For Whom the Eulogy

Is the purpose of the hesped eulogy said at a funeral to honor the survivors or to honor the departed?

This is not a mere theoretical question. One practical implication arises in a case where a man makes a request before his death not to be eulogized. If it is the honor of his survivors which is at stake his wish is ignored while if it his own honor which is the issue his wish will be honored. Another ramification is a situation in which no such request was made but the survivors refuse to pay the expense of hiring a professional eulogizer. If it is their honor they have a right to waive it while if it is the honor of the departed they can be compelled to hire the eulogizer.

The question is resolved on the basis of a statement by Rabbi Nossen to the effect that one who is not eulogized is considered as having suffered a disgrace in this world which will serve as an atonement for him in the World to Come. This is considered conclusive proof that a eulogy’s purpose is to honor the departed.

Sanhedrin 46b

Divine Commiseration

When a man suffers as a result of being executed for his sins Hashem, as it were, commiserates with him and says: “How heavy with pain is My head, how heavy with pain are My arms.”

If this is how the Omnipresent One relates to the shedding of the blood of the wicked, observed Rabbi Meir, how much more so does He suffer along with the blood of the righteous.

Sanhedrin 46a