

“If you consider My decrees loathsome.” (26:15)

Rashi explains that this pasuk refers to one who hates the sages that have expounded the ordinances, who denigrates Torah scholars, ridiculing them, humiliating them, despising them. The reason for this unwarranted hatred is simple: they represent everything he seeks to destroy. The Torah scholar demonstrates that Torah is viable; it refines and develops an individual into the consummate example of what a human being should be. The individual who blatantly takes it upon himself to impugn the authority and honor of a venerable Torah sage will answer to Hashem. In the sefer, *Likutei Imrei Avos*, cited by Horav Yitchak Zilberstein, Shlita, the author, who was a distinguished rav in Baghdad, relates the following incredible story to demonstrate the severe punishment sustained by one who denigrates a talmid chacham, Torah scholar.

The story is about a very special young man. Himself the scion of a wealthy family and the son-in-law of one of the wealthier men in the community, he spent his entire day secluded in his home studying Torah. Other than going to shul for the daily tefillos, he spent his entire day immersed in the sea of Torah. One day, the prince of the country came to visit. The entire town turned out to greet the monarch. The young man refused to halt his Torah study to welcome the prince. When the prince rode by his apartment, however, the young man went to the window in order to recite the appropriate blessing upon seeing a monarch.

Suddenly, as the prince was passing by and the young man stood by the window, a brick from the vicinity of the apartment loosened and fell on the prince's horse. A hush fell over the crowd as everybody wondered who would have had the nerve to strike at the prince. The police immediately searched the building and found only one person – the young man.

The young man, of course, claimed innocence, but the prince was sure that this young man was the perpetrator. He quickly sentenced him to death. Every Jew in the city was troubled. They all knew that this young man had not committed the crime. He was pious, virtuous, and gentle. He would never have done anything of the sort. People wrote letters to every government officer, pleading for the young man's life. Alas, it was to no avail.

Finally, after much pressure from the community, the prince decided to ask the rav of the community for his opinion in the matter. If the rav would intercede favorably on the young man's behalf, his life would be spared. To everyone's shock and dismay, the rav did not intercede and the young man was led to his death. Shortly after the execution took place, the rav asked that the body be brought to the shul. When the pallbearers brought the remains to the shul, the rav went over to the casket and in a loud voice exclaimed, “I command you by decree of the Torah to arise and tell everyone the true cause of your death so that the citizens of the community will harbor no ill will against me for not pleading your case to the prince.”

To everyone's amazement, the corpse sat up and spoke the following: “I am the neshamah, soul, of the first one who threw a stone at Yirmiyahu Ha'Navi. As punishment for this grave sin, I have

been sent back to this vile world to correct the spiritual blemish caused by my sin. Finally, during this most recent gilgul, reincarnation, I was able to correct everything I had done to my neshamah. My soul is now pure and holy. The rav, with his ability to see beyond the limitations of the human eye, saw b’Ruach Hakodesh, with Divine Inspiration, that my chance to return to Heaven on a lofty spiritual plateau was now. He, therefore, did not attempt to prolong my life on this world, allowing me to be executed and gain external rest.” The deceased finished speaking and lay back down – dead. Understandably, members of the community now realized that their spiritual leader was a great man who saw farther and deeper than they.

This remarkable story teaches us two very important lessons. First, we note the severe punishment for one who rises up against a Torah sage. Second, we understand that not everything that we observe is actually the way we see it.