

1. Points:

a) R. Yochanan ben Zakkai is depicted as someone who never said anything not explicitly rooted in tradition, and who never took time away from Torah, and who was capable of creating students who followed his ways.

b) R. Yochanan ben Zakkai was the least of Hillel HaZakein's students.

c) R. Yochanan ben Zakkai studied Torah from A-Z.

Question: Is דבר גדול ודבר קטן a summary description of the preceding list, or an addition to the list?

Question: What are מעשה מרכבה (make sure they know of יתזקאל פרק א) and היות דאביי ורביא?

Question: How minor is a דבר קטן?

2. Points:

a) דבר קטן is only minor relative to דבר גדול

b) דבר קטן refers to undecided discussions resulting from ירידת הדורות. These are still more גדול than all non-Torah wisdom

c) But Talmud, in the sense of discussion that leads to clear halakhic conclusions, is as great as דבר גדול, as witness its inclusion early in his curriculum

d) This explanation is clear, and we must reject the dangerous alternate explanation.

Question: What is the alternate explanation, and why is it dangerous?

3. Points:

a) מעשה מרכבה is knowledge that should be tightly held

4. Points:

a) מעשה מרכבה seems mystical

b) מעשה מרכבה, contra Ritva, seems to provoke a greater reaction than halakhic discussion

5. Points:

a) מעשה מרכבה is rationally discoverable, forcing reinterpretation of 4

b) curricular priority, contra Ritva, is no measure of significance

c) דבר קטן, contra Ritva, includes all law-oriented discussion

d) Rambam is presumably the opinion that horrified Ritva

6. Points:

a) Philosophy of religion should not be the philosophy of either privileged religious experience or abstract intellectual creations with no real-life grounding. (Note: This doesn't mean that the philosophy has to be mass-marketable, just that it has to relate to the experiences and capabilities of the masses.. This makes the mystical מעשה מרכבה irrelevant to "philosophy of religion".

b) Rambam's philosophy is, in a word, unJewish.

c) If we assume that "philosophy of religion = דבר גדול, the Rav z"l has eliminated both prior contenders for the definition.

7. Points:

a) The assertion that "they need no commentary" establishes this as central

b) The study of halakhot for their own sake is more important than religious experience.

Question: What role do philosophy and mysticism play here?

8. Points:

a) The Rav says that the point of this essay is to explore the person who lives in the only place left to Hashem in this world

9. Points:

a) Halakhic man has no interest in mysticism, i.e. in at least one type of מעשה מרכבה

10-11. Points:

a) Halakhic man has no interest in practical halakhah

b) But, contra Ritva, the abstract discussion is more valuable than the practical halakhah, which seems not to be **even** a דבר קטן

12-13. Points:

a) Law is more central than speculative philosophy to understanding Judaism, i.e. halakhah is more philosophically important than Rambam's דבר גדול.

Overall:

The Rav zt"l argues, in powerful contemporary philosophic terms, that in our era the ultimate religious personality is the theoretical halakhist who has no interest in the supreme value of Rambam or even the secondary value of Ritva, and seemingly for that matter in contemporary philosophy. However:

- a) his denunciation of Rambam in 6 relies on Hegel
- b) his glorification of abstract over concrete halakhah in 11 relies on Plato
- c) His quote of R. Chayyim Volozhin in 7 elides the sections in which R. Chaim seems to sound very much like Rambam re דבר קטן as propaedeutic to דבר גדול
- d) In 8 he admits that he is exploring the consciousness of the master of what the גמרא calls דבר קטן

Two possible conclusions:

- a) The Rav believed that in the post-Temple era the possibility of serious דבר גדול had been lost, and his own time in philosophy et al were either moments of weakness or sacrifices for the communal good
- b) The Rav was trying to bring to life, and show the greatness of, a particular type of religious personality, without arguing that this was necessarily the ultimate religious personality. He would argue in any case that this a necessary stage on the road to the ultimate.
- c) The Rav himself was unsure which.

Final note: The גמרא describes the master of דבר גדול as one who transmits rather than creates (even though the Mishnah implies that the דבר גדול cannot be taught!). The Rav argues in Halakhic Man that creativity is the hallmark of the דבר קטן! **בעל דבר קטן!** But the Rav was, as we have seen, creative in both areas . . .