

FLEEING FROM HONOR II

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Dedicated in Loving Memory of Harry Mitnick [Tzvi Herschel bar Moshe] A"H, by his granddaughter, Rita Matcher Silverman.

When Yaakov concluded his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet onto the bed and breathed his last, and he was gathered to his people.(Bereshith 49:33)

The previous essay gave the examples of Yaakov Avinu and great Torah scholars who made it their top priority to flee from honor. These examples raise the following questions: Why does one need to go out of his way to avoid praise? What is so bad about a little recognition for one's accomplishments? Furthermore, our Sages tell us that if someone runs away from honor, honor will chase after him.¹ If honor is negative and should be shunned, why does God burden a person who really does not want it with even more honor? On the other hand, if honor is good, what motivates one to run away from it?

True honor, i.e. that which brings glory to God, is definitely praiseworthy. However it carries with it an inherent danger: one could make the mistake of thinking that he is being honored, and not the Divine glory that he represents. Someone who realizes how infinitely far away he is from his Creator, and expresses this by fleeing from honor, recognizes that only God is deserving of true glory. He will not make the error of pride, and consequently, when he does receive honor, the Divine name will be sanctified.

There are times when one must put humility aside, and admit one's Torah knowledge. If a Rav is approached with questions of practical halachah, the Torah obliges him, if he is capable to answer every pertinent question.² Even if someone asks him a question that is not relevant, it is important for a Rav to answer it, so that people will come back to him with their more pertinent questions.³ Likewise, a teacher should answer every question his students ask him, since that is his job and he must be a strong leader and role model to his students. If he does not answer certain questions because he wishes to be humble, a student may lose respect for him and will not want to continue to learn from him.⁴

1. *Eruvin* 13b.

2. *Tosfoth Bava Metzia* 23b.

3. Avnei Kodesh Bava Metzia 23b.

4. Responsa Lev Chaim 1:5.

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