

"In the presence of an old person you shall rise and you shall honor the presence of a sage." (19:32)

Rashi explains that the word *iez*, elder, refers to an elder in wisdom, a *Torah* scholar. He cites the *Talmud* in *Kiddushin 32b* that applies the *notrikon* technique of the word *iez* as implying *vnfj vbea vz* "this one has acquired wisdom." This is consistent with the *pasuk* in *Mishlei 3:35*, "Honor is the inheritance of the scholar." The *Maharal* explains that honor applies specifically to one who has amassed a profound knowledge of the *Torah*. The physical world is inherently iniquitous and shameful, for it engenders debauchery and immorality. Thus, honor relates to that which is farthest removed from the physical.

Intellect, on the other hand, is that trait which is readily identified with honor. It is, consequently, appropriate to treat scholars with honor just as the *Torah* equates their honor with that of a man of advanced age. The *Maharal* explains that in one's senior years he becomes indifferent to material and physical pleasures. This generates an increased tendency to develop the intellectual and spiritual, which makes one worthy of honor. *Horav Yitzchak Hutner, z.l.*, expands upon this idea. He posits that a person's intellect is that quality that distinguishes him from others by identifying his uniqueness.

Physical characteristics can be compared between people and physical strength can be measured. There are areas in which one can excel and be distinguished relative to others. The intellect, however, is an area in which each individual is self-defined. The honor one is due is commensurate to the degree to which he stands apart in a positive manner from others. Hence, intellect engenders individuality. In turn, individuality determines the honor one is entitled to.

A *Torah* scholar is more than a "receptacle" for *Torah* erudition. He is a new and unique "personality." His *Torah* values are inherently integrated into his character. *Torah* knowledge is the frame of reference for all of his judgments and perspectives. The "*Torah* personality" is a composite of *Torah* erudition and *yiras Shomayim*, fear of heaven. He has achieved greatness in *Torah* by devoting himself totally to its study and by his non-involvement in the pursuit of physical pleasures. He does not seek recognition for his accomplishments, since this is the only way for him to live. His every emotion and reflex reflects *Torah* perspective. His wisdom is *daas Torah* -- the wisdom of *Torah* -- to the point that the *Torah* actually speaks through him. He is the embodiment of the *Torah* itself.

The *Maharal* explains that the reason that one who impugns the honor of a *Torah* scholar is termed "insolent toward the *Torah*," is that a scholar is an actual *Torah*. With this idea in mind, we may understand why there is great reward in store for those who honor and sustain a *Talmid Chacham*. Providing sustenance for a *Torah* scholar is reciprocative in that the sustainer himself will be assured protection by Hashem. We would do well to reflect upon the reward, or u"j the punishment awarded for honoring or defaming a *Torah* scholar.