

The Weekly Daf



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Erachin 14-20

Week of 15-21 Adar II 5757 / 24-30 March 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Damning With Praise

One should never speak in praise of another person for one is likely to end up speaking ill of him.

This rule is difficult to understand because we find that our Sages (*Eiruvim* 18b) have told us that one should speak only partial praise of a person in his presence and his full praise when he is not there. It also seems to contradict many incidents in the Talmud of sages speaking in praise of individuals.

Two different resolutions are offered for this problem.

1. Rashi explains that the ban is only on speaking excessive praise, because either he or his listener is then inevitably tempted to say "but he has this fault."
2. Rambam (*Hilchos Deios* 7:4) limits this ban to speaking praise to an audience which is hostile to the one being praised, since this will trigger a put-down on their part.

The explanations offered by these commentaries run into a problem when this rule is quoted in an incident involving Rabbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi) and a scribe by the name of Yehuda Charta. Rebbie expressed admiration for the beautiful scripts of a *Tehillim* scroll which he assumed was the work of his son, Shimon. When Rabbi Shimon told him that it was the work of Yehuda Charta, his father reprimanded him for speaking praise of a person in violation of the aforementioned ban. It is rather difficult to see in Rabbi Shimon's revelation of the scroll's authorship either the 'excessive praise' of Rashi or the 'hostile audience' of the Rambam.

Rabbi Shmuel Shtrasson (Rashash), in his commentary, which appears in the back of the widely used Vilna edition of the Talmud, suggests that perhaps Rebbie felt that his son should have considered him to be a hostile audience as a result of an embarrassment he had earlier suffered because of a divorce document which that scribe had written.

Erachin 16a

The Serpent's Pleasure

In the hereafter all the beasts will gather and thus challenge the serpent: "The lion and the wolf eat their prey but what pleasure do you have from killing a man by injecting your venom?" The serpent will reply by challenging them to explain what pleasure does the man who wags an evil tongue have from hurting his victim.

This fascinating dialogue may be better understood against the background of the curse which Hashem pronounced upon the serpent for tempting the first woman to sin by eating from the Tree of Knowledge (*Bereishis* 2:14-15). "Upon your belly you shall move ... and I will create enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed, which shall strike at your head while you strike at his heel."

Before this curse, say our Sages (*Sotah* 9b), the serpent walked upright on legs. After his demotion he is envious of man who still enjoys that dignified posture. Lacking the ability to raise himself to man's height, he is steadily trying to bring man down to his level by injecting his venom into the heel of his human rival.

The serpent will explain to the other beasts that he is acting no differently than any man who speaks evil of another. The man of evil tongue is envious of his neighbor, and rather than struggle to raise himself to his rival's level he tries to bring him down in serpent-like fashion by speaking ill of him.

Erachin 15b

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