

A good way to judge a known rabbinical figure is to look at his works with a perspective of the passing generations. We should ask such questions as: Is his name known to everybody even after he passed away? Does his spiritual guidance serve as a path that people have continued to follow for many years?

An interesting example of this concept can be seen in the book "Dor Revi'i" (Fourth Generation), written by Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Glazer, who was the rabbi of the city of Kloizenberg for forty-two years. Dor Revi'i is a wide-ranging book on the tractate of Chulin. To explain the name of the book, he wrote: "It is because I am the first one in the fourth generation from the Chatam Sofer, and I bear his name. I hope he will not be ashamed of me or of my Torah." That is, the author is the oldest great-grandson of the Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Glazer was the son of the Chatam Sofer's daughter's daughter). Rabbi Glazer did not have the privilege of meeting the Chatam Sofer, but he was named for him. Thus the name, Fourth Generation, notes his relationship to the famous rabbi. Rabbi Glazer was recognized as a Torah genius from an early age. When he was nine years old, he attended lessons given in his grandfather's yeshiva. In order to prevent him from showing pride over this fact, his father would often tell him that his success in study was the result of his family history. He was the descendant of generations of Torah scholars who labored hard to study the Torah, and this made it easy for him. Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Glazer joined the Mizrachi movement. Near the end of his life he moved to Jerusalem, where he passed away in 5685 (1925).

Rabbi Glazer's approach to study emphasized honest logic and a sense of criticism, and he stayed far away from "pilpul," hair-splitting analysis. In this, he followed his great-grandfathers lead. He writes about himself, "I have faith in the words of a faithful righteous man, a man who was great for the fearing Jews, a pillar of teaching in the previous generation, my great-grandfather, the holy author of the Chatam Sofer... His soul was upset by the twisted path others took... explaining the words of the earlier rabbis in a way that is far removed from simple logic, saying in fact that the right side is on the left side."

As an example of the clear way that he thought, we will take the issue of religion and science.

One of the main issues within the broad range of questions about the relationship between Torah and science – and whether they are compatible or not – involves animals that are listed in the Mishna in the beginning of the third chapter of Chulin as unkosher ("tareif" – when an animal has sustained an injury that will definitely lead to its death). The Mishna gives a detailed list of eighteen injuries which make the animal unfit to eat and ends with a common definition that fits them all: "Here is the general rule: Anything that cannot live with such an injury is unkosher" [Chulin 42a]. Any injury sustained by an animal such that it cannot continue to live makes it unfit to eat, even if it was slaughtered according to the halacha.

Among the specific injuries that appear in the Mishna are such examples as a hole in the food pipe, a hole in the lung, and so on. Today it is well known that some of the injuries listed are not life-threatening at all. Today operations are performed on the food pipe, on the intestines, and even on the lungs without any fear for the lives of the patients. People donate entire lobes of their lungs to be implanted in the bodies of their dear ones who have an injury in their lungs, because it has been shown that the level of danger to the donor is very low. The question that can be asked is: How can halacha and scientific reality be reconciled? There are two different approaches to this dilemma which were already proposed by the early commentators, and it seems that these two approaches can still be found today. One approach is that of the Rashba in his Responsa, while the other is that of the Rambam in his book of law. One approach is not to test the words of the sages with scientific tools and to accept their statements at face value. Those who hold the other approach, on the other hand, accept that the medical and scientific knowledge that we have today indeed contradicts what we were taught by the sages, but that the halacha is not to be changed, for various reasons. (See a comprehensive discussion of this issue in the book by Rabbi Neria Gatal, Natural Changes in Halacha, Book 1, Chapter 4).

Rabbi Avraham Korman discusses such questions in his books analyzing halacha and reality. In a visit to the Rambam Library, he showed me the correct approach of Rabbi Shmuel Glazer, in the introduction to Dor Revi'i. His main point is that there are indeed differences between what is known to halacha and physical reality but we are still obligated to abide by the halachic rulings. "If a generation living after the Mishna was sealed finds that the authors of the Mishna made a mistake and if a generation after the Talmud was sealed finds that the authors of the Talmud made a mistake, we can only continue to abide by the laws as agreed upon by the earlier rabbis, whether they are lenient or stringent. As is written in the Chinuch, it is better for us to accept a mistake in a single halacha than to destroy the entire edifice of halacha. Even if the original was based on natural science or other general wisdom, we cannot change what was accepted as halacha in the Mishna or the Talmud."

In short, the book Dor Revi'i continues in the tradition of logical study as was taught by the Chatam Sofer.