

Parsha Beha'alotcha

In this week's parsha, Beha'alotcha, Moshe says "Stand and I will hear what Hashem will command you." Rambam tells us that Moshe is unique among prophets in that only he could speak to Hashem whenever he desired. Because of this distinction it is surprising that Yehoshua declined Moshe's offer to answer any questions for him before Moshe passed away. As a consequence, Yehoshua forgot 300 laws and became murky on many other ideas, and once Moshe had passed away there was no longer a way to clarify these laws or ideas on his own. R. Yaakov Kamenetsky suggests that Yehoshua should have deferred to Moshe's knowledge of what he needed, as his teacher.

One lesson for the students among us is that we never stop learning and should never believe that we know all there is to know. Even Yehoshua, who had constantly been by Moshe's side, erred in not asking for Moshe to complete his instruction as he deemed fit. A subtler lesson that may be inferred here might be that, as a teacher it is important that we teach students how to learn on their own in the eventual case that we are no longer there to guide our students. In fact, we find out in Tractate Temura that Asniel Ben Kenaz stepped in and deduced the 300 lost laws through the skills he had acquired as a learner. If students can only learn from us, then their learning will cease when we are separated. If our students know how to learn on their own, then their learning never needs to end. In this particular case, of course, Moshe did not have the luxury or ability to train Yehoshua in communicating with Hashem at will; this was why Yehoshua's response to Moshe's offer for further instruction particularly had to be answered in the affirmative!

May we all strive to be lifelong learners who teach our own students and children how to be lifelong learners themselves.

