

Whenever Moshe would go out to the Tent, the entire people would stand up and remain standing, everyone at the entrance of his tent. (33:8)

Midrash Tanchuma derives from here that one must stand up and show respect to an old man, a scholar, *Av Bais Din*; Head of the Rabbinical Court, and a king. He must remain at attention until the individual whom he is honoring walks out of sight. One *Tanna* adds that as a result of this *halachah*, if one of these individuals would notice a large group of people near his intended walking path, he should alter his route, so not to disturb them, since they would have to stop whatever they were doing in order to show him respect. A second *Tanna* disputed this notion, contending that on the contrary, he should make a point of going past them. When people observe a righteous man, the image is indelibly engraved onto their hearts and minds, elevating them spiritually. The **Chida, zl**, writes that the purpose of venerating *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, is not that they require the honor. It is due to the Torah which they have studied. By honoring them, one honors the Torah, thus facilitating his Torah observance. It is not about the man, but about his Torah.

With this in mind, we understand why one gives respect to a *talmid chacham* even if he is himself greater than he. The **Chafetz Chaim** would give *kavod* to younger, less knowledgeable *rabbanim*, despite his personal ill health and weakness.

While it may be difficult for some people to give *kavod* to someone whom he feels is not yet worthy of it, it is clearly deplorable to degrade a Torah scholar. Furthermore, not only does he infringe the laws of respect, but he also harms himself and creates a negative atmosphere for his children. A child growing up in a home in which his father lacks *kavod haTorah*, in a home in which a child will often be relegated to listening to his father abuse *rabbanim*, will sadly see his son follow in his footsteps.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites the *Ben Yehoyada* in his commentary to the *Talmud Shabbos* 119b concerning the meaning of the *pasuk*: ‘*Al tigu b’meshichai, eilu tinokos shel bais rabban; u’binviai al tareiu, eilu talmidei chachamim*, “Dare not touch My anointed ones” – this refers to young children in school; “and to my prophets do no harm,” which is an allusion to Torah scholars. The *Ben Yehoyada* questions the use of *al tigu* – “dare not touch,” regarding to children, and *al tareiu*, “do not harm,” concerning Torah scholars. He explains that the *raah*, acting harmfully, which is written concerning Prophets means humiliation. “Do not humiliate My Prophets.” Take great care not to offend, hurt the feelings, or cause them any shame. This idea does not apply to children. No one should trouble himself to embarrass a child.

The *Ben Yehoyada* adds the “clincher.” One who shames a *talmid chacham*, who denigrates a sage, will eventually be the cause of *ra*, evil, touching his children. When young children observe a lack of respect of scholars; when they see adults knock the rabbi or *Rosh Yeshivah*; when children see their parents’ lack of respect for a Torah personality – they will eventually follow suit.

Rav Zilberstein shares the story of a young, pre-*Bar-Mitzvah* *yeshivah* student who was both brilliant and diligent. His desire to learn more and more was outstanding. This was a boy who could not wait to go to school, who jumped out of bed the moment the alarm clock rang – in short, the perfect student, a *rebbe's* dream. One day, however, it all changed. The alarm rang and he continued sleeping. After a while, his mother went to his room to check on him. Something must be wrong. Her son never slept in.

"Come, get up, it is time to go to school," the mother said to her son. "I am not in the mood" was the boy's response. Something was terribly wrong. This was unusual. The father was called. Perhaps he could clear up the problem. The boy's father had as much success as his wife. Their son absolutely refused to go to school. It made no difference to him if he slept in – or not.

The parents turned to the *rebbe*. Perhaps he could help. His relationship with his student/their son was close. He might be able to discover what had entered their child's mind. The *rebbe* gladly came over to the house, infused with self-confidence. He would inspire the boy with hope. He would succeed in getting him to return to school. He tried, once, twice, a number of times – all to no avail. The child had lost his interest in Torah.

Parents do not give up. A *rebbe* does not give up – that is, if they are genuine. They worked together in order to achieve a breakthrough. Finally, the young boy opened up and related a frightening, but regrettably all-too-common story: "The other day I saw one of the distinguished *talmidei chachamim* of our community, who also happens to be the *Rav* of a *shul*, walking home. Behind him were a group of youths making fun, catcalling and denigrating him. I decided then and there, that if this was the reward for spending a life studying Torah – I want out! Better I should remain at home, sleep and play, than attend *cheder*."

The young boy then turned to his *rebbe* and said, "The other day you pleaded with me to return to *cheder*. You claimed that I was a wonderful student who would one day grow up to be a distinguished *Rav* or *Rosh Yeshivah*. I thought to myself, 'My *rebbe* is cursing me! He wants me to be like that hapless *Rav* who was disgraced by supposed *bnei Torah*! If this is the case – I am not interested.'"

When one acts harmfully towards Torah scholars, he creates a situation in which this harm will touch his children. Regrettably, this is an issue that has come to the fore time and again, as young people become "turned off". While a number of issues have colluded to catalyze this tragedy, one of the reasons that always seem to pop up is: I lost all respect for the rabbi, *Rosh Yeshivah*, etc. From where does such an attitude originate? When young people listen to adults who are either malcontented, insecure, egomaniacs who are jealous of others, or talk with derision regarding Torah leaders, their words "touch" the children. If Torah is to mean something, its disseminators must be held in the greatest esteem. There is, however, one catch: they must be worthy of such respect.