholars who devote themselves to the study of Torah she’b’al peh; they possess the ability to generate chiddushim and novel interpretations of the halachah germane to each particular generation. They not only receive from the Torah, but they actually exert their influence on the Torah.

Thus, Rava supports his statement as follows: **“For it is written in the sefer Torah ‘forty’; the Rabbis came along and subtracted one.”** In other words, the sages in Torah she’b’al peh reveal the true meaning of Torah she’b’chtav. When the Torah says “ארבעים יכנו”, it actually means that thirty-nine lashes are to be administered, not forty. Thus, they exert their influence via their wisdom and knowledge to reveal that which is missing and not readily apparent from the simple text of Torah she’b’chtav. A scholar with this sort of acumen and power is referred to as a “gavra rabbah.” Concerning such a distinguished scholar, Rava states that he deserves a greater degree of honor than a sefer Torah. For, in this scenario, he is the “chasan” providing the influence, and the Torah is the “kallah” receiving his influence.

The White Areas of the Parchment Are on a Higher Level than the Black Letters of the Torah

As it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, let us reconcile the apparent contradiction between the two statements in the Gemara—regarding the “kavod” of a “talmid-chacham” versus the “kavod” of a sefer Torah—in a different way. We find the following statement in the Midrash (D.R. 3, 12): **“אמר ריש לקיש התורה שנתנה למשה עורה של—אש לבנה וכתובה באש שחורה—Reish Lakish said: The Torah that was given to Moshe, its parchment was of white fire and it was inscribed with black fire.** We find a similar statement in the Yerushalmi (Shekalim 1, 1): **“התורה שנתן לו הקב”ה למשה—נתנה לו אש לבנה חרותה באש שחורה—the Torah that HKB”H gave to Moshe was given to him as white fire etched with black fire.** Apparently, our sefer-Torahs are made up of black letters inscribed on white parchment to allude to the origins of the Torah from black fire on white fire.

To gain a better understanding of the concept of black fire upon white fire, let us refer to the Kedushas Levi (Likutim), authored by the great Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy”a. In his own sacred way, he addresses the passuk (Yeshayah 51, 4): **“כי תורה מאתי תצא”—for Torah will come forth from Me.** We find the following elucidation in the Midrash concerning this passuk (V.R. 13, 3): **“אמר הקב”ה תורה חדשה מאתי תצא, חידוש תורה—HKB”H said: “A new Torah will come forth from Me”—novel aspects of the Torah will come forth from Me.** This is seemingly difficult to comprehend, because it contradicts one of the thirteen principles of emunah: **שזאת התורה לא תהא**

“מוחלפת ולא תהיה תורה אחרת מאת הבורא יתברך שמו”—**this Torah will not be replaced and there will not be another Torah from the Creator, blessed is His name.** So, how is it possible to say: **“A new Torah will come forth from Me”?**

The Kedushas Levi explains that the black letters visible to all represent the black fire that every human being is capable of perceiving at least superficially. The white parchment, however, representing the white fire, contains no visible letters. It represents the light of the Torah that is beyond human comprehension. That light will be revealed le’atid la’vo; this is the implication of HKB”H’s statement: ---“תורה חדשה מאתי תצא”---**novel aspects of the Torah will come forth from Me.**

This also provides us with a rationale for the following teaching in the Gemara (M.K. 26a): **“אמר רבי חלבו אמר רב הונא, הרואה ספר תורה שנקרע חייב לקרוע שתי קריעות, אחד על הגויל ואחד על הכתב—Rabbi Chelbo said in the name of Rav Huna: A person who sees a sefer Torah that is torn (burnt) must tear two times—once for the parchment and once for the script.** Just as one must tear one’s garment for the script—the actual letters of the Torah—so, too, must one tear one’s garment for the parchment, which represents the white fire that will be revealed le’atid la’vo.

The Neshamos of Yisrael’s Sages Emanate from the White Fire

Let us elaborate on this concept further based on what the author of the Tanya writes in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 4). He explains that the origins of the Torah in the heavenly realm are infinite, without boundaries and without purpose. As such, it is beyond the scope of human comprehension. Seeing as the Torah represents HKB”H’s wisdom, it is infinite just as He is infinite. In His infinite mercy and kindness, however, HKB”H constricted His wisdom step by step until it could be confined within the letters of the Torah; so that we are able to appreciate it and understand it to some degree. This is the Torah that we are familiar with today.

In this manner, we can comprehend the Kedushas Levi’s explanation of the concept of black fire on top of white fire. The white fire of the Torah alludes to the origins of the Torah before it descended to earth in its restricted form, within the visible, black letters. Therefore, in Olam HaZeh, we are unable to comprehend or even perceive the white fire. It represents an “ohr meikif”—a surrounding light; it is unrestricted and is

beyond the grasp of human intelligence. [As we know, white alludes to unlimited chesed.] We can only begin to perceive it and comprehend it when it is restricted and confined in the form of the black letters. [As we know, black alludes to din, which confines and limits.] Le’atid la’vo, however, the material and corporeal confines, which limit the perception of the neshamah, will be abolished. Then we will be able to perceive and appreciate even that portion of the Torah represented by the white light—the unrestricted “ohr meikif.” Regarding this situation, it says: **“אמר הקב”ה תורה חדשה מאתי תצא, חדוש תורה מאתי תצא”** **HKB”H said: “A new Torah will come forth from Me”—novel aspects of the Torah will come forth from Me.**

With this understanding, we can begin to appreciate where the chiddushim of the Torah generated by our blessed sages throughout the generations originate from. These chiddushim apply both to the areas of Torah that are revealed and apparent (the “niglah”) and to the areas that are concealed and mystical (the “nistar”). All of our sages’ chiddushim interpreting the written letters of the Torah emanate from the white parchment—the white light representing the heavenly aspects of the Torah, before it was constricted.

Although the revelation of the secrets of the Torah from the white fire will occur primarily le’atid la’vo; nevertheless, HKB”H gave the sages of Yisrael the power to access this realm of the Torah, this white fire, through their tireless efforts in the study of Torah and service of Hashem. This enables them to elaborate, interpret and clarify the letters of the Torah above and beyond what is apparent from their confined, restricted form. For this reason, they are referred to as “chiddushei Torah”; because they originate from the novel interpretations of the Torah that will be revealed from the white fire le’atid la’vo: **“חידוש תורה מאתי תצא”**.

This ties in amazingly with the interpretation of the brilliant author of the Chavas Da’as regarding the passuk (Devarim 32, 47): **“כי לא דבר ריק הוא מכם”—for it is not an empty thing for you.** Do not think that the areas of parchment between the letters of a sefer Torah are empty and lack content. In truth, letters also exist in those spaces; however, they are concealed and not apparent. Based on this understanding, we can explain the meaning of the following Yerushalmi (Peiah 1, 1): **“אמר רבי מנא, כי לא דבר ריק הוא, ואם ריק הוא מכם היא, ולמה מפני שאין אתם יגעין מנא, כי לא דבר ריק הוא, ואתם ריק הוא מכם היא, ולמה מפני שאין אתם יגעין”—it is not empty, but if it seems empty and futile to you, it is merely because you are not exerting enough effort in your Torah studies. If you did expend the effort, you would**

be privileged to perceive insights and comprehension beyond the realm of the written letters of the Torah. Then you would understand that the areas of white parchment are not empty spaces. On the contrary! They represent the white fire from which the Torah originated before it was constricted; it is this fire that illuminates the black letters of the Torah.

Now, let us explore who exactly are the Neshamos that have a grasp of the black fire, represented by the black letters of the Torah after the process of constriction, and who exactly are the Neshamos that are able to grasp to some degree the white fire, the letters of the Torah prior to the process of constriction. It seems obvious that only the sages and leaders of Yisrael throughout the generations, who solidified the foundations of the Torah and safeguarded it, are the ones with access to the Torah in its original form—the concealed letters of white fire on a level above and beyond the letters we see in a sefer Torah. This distinguished group includes Moshe Rabeinu, the Tannaim, Amoraim and the preeminent scholars and leaders of Yisrael throughout the generations. As a result, they were granted incredible revelations in the realm of Torah she'b'al peh. The rest of Yisrael, however, who are not on their superior level, only have access to the black letters of the Torah, the restricted realm of the Torah.

Accordingly, it is imperative for every single Jew to establish a close relationship with the prominent Torah scholars of his times and in his vicinity. We see that the black letters in a sefer Torah cannot exist without the white parchment upon which they are written. In similar fashion, the segments of Yisrael associated merely with the visible letters of the Torah cannot exist without some sort of relationship and attachment to their Torah scholars—those who have an association with the white parchment representing the white fire, which exists above the level of the visible letters of the Torah.

A “Gavra Rabbah” Has Access to the White Fire of the Torah

At this point, we have reconciled the contradiction between the two somewhat conflicting statements in the Gemara. When the Gemara says that the “kavod” of a sefer Torah is greater than the “kavod” of a talmid-chacham, it is speaking

of a talmid-chacham who is rooted only in the black letters of the Torah. Therefore, he is referred to as a “talmid-chacham”; because he learns and receives from the chochmah of the Torah. Hence, it only stands to reason that it is necessary to stand in the presence of a sefer Torah: **קל וחומר, מפני לומדיה עומדים מפניה לא כל שכן**.

Rava, however, is not discussing this ordinary sort of talmid-chacham. He is talking about a “gavra rabbah,” who is rooted in the white areas of the sefer Torah. Those areas represent a much higher and deeper level than the visible letters of the Torah. Such a distinguished personage is able to extend his comprehension and perceptions from the white of the Torah to the black letters. Concerning a “gavra rabbah” of this sort, Rava stated that his “kavod” exceeds that of a sefer Torah. For, he represents the white fire that is on a higher level than the letters of the Torah. As we have explained, the visible letters in a sefer Torah are nurtured by the white areas of the sefer Torah.

This then is the thrust of Rava’s statement: **“How foolish are some people, who stand up in honor of a sefer Torah, but they do not stand up in honor of a ‘gavra rabbah.’”** In other words, these people stand up out of respect for a sefer Torah that is comprised of black letters inscribed on white parchment, alluding to the black fire on top of the white fire. That being the case, why don’t they stand up out of respect for a distinguished scholar who is connected to that superior white fire. Therefore, he concludes that they are foolish for believing that the white parchment is empty and devoid of letters.

He proves that the sages have access to the white fire, which is on a higher level than the letters of the Torah as follows: **“דאילו בספר תורה כתיב ארבעים, ואתו רבנן בצרו חדא”**. Even though the black letters of the sefer Torah clearly state: **“ארבעים יכנו”**—he shall deliver forty lashes to the guilty person; nevertheless, the sages—having access to the superior white fire—came along and understood that thirty-nine lashes would suffice. So, if we stand in the presence of a sefer Torah, acknowledging the “kavod” due the black letters within it, all the more so should we stand in the presence of a “gavra rabbah.” For, he is connected with the white fire, possessing a status superior to that of the letters.

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