

חנּוּפָה

Flattery

The great evil of flattery is explicit in the words of our Sages in the Talmud and midrashim. A pure man, HaRav Rebbe Chaim Vital, has collected them in his holy work, Sha'arei Kedushah. A G-d-fearing man who studies his work will vehemently oppose flattery and it will be as a sign between his eyes. Nonetheless, it is necessary to define what flattery is. There are things that are not flattery, yet those who are lacking intelligence think that it is. For example, they consider a person who honors a wealthy man a flatterer. A person who protests against and disparages the rich takes pride in his folly and claims that he does not know how to flatter. There is no morality in his mouth, for it is proper and befitting to show respect to the rich. We found (Eruvin 86a) that Rabeinu HaKadosh honored the rich, and Rebbe Akiva also honored them. The reason is that since the King desires this man's prestige and has bestowed upon him blessing from Above, we too are obligated to honor him. Especially if a person received from him any good or benefit, he is obviously obliged to

show him deference. Furthermore, the individual who has more possessions most likely increases his performance of mitzvot and good deeds more than others, and makes amends for his sins with charity. It is proper to show him some respect even if he has done something inappropriate and has deviated from the straight path. A person should not treat him in a demeaning way, as we found in the Talmud (Pesachim 53a) that our Sages said, “If not that you are *Todus*, I would excommunicate you!” The sages explained that he used to place provisions in the pockets of Torah scholars. However, the concept of flattery applies in one of two situations – the first one is severe and the second one is even more so. The first one is when a man shows his fellow a friendly countenance and extra love, yet his mouth and his heart are not the same. With his mouth he speaks words of peace, but, inside of himself, he sets a trap for him. Even if he is not his enemy and does not seek his demise, to the extent that he displays great love and honor more than he truly feels inside, he has stumbled on the sin of flattery. This degree of flattery our Sages allowed towards a person’s wife, for the sake of domestic peace, and towards his rabbi, so that he should teach him Torah. A person is also allowed to flatter wicked people due to the ways of peace.

However, the second situation is evil and bitter – this refers to someone who says to evil, “You are good!” and he does not reprove or protest (referring to a person who is in a position to do so). Besides the fact that he is held accountable for that person’s transgression as if he did it, he will surely be punished for a major violation of flattery. The man who is pure and fears G-d should not favor the poor nor show deference to the wealthy; he should not have pity upon himself lest he lose honor or benefit. Rather,

he should trust in G-d that He will not withhold good from those who walk before Him with absolute faith. A person who enhances the honor of Heaven will have his own honor increased, and he will not lack any riches. He should roar like a lion and raise his voice like a shofar to protest against anyone who he can influence. We will write more about this in the entry, Tochachah, with Divine assistance. The verse (Mishlei, 28:4) says, “Those who abandon the Torah will praise the wicked; those who keep the Torah will challenge them.” And, it is written (Tehillim, 139:21), “Indeed your enemies, O’ G-d, I will hate.” As such, favoring the wicked man is not good. Additionally, it is forbidden to look in the face of an evil man who is famous for being an informer or one who commits sins flagrantly in public. It is befitting for every G-d-fearing person, even if he does not have the ability to protest, to at least flee from before him so that he need not show him any favor, display any respect for him, express any fear of him, or desire any benefit from him. Rather, the wicked man should be loathsome and despicable in his eyes, and the righteous man he will honor. Due to sin, flattery is prevalent and there is almost no one who is innocent of it. However, the man who fears G-d, believes that He will bring everything in judgment, and knows the enormous evil of flattery will not follow after the many in wrongdoing. This person will be strong as a lion to do that which is good and upright in the eyes of G-d, even if it is not “upright” in the eyes of boorish men. He should balance his affairs with justice according to the Torah, and G-d will help him!

