

TALMUD TORAH 6:3

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

3. It is inappropriate for a scholar to trouble the people, aiming to walk near them in order that they should stand in his presence; rather, he should take the shortest route, intending that they not see him, not to trouble them to stand. The sages used to go around [take the longer way] where those who recognized them were not found in order not to trouble them.

Q1: Why does R advise the scholars to take the shortest way, when the sages (of whose actions he evidently approves) took the longest way?

YE: R is simply saying that a scholar should not go out of his way to "gain" more honor - he should just go his normal way and, if that involves passing near people who recognize him as a scholar, so be it. He then accentuates the notion that "seeking" such honor is not a positive approach by noting that scholars would even go out of their way for the opposite goal - to avoid that honor.

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