Rabbi Yosef Hayon (15th Century, Portugal)

Not many details are known about the biographical data of rabbi Yosef Hayon (or Hayun). We know that he was born and died in Lisbon, Portugal. And that his main rabbinical activity must have been between 1440 and 1480. We also know that he was considered "The last Rabbi of Lisbon", before the forced conversion of the Portuguese Jews in 1496. Rabbi Hayon was one of the four students of rabbi Isaac Canpanton (1360-1463), the Gaon of Castile (Spain) and author of *darkhe haTalmud*, a book that instructs teachers and rabbis how to teach the Talmud.

We also know that Rabbi Hayon lead a selected group of students to whom he taught the *More Nebukhim*, Maimonides' Guide of Perplexed, a book that requires, beyond mastery of Biblical and rabbinical literature, a vast knowledge of philosophy, language and science. Among his students in that circle was the celebrate Rabbi Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508)

Rabbi Hayon wrote commentaries on most Biblical books. But most of those books are not extant today. What we do have in its entirety is his commentary on Pirqe Abot, written in 1470 .

Some of the personal characteristic of Rabbi Hayon might be learned from his commentaries about the ideal Tora Scholar.

Rabbi Hayon says (p. 163, Venezia Edition): "If a Tora scholar wants to have many students, he has to be a role model. If the teacher's personal actions do not reflect his wisdom and his moral teachings, he will not have students".

When a Tora scholar teaches or speaks (p. 104), "he has to use few words with rich meaning, and not many words with little

meaning… long discourses are not easy to digest for the students”

A rabbi (p.281) “cannot loss his temper, not just with his students but with every person, because anger and wisdom exclude each other (כי הכעס מעלים חכמה). On the contrary , the rabbi has to be friendly with all those who come to learn from him. This attitude is what will allow students to getting closer to the rabbi”.

Rabbi Hayon explains (p.174) that there is a balance to be kept in the relationship between a rabbi and his students. The rabbi, being an authority, has to behave with humbleness toward his students. But the students should not behave toward the rabbi according to the rabbi’s humbleness; the students must act toward the rabbi with the respect owed to a high authority.
Rabbi Yosef’s great humbleness is reflected in one of his commentaries (p.187) where he says that a student should not learn just from one rabbi (תלמיד חכמים), “because even a great rabbi could be mistaken in some of his opinions, and other rabbis with less knowledge might have great ideas”. Let’s remember that this encouragement is coming from the *Senior* Rabbi of Portugal.

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