

“Tradition”
Brachos 21b
Rabbi Yaakov Berkowitz

Tradition...Tradition. We know it in word, in song and in life. This week's *amud* highlights this concept. The *gemara* says that one who teaches his child (according to other versions, his grandchild) *Torah*, it is considered as though he received the *Torah* [directly from G-d at Sinai]. Why is this so? Why would it not suffice for a child to learn from a teacher or rabbi? What is so unique about a father teaching *Torah* to his child that makes it so irreplaceable and to such a degree that it is akin to receiving it from Sinai?

It would seem that the answer to this question lies in the most fundamental aspect of Judaism. Tradition. The following anecdote brings out this point, the outcome of such an attitude, and the converse. In his old age, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky (1891-1986) was once traveling to Israel with his son and granddaughter. Although, due to his infirmity, he was sitting in business class while his son and granddaughter were in coach, his children waited on him hand and foot, ensuring that all his needs were taken care of and he was comfortable. Sitting next to him was a Knesset Member, the head of the *Histadrut* party. Throughout the flight he enjoyed conversing with Reb Yaakov and couldn't help but notice the extreme care and concern being shown to Reb Yaakov by his children. He said to Reb Yaakov, “I rarely see my grandchildren, and certainly do not enjoy this type of relationship with them; I don't think I ever would receive such loving treatment from my children and grandchildren. Tell me, Rabbi, what is the secret of your close connection with your family?” Reb Yaakov replied, “for those who believe in Darwin and his theory of random evolution, every successive generation is more refined and developed than its predecessors. Why, then, should the young honor the old? However, in our tradition, every earlier generation is closer to the Sinai experience and the source of our specialness as a people. My children and grandchildren look up to me because it is through me that they have a connection to our people.”

This is the key to ensuring that our children respect us, and, in reality, the key to our survival. Tradition. We are part of a chain from Sinai, and it is our duty to continue that chain, conveying the uniqueness of the Jewish people and the significance of the *Torah*. With this story in mind, and the lesson it teaches, which we yearn to emulate, we can understand our *gemara*. The reason why it is considered as if he received the *Torah* from [Hashem at] Sinai when taught by his parent is because it is the tradition “from parent to child” which keeps us extant. Through the recognition that his father is there to pass on the tradition, and that our survival as a people is dependent on that tradition, one can truly appreciate the *Torah* that he is being taught, and therefore feel, and it will be considered, as though he is receiving it directly from Sinai.