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Flattery

Destruction of Beis HaMikdash

∞ 32.1 ∞

The issue of flattery plays an important role in human relationships. There is also a significant connection between flattery and hatred, which deserves an introduction.

As cited earlier many times, the second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of unjustifiable hatred. The Gemara¹ mentions that Yerushalayim was destroyed as a result of an incident involving Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. A certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza.² He made a banquet and sent his servant to invite his friend, Kamtza. The servant mistakenly invited his enemy, Bar Kamtza. When the host saw Bar Kamtza sitting at the banquet table, he approached him and told him that being his enemy, he did not belong there and should get up and leave. Bar Kamtza responded by offering to pay for his participation. The host insisted that he leave. Bar Kamtza then offered to pay for half of the banquet if he would allow him to stay, but

1. *Gittin* 55b.

2. According to *Maharsha*, Bar Kamtza was the son of Kamtza.

the host refused. In order to save himself from public humiliation, Bar Kamtza offered to pay for the entire banquet if he would just allow him to stay, but the host refused, and took him by the arm and sent him out.

Bar Kamtza was mortified, and said to himself, since all the rabbis were present at the banquet and none of them intervened or reprimanded the host for treating him that way, evidently his behavior was acceptable to them. He therefore decided that he would slander them in the royal court of Rome. His slander resulted in the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash.

The *Maharsha* points out that the hatred between the host and Bar Kamtza led to the destruction, which supports what *Chazal* have said, that the second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of undue hatred. The question as to why the rabbis did not reprimand the host and did not protest his behavior is also dealt with by the *Maharsha*. He offers two explanations:

First he suggests, that they were unable to reprove him. This is unlikely because protesting his behavior would certainly not have placed their lives in tangible danger, and that being the case, such silence would be forbidden as flattery.³ Even if Kamtza were a scoffer and never accepted rebuke, they would still have been obliged to protest so as not to flatter him. Furthermore, if Kamtza were a scoffer, why were all the great rabbis present at his party?

Therefore, the second explanation of the *Maharsha* seems more likely, that their lack of protest was sheer flattery which, he points out, was very common in those days.

Bar Kamtza did not resolve to slander their names to the royal court of Rome because of the hatred displayed by the

3. This Halachah is cited later in the name of Rabbeinu Yonah.

host, but because the rabbis sat there in quiet acquiescence. As a matter of fact, according to many Poskim it would seem that there was no sin of hatred involved on the part of the host because he made it perfectly clear to Bar Kamtza that he hated him. As cited earlier, the Rambam, Chinuch and many others maintain that open hatred is not a violation of hatred in the heart. This is also the halachic opinion of the Chafetz Chaim.

Accordingly, this story would not be symbolic of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash because of hatred in the heart since this was an open hatred, and was not a violation of the sin of hatred in the heart. One might argue that perhaps Bar Kamtza did not know that the host hated him until he told him at the banquet and had he known, he would not have come. However, the *Maharsha* explains that he came knowing that they were enemies, because he surmised that the host might have wanted to make up with him.

Alternatively, maybe Bar Kamtza interpreted the rabbis' silence as a sign that they hated him in their hearts. This might then be symbolic of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash because of hatred. However, this cannot be the reason for their silence, because publicly shaming him was a grave sin, and should not have been condoned even if they did hate him. As the *Maharsha* attributes their silence to flattery, hatred was attributed only to the host and Bar Kamtza. Thus it becomes clear that although the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash was brought about by the character of hatred, flattery played a major role.

In fact, one of the major causes of hatred can be attributed to the silent acquiescence of spiritual leaders to sin and vice. When people unabashedly wield brutal power because of their wealth or influence and hurt the innocent, especially the most vulnerable and defenseless, the spiritual leaders are obliged to react decisively and forcefully, to defend the victims, to

champion the truth, and to exact justice. If they fail to do this, the social fabric becomes torn and soiled and hatred abounds. Hatred coupled with flattery was the ultimate cause of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash.

There is another connection between hatred and flattery, which makes flattery an appropriate topic for discussion at this point. Much was discussed about how you are supposed to relate to a sinful person. As explained in detail, this issue is complex and is the subject of much halachic debate. Whatever the case, you must be careful not to flatter the sinner, and not to give the impression that his misconduct is acceptable.

Definition

∞ 32.2 ∞

Flattery is both a negative character trait and a violation of two sins in the Torah:

- 1) "And you shall not bring guilt upon the Land."⁴
- 2) "And you shall not contaminate the Land."⁵

The flatterer contaminates the Land (of Eretz Yisrael), and causes the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) to depart.⁶

4. *Bamidbar* 35:33.

5. *Ibid.* 35:34. See *Yera'im* 65 citing the *Sifrei*. The Torah is referring in particular to the one who sins and accepts a monetary payment as a punishment for murder. That is a kind of flattery because it minimizes the severity of the evil of murder. The Ramban (*Sefer HaMitzvos, Shoresh 5*) also maintains that flattery is an absolute negative commandment in the Torah, but for various reasons he does not include it in the list of six hundred and thirteen mitzvos. Others, like the Bahag (167) and *Sefer Azharos (Lavin 307)* include it in the list of six hundred and thirteen mitzvos.

6. *Sifrei*, *Ibid.*

∞ 32.3 ∞

Rabbeinu Yonah⁷ lists nine categories of flattery, representing nine levels of severity.⁸ (These are listed further.) Their common theme is that the flatterer lends backing and support to the wicked and their actions. This is the generally accepted definition of flattery.⁹ *Chazal* say that one who shows honor to the wicked, is likened to an idol worshipper.¹⁰ When a person honors evildoers or evil deeds, he is in fact worshipping evil, which is idolatry.

∞ 32.4 ∞

Many Poskim say that a person who pretends to be righteous but is not, is also a flatterer.¹¹ Accordingly, flattery includes

7. *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 3:189–199.

8. It is not clear that every one of those levels is *mi-d'Oraisa*, especially given that the Torah is explicitly referring to a very serious level of flattery, as described earlier.

9. *Metzudas Dovid* (*Issiah* 9:16). The *Gra* says that the word “*channef*” (flatterer) in that verse, refers to the evil inclination of desire, and refers to those who are wicked toward Heaven, but nice to other people. This is different from how flattery is defined by everyone else.

10. *Tosefta, Avodah Zarah* 7:6.

11. See *Yoma* 86b that you should make known who the flatterers are, because of *chilul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name). Rashi explains that this refers to one who pretends to be righteous but is not. The desecration to Hashem's Name comes from the fact that people learn from his ways because they mistake him to be a *tzaddik*, and also because, when he receives Divine punishment, people will wonder why his merit did not help him. This would also fit with the Ibn Ezra (*Parashas Massai*) who writes that flattery means secretly doing evil. According to Rashi, you would make his flattery known even if he did not receive any particular benefits from acting that way. If he pretends to be a kabbalistic miracle worker and *tzaddik*, and people cue up waiting for his blessings, according to both reasons you should make it known. However, you are only permitted to make it known if your intention is purely for the sake

anything, good or bad, which one does in order to find favor in the eyes of others.¹²

This does not mean that he does some things that are beyond his true level of observance, because that is normal and accepted and that is the way a person grows spiritually. It also does not mean that he is more exact and efficient in his performance of mitzvot when others are present or aware

of Heaven and you are not doing it with any other motive. See *Chafetz Chaim* (Klal 4:7 and 10:4).

Also, some refer to talking one way and feeling differently in your heart, as flattery. *Sha'arei Kedushah* vol. 2 ch. 5 — Rosh (*Orchos Chaim* 103); *Reishis Chochmah* (*Sha'ar HaKedushah* ch. 12); *Peleh Yoetz* (*Chanufa*).

Also, see Targum on *Yirmeyahu* (23:11) who explains that it means גניבו אורחיהוּן — “they stole their ways.” This also supports the explanation that it means fooling people to find favor in their eyes. The commentaries on *Yirmeyahu* explain the verse in the more standard way — which refers to flattering people instead of speaking the truth.

12. This is the explanation of *Tosafot*, *Sotah* 41b; Ramban (*Massai* 35:33), and *Sefer Chareidim* 24:48. They write that by doing this, the flatterer shows that he fears people more than he fears God.

Chazal say that one who steals secretly (*ganev*) is worse than one who steals openly (*gazlan*). The one who steals secretly fears people more than he fears God, but the one who steals openly does not fear people more than he fears God. That is why only the former is fined and must pay double. However, this does not mean that every *ganev* is a flatterer. As a matter of fact, few people actually fear Hashem more than, or even as much as, they fear people, which is why Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai blessed his students that they should reach the level where they fear Hashem as much as they fear people. The problem with the flatterer is that he does things that are driven primarily by this force of trying to find favor in the eyes of others, and that is what labels him a flatterer. The thief steals because he wants the object — not because he wants to find favor in the eyes of others. If he won't steal in front of other people it is because he fears the repercussions of getting caught by people more than he fears the repercussions of Hashem's justice. This is an issue of fear of God and not the specific issue of flattery. He is not trying to appear to be anything, but he is simply lacking fear of God.

of his actions. Although a person should strive to transcend that level, functioning at that level of righteousness is not sinful behavior. Even Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai blessed his *talmidim* that their fear of God should be as great as their fear of people. However, if while in the presence of others, he acts above his true level, with the conscious purpose of creating a false impression, this is both flattery and *genaivas da'as*.

∞ 32.5 ∞

Doing, or pretending to do, mitzvos, in order to find favor in the eyes of others, is from the milder forms of flattery, but is also *genaivas da'as*, which was discussed in chapter 11.

When an ignorant person goes around dressed up as a talmid chacham, it is both flattery and genaivas da'as.

∞ 32.6 ∞

If doing good things can be considered flattery, lending support to a sinner or to sinful activity is certainly forbidden flattery. If lending support to a sinner or his sinful activity in order to find favor in the eyes of others is a serious form of flattery, all the more so is actually sinning in order to find favor in their eyes. The details are discussed further.

The Evils of Flattery

∞ 32.7 ∞

Chazal say:¹³

There are four categories of people who do not see the *Shechinah* after they depart from this world: scoffers,

13. *Sotah* 42a. Flatterers are included because it is written (*Job* 13:16) "For a flatterer will not come before Him."

flatterers, liars, those who speak *lashon ha-ra*.

Rabbi Elazar says that a flatterer brings Hashem's wrath upon the world and his prayers are not heard.

Rabbi Elazar says, even the unborn children curse the person who harbors the character of flattery.¹⁴

Rabbi Elazar says, anyone who harbors the character trait of flattery falls into Gehinnom.¹⁵

Rabbi Elazar says that anyone who flatters someone eventually falls into his hands, or into the hands of his children or his grandchildren.¹⁶

Rabbi Elazar says that any community that harbors flattery, will eventually be exiled.¹⁷

☞ 32.8 ☞

Throughout the generations even those who were considered great people were often guilty of at least a touch of flattery.¹⁸ The Gemara says:

Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta said, from the day that flattery gained strength, the judicial system became corrupted

14. *Sotah* 41b.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Sotah* 42a.

17. *Ibid.*

18. See *Sotah* 41b that even Yirmeyahu, the prophet, was guilty of flattering Hanania and was punished. Rashi explains that, Hanania delivered a false prophecy regarding the exile of Yechanya and the holy vessels that were taken with him out of Eretz Yisrael, and said that they would return in two years. Yirmeyahu, upon hearing this, said to him, "Were it that Hashem would so do." This was considered flattery. Even though Yirmeyahu did not agree with Hanania, and only said this as a prayer, he should have immediately protested Hanania's words, since he knew that they were a false prophecy. He did protest this false prophecy shortly after he heard it from Hanania, but he should have protested it immediately without even momentarily giving the impression of entertaining any thought of it.

(Rashi: the judges used to flatter those who came to them for judgment), and peoples' deeds became corrupted (Rashi: since the leaders did not protest against wrongdoers), and nobody can say 'my deeds are greater than yours' (Rashi: since the leaders did not protest the wrongdoers, everybody learned from their ways and they all sinned).

To Protect Yourself

∞ 32.9 ∞

Rabbeinu Yonah writes¹⁹ that you are obliged to place yourself in danger rather than sin by flattering the wrongdoer and justifying his sins. He probably does not mean to forbid flattery when there is a foreseen danger to life, in which case you must save your life. He is referring to where there is only a remote possibility of danger.²⁰ However, it is possible that

19. *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 3:188.

20. See *Yad HaKetannah* (*Hilchos De'os* 10:13). The example cited by Rabbeinu Yonah is not one that presents any tangible danger. He cites the Gemara in *Sotah* 41b about Agrippas, a king who ruled over the Jews by force during the years before the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash. He was reading the portion of the Torah that the king reads publicly in the Beis HaMikdash at *Hakhel*, on Succos after the Sabbatical Year. When he read the verse in *Devarim* (17:15) that "you cannot place over yourself a foreign man, who is not your brother," tears ran from his eyes. This was because Agrippas was a descendant of Herod, and only his mother was Jewish but not his father. As such, he was Halachically unfit to be the king. The Jews that were assembled comforted him and called out, "Agrippas, have no fear, you are our brother! You are our brother!" The Gemara says that because of this flattery they were sentenced to destruction, and hundreds of them died that day.

Although Agrippas was ruling as a self-appointed dictator and opposing him would have been dangerous, nonetheless, their flattering remark was uncalled for. Had they not flattered him, the chances of danger to them would have been only remote if at all, especially since he himself was crying

he means it literally, even in the face of real danger to one's life. Earlier the words of *Chazal* were cited, that honoring the wicked is flattery and is like idolatry. It is possible that Rabbeinu Yonah understood that it is so much like idolatry that one must forfeit his life rather than commit the sin, as is the Halachah with regard to idolatry.

This is Rabbeinu Yonah's opinion regarding embarrassing somebody in public. He rules that one is obliged to literally forfeit his life rather than embarrass somebody in public because *Chazal* equated publicly embarrassing somebody with murder. If so, just like the Rambam does not agree with Rabbeinu Yonah with regard to forfeiting one's life instead of embarrassing someone, he will also disagree with regard to flattery.

However, some say that if publicly flattering the wicked and their evil will cause a public *chilul Hashem*, (public desecration of Hashem's Name) you should rather sacrifice your life.²¹ If it is not in public, you should flatter him rather than endanger your life.

Rabbeinu Yonah's Nine Levels

∞ 32.10 ∞

As cited earlier, Rabbeinu Yonah lists nine categories of flattery, beginning with the most severe and continuing in decreasing order of severity.

1) Publicly justifying evil deeds. There are many wrongs involved in this: (a) labeling evil as good is an abomination to Hashem; (b) not offering reproof is a sin, and especially assisting evil by saying that the *rasha* did nothing wrong; (c)

over the fact and realized that he was unqualified to be their king.

21. *Yad HaKetannah, Hilchos De'os* 10:13.

placing a stumbling block in front of the sinner, who will now be much less likely to ever repent; (d) harming the victims of the person's wrongdoings because now the offender will less likely make restitution; (e) not being zealous in support of the truth;²² (f) lying; (g) desecrating Hashem's Name. In order to avoid desecrating Hashem's Name you must even endanger your life, and certainly your livelihood. If it is not in public, you may flatter in order to protect your life.²³

22. Rabbeinu Yonah calls this a criminal offense.

23. See *Nedarim* 22a, where Ulah was traveling to Eretz Yisrael, and two people accompanied him. One of the two people cut the throat of the other one, and then asked Ulah if he was right for killing him. Ulah answered that he was indeed right for having killed him, and to make himself sound more convincing, Ulah told him to (further) open his throat. When he arrived in Eretz Yisrael, Ulah asked Rabbi Yochanan if what he had done was correct or maybe he should not have strengthened the hands of sinners. Rabbi Yochanan told him that he was right for saving his own life. Since this was not in public, the element of public desecration to Hashem's Name was absent.

Tosafos, *Sotah* 41b, cite this proof from Ulah and Rabbi Yochanan, but they do not differentiate between it being in public or in private, and it would seem from their words that even in public it would be permitted. *Magen Avraham* ch. 156, cites this *Tosafos* immediately after citing the event about Agrippas, and does not discuss any difference between public and private. Maybe this is why R' Akiva Eiger in his *Gilyon HaShas* on *Sotah*, cites the *Magen Avraham*.

Igros Moshe (*Orach Chaim* vol. 2 ch. 51) says that the reason why *Tosafos* needs to prove from Ulah and Rabbi Yochanan that one should save his life even if he has to flatter the wicked to do so, is because one might think that you must sacrifice your life because it may be comparable to changing a Halachah of the Torah. The *Maharshal* in *Yam Shel Shlomo* (*Bava Kama* 4:9) writes that one is forbidden to change a Halachah in the Torah in order to save his life. (He explains that this was the reason why the Sages admitted to the government officials about a Halachah in the Torah that might have potentially caused pogroms against the Jews. With regard to the elders changing the real translation of the Torah when they translated it for Ptolmey, *Maharshal* says that it was changed based

2) Not justifying evil deeds, but praising the evil person in front of other people (whether the evil person is present or not is irrelevant). Of such a flatterer it is written:²⁴ “Those who forsake the Torah, praise evil.” Even praising him for his good deeds is forbidden, since he is wicked and most of his deeds are sinful. If you mention his good deeds, you must also mention his bad ones, and not lead people to believe that he is righteous. {Some people refrain from speaking anything good about a *rasha* even if it has nothing to do with his being righteous or evil, unless their remarks are balanced by mentioning the bad.²⁵} Others say that if saying something positive about him will not strengthen or increase the forces of evil, it is not forbidden.²⁶ If there is room for such concern,

on *Ruach HaKodesh*. He also answers that, there were no changes in Halachah.) Since telling a wicked person that his sinful deeds are correct might seem to fall into that category, Tosafos had to prove that it does not.

24. *Mishlei* 28:4.

25. This is the implication of the Gemara in *Sotah* 42b, that the *pasuk* did not mention all of Goliath's strength for that reason. Were it not to show the praise of David, it would not have mentioned his strength at all. Rabbi Elazar learned from there, that you are forbidden to speak the praise of a *rasha*. As discussed earlier in chapter 19:107–108, this Gemara is not cited in Poskim with regard to a Jewish *rasha*, but Rav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, holds that it applies. See *Igros Moshe* vol. 2 *Orach Chaim* ch. 52.

26. *Chazal* describe at length how Esau honored his father. They said that there never was a person who honored his father like Esau (*Zohar, Bereishis* 146b). Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said that nobody honored their fathers like I and my fathers did, but I found that Esau honored his father even more than me. (*Midrash, Devarim* 1:15). *Chazal* were not concerned that these praises might cause somebody to want to become like Esau. The Gemara says that Ahaab merited becoming king because he honored the Torah that was given with twenty-two letters (*Sanhedrin* 102b). It also says that he was yielding regarding his money (*ibid.*). Also,

it is forbidden. When speaking to children about a popular figure who is a *rasha*, you must be careful not to make him attractive in their eyes as this might influence them to imitate him. If you balance your praise of the positive side of the *rasha*

he expounded on Toras Kohanim in eighty-five different ways (*Sanhedrin* 103b). See *Melachim* (I 21:29) 'Ahaab has humbled himself before Me....' Ahaab did one good thing etc. (*Moed Katan* 28b). Rav and Shmuel argued if Achashveirosh and Sanherib were wise or foolish. The one who says they were wise is praising them (see *Megillah* 12a and *Sanhedrin* 94a). *Chazal* said about Nevuchadnezzar that Hashem said, "Since you took three steps for my honor, I will give you three descendants who will rule over the entire world." (*Midrash, Esther* 3:1; *Midrash Shir HaShirim* 3:4)

See also *Safra* (*Emor*, 8), that Nevuchadnezzar was fitting for a miracle to be done through him. Also see *Sanhedrin* 92b that were it not for an angel hitting his mouth, Nevuchadnezzar would have put to shame all the songs of King David in Tehillim. Also, in *Midrash Shochev Tov* 5:10, everything that King David said in Tehillim, that *rasha* (Nevuchadnezzar) summed up in one verse. Also, in *Midrash* (*Shemos* 30:24) Nevuchadnezzar opened his warehouses and sustained the Jews for twelve months. Also see *Midrash Sechel Tov* (*Bereishis* 33:19) that Shechem, the son of Chamor, was expert and sharp-minded. See *Zohar Chadash* (*Ha'azinu*) that Bilaam would whisper an incantation over a sick person, and he would be cured immediately. Also see *Sanhedrin* (102a and 103b) that describes the greatness in Torah of Yerabam ben Nevat.

It is possible to refute all of these proofs and say that *Chazal* only mentioned a good point in order to teach a lesson from it, or to realize how these attributes affected *Klal Yisrael*, but speaking such praise without any spiritual lesson, might be forbidden. Even so, it appears more correct that as long as there is no concern that somebody will decide to go in the way of the evil person, or will believe that you approve and respect his bad ways, there is nothing wrong with saying something positive about him.

However, some Poskim forbid saying something good about a *rasha*, even when nobody will come to emulate his evil ways. As mentioned earlier, regarding Goliath, even though mentioning his strength would not cause people to follow him (he was dead), it still was forbidden. Rav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, holds that you are forbidden unless you counterbalance it with also saying the bad.

with adequate emphasis on his negative side, everyone permits it.

If an irreligious doctor comes to shul, and you want to honor him because he is so dedicated to the members of the community and such a fine person, you are allowed to honor him with something like opening the Holy Ark and taking out the Sefer Torah. He, and everyone else, will know that you are not showing approval, for example, to his being married out of the faith, but are honoring him for the good things that he does. Thus, it is not flattery.²⁷

3) Not justifying the evil ways of the wicked, and not even praising the good deeds of the wicked person in front of other people, but conveying words of praise to the wicked person himself. This type of flattery causes the wicked person to believe that he is exalted and righteous, and makes his repentance much less likely. Thus, the flatterer destroys the person he is flattering, as it is written:²⁸ "With his mouth, the flatterer destroys his fellow." This includes praising someone for an attribute that he does not possess.²⁹ About this type of flatterer, King David wrote:³⁰ "May Hashem cut off all equivocating lips."

If an irreligious workman does work on your house, you can tell him that he did a nice job, and it is not considered flattery. This will not cause him to continue his wickedness. On the contrary, your expressed satisfaction with his work might actually bring him closer to repentance.

27. *Igros Moshe* vol. 2 *Orach Chaim* ch. 52.

28. *Mishlei* 11:9.

29. *Rabbeinu Yonah*, *Mishlei* 11:9.

30. *Tehillim* 12:4.

Courteousness is not flattery. After completing a business engagement with a person who does not observe Torah and mitzvos, you may say, "it was a pleasure doing business with you." When introduced to such a person, you may say "pleasure to meet you." These expressions have no deep connotations, and are simply standard communications. Overdoing it with exaggerations is considered flattery. Therefore, you should not tell such a person that you never in your life enjoyed doing business with anyone as much as with him.

You are also forbidden to praise the bad deeds of a good person. This is forbidden both in the presence of others, and in his presence.

4) Being friends with a wicked person. A righteous person loathes wickedness, as it written:³¹ "The despicable is repulsive in his eyes." *Chazal* said, "It is not without reason that the starling followed the raven; he is his kind."³² That is the source of the popular expression, "birds of a feather flock together." *Chazal* say you are forbidden even to gaze at the face of a wicked person,³³ and that Yitzchak turned blind when he was older because he gazed at Esau's face. This was the result even though he did not know of Esau's wickedness. Rabbeinu Yonah adds that there are many (spiritually) fatal avenues open to one who teams up with the wicked.

According to these words of Rabbeinu Yonah, one may arrive at the following conclusions:

Participating in a business partnership with a rasha which will place one in close contact on a regular basis, is forbidden. The

31. *Tehillim* 15:4.

32. *Bava Kama* 92b.

33. *Megillah* 28a.

fact that he does not loathe his wickedness is considered flattery.

Accepting a job from a wicked employer when it will place him in regular contact with him is also a form of flattery, unless he has no choice. The same applies to hiring such a worker.

One should live in a neighborhood with righteous people, if possible. Righteous people are those who are careful in their observance of mitzvos between man and Hashem and between man and his fellow. Often, people judge Torah observant Jews more stringently with regard to fulfillment of mitzvos between man and his fellow than they do other people. Breaches in mitzvos between man and his fellow that would be treated as natural, or ignored when committed by a non-observant Jew, are treated severely when committed by an observant Jew. This is unfair and dishonest, and is itself a form of flattery. On the other hand, denying the existence of such problems, is also flattery.

5) Describing a person in flattering ways that are not true. Sometimes, a respected person wants to see a friend or relative promoted to a position or place of status. If he says about him that he is wise, learned or trustworthy, and it is not true, he is a flatterer (and a liar). With such flattery, he can cause people to rely on this person and to trust him, when he is not to be relied upon or trusted, and by these means he can destroy the world. As an example, Chazal refer to one who instates an improper *dayan* (judge), and they compare him to one who plants an *asheira* (tree for the purpose of idol worship).³⁴ If he does this in an area where there is a true *talmid chacham*, (who could perform the function properly) it is as though he planted an *asheira* next to the *mizbaiach* (altar in the Beis HaMikdash).³⁵

34. *Sanhedrin* 7b.

35. In the case of *dayanim* this is often a problem. In Eretz Yisrael they

The problem of flattery's role in important appointments is also pertinent with regard to teachers. If a teacher is appointed primarily because he is the son of Mr. Plony, or she is the wife of Rabbi Plony, the students are inevitably going to suffer. If the person does not have the ability or the character traits to successfully teach, anyone responsible for hiring that teacher is a flatterer, and ultimately responsible for all of the negative results. These results affect not only the students, but also future generations.

are appointed by a group consisting largely of secular politicians and others with special interests. The fact that *beis din* receives its authority from the secular government sometimes invites flattery in the form of decisions based on secular ideas rather than on Halachah. Some *dayanim* lack the Torah knowledge and other attributes that are so important in a *dayan*. Chazal say in *Avos* (5:8) that because of the sins of corruption in the *beis din*, the sword (i.e. war, terror, bombs etc.) comes to the land.

The Gemara says in *Shabbos* 139a that "If you see a generation that is plagued by many troubles and woes, go out and investigate the judges of the Jews, for all the calamities in the world come only because of the judges of the Jews as it is written (*Micha* 3:9–12): "Listen to this, heads of the house of Jacob, and officers of the house of Israel, who abominate justice, and twist all that is straight, who build Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with vice etc...."

This, as well as the other verses in that chapter in *Micha*, accurately describes some of the *dayanim* today. Let nobody flatter by saying that today's judges are more honest than they were in the days of *Micha*. It is flattery that brought on this unfortunate situation to begin with.

One of the greatest dangers of flattery is that it is self-sustaining. Flattery creates great corruption and vice which the masses refuse to confront because the masses are flatterers. Their flattery prevents them from admitting to the existence of the corruption and vice that their flattery created. So the corruption and vice perpetuate themselves and continue year after year, generation after generation. Sadly, since corruption works well for those at the upper end of the socio-economic scale, and since those on the bottom feel compelled to flatter those who are higher up than they are, it is unlikely to be corrected without painful Heavenly intervention.

6) Refraining from offering reproof to remain on somebody's good side. This is also a form of flattery. If a person has the authority and influence to protest and does not protest, he is also guilty as if he committed the sin. This is the law of *arvus*, whereby Jews are responsible to see to it that other Jews do not sin.

7) Refraining from giving reproof because the people in the community are usually stubborn and do not accept reproof. Unless you know for sure that they will not listen to you, you are obliged to reprimand them.³⁶ (See discussion about the Halachos of reproof in ch. 19.)

8) Sitting with people who are speaking *lashon ha-ra* or using foul language and not protesting. This is true even though one is not partaking in the conversation, and even though one is certain that the speakers will not accept reproof. If one finds it too hard to protest, he should at least get up and leave, while displaying his displeasure with the conversation. One who sits in the company of people who are talking *lashon ha-ra*, and tries to hear what they are saying, is written down in Heaven as a *rasha* and as one who speaks *lashon ha-ra*.³⁷

36. This is also the Halachah with regard to a violation of a *d'Rabbanan*. (*Mishnah Berurah* 608:3). This is the case when they are sinning without knowing (See *Tosafos, Shabbos* 55a). If they are sinning knowingly, even if you are sure that they will not accept rebuke, some say that you must reprove them once, but you are not responsible for their sins (*arvus*) even if you do not reprove them. However, if they are sinning unknowingly, if you are absolutely positive that they will not accept rebuke you should not rebuke them because it is better that they sin unknowingly than knowingly. The scoffer should not be rebuked even if he is sinning knowingly, unless your silence might look like an approbation. About such a person it is written (*Mishlei* 9:8) "Do not to reprove the scoffer lest he will hate you."

37. See *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* (*tzava'ah to son, Horkenos*); *Chafetz Chaim* (*Klal* 6:6).

If he is unable to leave, he should resolve not to believe any of the *lashon ha-ra*, and not to enjoy their conversation. If possible, he should plug up his ears with his fingers.³⁸

9) Giving honor to the wicked for the purpose of peace. This is true even when the honor is clearly not genuine, but merely a pragmatic bestowing of honor for an ulterior motive, like the honor which people often give the wealthy. You may honor a wealthy person, but not a wicked one. If the wicked person might harm you or cause you a loss, you may flatter him in order to protect yourself, as the Gemara says, "You are permitted to flatter the wicked in this world."³⁹ Even then, the Gemara is only referring to something standard, like standing up to greet him, but you are forbidden to praise him in front of anybody, in a way that will lead people to believe that you truly respect him. As cited earlier, Rabbeinu Yonah says that you must endanger your life rather than flatter the wicked with honor and praise. Even this standard honor to which the Gemara is referring, is permitted only in order to protect oneself from damage or loss, but not to secure a favor, benefit, or profit.

All forms of flattery of the wicked are forbidden even for the sake of procuring a donation for a yeshiva or other charitable cause. This includes even standard honors. This applies to potential donors and to government officials who may or may not award the yeshiva government funding.

38. See *Be'er Mayim Chaim* (Klal 6:15).

39. *Sotah* 41b.