

Do not accept less than the age of six – בבציר מבר שית לא תקבל –

OVERVIEW

רב instructed בר שילת not to accept a student who is younger than six years of age. משנה reconciles this with a seemingly contradictory תוספות.

responds to an anticipated difficulty:

והא דתנן במסכת אבות (פרק ה' משנה כ"א) בן חמש שנים למקרא¹ בריא לגמרי² -

And this which the משנה teaches in מסכת אבות, at five years old a child should be taught חומש, that is only if he is completely healthy –

offers support to his view:

כדאמר בכתובות (דף נ"א ושם) הלומד בנו פחות מבן שש רץ אחריו ואינו מגיעו³ -

As states in כתובות, 'one who teaches his son when he is less than six years old, he may run after him, but he will not reach him. The גמרא continues -

ואיכא דאמרי חבריו רצין אחריו ואין מגיעין אותו⁴ ותרוייהו⁵ איתנהו דחליש וגמיר -

And some say that his friends run after him, but they cannot reach him; the גמרא concludes; 'and both these statements are true, he is weak (like the first interpretation) and he is learned' (like the ד"א). The גמרא offers an alternate view -

ואיבעית אימא⁶ הא בכחוש והא⁷ בריא:

And if you want I can say, this (that he will be sick) is regarding a weak child, **and this** (the ד"א) is by a healthy child.

SUMMARY

A child who is בריא לגמרי can begin learning at five years old.

THINKING IT OVER

Perhaps בן חמש in the משנה means when he completed his five years and is entering his sixth year and כבן שש here means when he is entering his sixth year, so there is

¹ This seemingly contradicts our גמרא which requires the child be at least six years old (not five).

² In the previous תוס' ד"ה כבן we were told that a weak child begins learning at seven years old, and a healthy child (בריא) at six years old, however a בריא לגמרי can begin even at five years old.

³ See רש"י there that this means the father will attempt to revive him and make him healthy (רץ אחריו), but he will not be successful (ואינו מגיעו) for he is in danger of dying because of his excessive weakness.

⁴ He is too advanced so they cannot keep up with him.

⁵ This view reconciles that both the first לשון and the second are true by the same child, he is weak but smart.

⁶ The ואיבעית אימא maintains that the two previous statements are discussing two different types of children.

⁷ The 'ואיבעית אימא' in the גמרא there substantiates what תוספות says here that by a בריא [לגמרי], he can begin even younger than six years old.

no contradiction at all!⁸

⁸ See תורת חיים.