

## Flattery of a Sinner:

### The Prohibition & Consequences:

1. Anyone who sees another Jew violating an *aveira* and flatters him, whether with words or some gesture that indicates his approval, or even if he remains silent and does not reprove him for his sin, has transgressed not only the mitzvah of *tochacha*, but also the prohibition of flattery. This is derived from the passuk: “Do not sully the land with flattery.” By implying that we approve of the sinner’s misdeeds, our allegiance to Hashem comes under question, since a servant cannot love his master if he love’s his master’s enemies.
2. **Talmud Sotah 41,42:** “ From the day that flattery gained power, judgments have been perverted and deeds have been corrupted. A flatterer brings Hashem’s anger into the world, and his prayers are not accepted. He is also called a defiler of the land and causes the *Shechina* to depart from the Jewish people; he brings about exile and falls to the depths of *Gehinnom*.”
3. Flatters are listed by the Talmud as one of the four groups of people who will not be admitted to the Presence of the *Shechina* in the next world.
4. The Talmud tells us that someone who flatters the wicked will end up falling into his hands or into the hands of his descendants.
5. Even when you are certain that your *Tochacha* will not be accepted, you are still prohibited to flatter him.
6. Prohibited flattery includes:
  - praising wicked people or wickedness
  - praising someone in a way that will cause him to sin or will reinforce his error
  - “buttering up” someone so that he will trust you and you can then deceive him
  - praising your child or relative when he or she is doing something wrong
7. Consider the incident with King Aggripas, who appropriated the monarchy although according to Halacha he was not entitled to rule, because of his lineage. The Talmud says that when the people who had assembled in the courtyard of the Temple flattered the king and indicated that he had their support, they deserved to be wiped out. Even though they acted out of fear of the ruler, their fear of Hashem should have been stronger.
8. However, if your life will be in danger, there are those who permit you to flatter the sinner, as evidenced from the story of the sage Ulla who flattered a murderer while travelling to Israel.
9. A habit related to flattery is hypocrisy, where a person makes a false show of being a Tzaddik or a talmud Chacham, when inside he is in fact far from that image.
10. A person should not say one thing and mean another.

### Honoring Wicked People:

1. Generally, we should not praise or honor wicked people - not in their presence and not in their absence. Moreover, we should avoid their company and refrain from awarding them any position of honor or leadership in the community.
2. When such people are in power and are enjoying a period of success and we are not in position to subdue them, then we are permitted to show them respect to the same degree that we may show respect to potentially violent people, out of fear of what they might do to us.
3. We may praise them if necessary for their beauty, intelligence, talent, etc.
4. We may praise his parents or grandparents, and mention that in their merit, this fellow has done good deeds, which we are honouring.
5. We should not honor them in any way that can be interpreted as approval of their sins.
6. We should limit honouring such people as much as possible when they are attending your Shul, and give them reduced donors such as opening the Ark.
7. The general rule regarding wicked people is to avoid them at all costs. We should not associate with them in business or any partnership, not even in joint effort for a Mitzvah project, so that we should not be influenced by them in any way. It is also important not to be associated with people who approve of wrongdoing or *Baalei Machlokes*.

### Nine Categories of Flattery Listed by Rabbeinu Yonah:

1. **One who sees another sin and does not rebuke him** - Because he is lax in defending the truth, the offender will not regret what he has done and will likely repeat the sin. This is even more serious if the sin was done in public.
2. **One who praises a wicked person, even not in his presence** - He is counted among those who 'Forsake the Torah and praise the Rasha.' Even when he finds it necessary to mention some good aspect of the wicked person, he should make sure to mention a bad point as well, so that the listeners should not consider the offender a Tzaddik.
3. **One who praise the wicked person to his face** - this person causes the wicked person to take pride in his ways so that we will not do Teshuva. Regarding such flattery we are told, 'Hashem will cut off all lips of smooth talk.' Some people flatter powerful people so that those people will give them honor and raise their position, but *Chazal* say that these people will end up parting from the wicked person in disgrace.
4. **One who associates with a wicked person** - To the Tzaddik, 'the despicable is repulsive.'" Some say we may not even look at a wicked person. By joining up with

a wicked person, a person indicates that, to some degree, he too is wicked in his heart. One way or another, his punishment will catch up with him.

5. **One who appoints a person who is unworthy or dishonest as a judge or teacher** - such a person is compared to be on the same level as someone who planted a tree of idol worship, because as a result of his support, the community relies on this unworthy person.
6. **One who is in position to object to sin and does not** - is held responsible for that sin.
7. **One who is uncertain about whether his *Tochacha* will be accepted** - is also held responsible for the sin if he did not at least attempt to give *Tochacha*.
8. **One who is certain that his *Tochacha* will not be accepted** - is still obligated to speak up so that people will not think that he approves of the transgression. For this same reason, one should leave an assembly of wicked people, so people will not think he is one of them.
9. **One who shows honor to wicked people because of their wealth** - You are permitted to honor these wicked people who are in positions of power, if you show them no more honor than any other wealthy person. However, one should not praise them or speak well of them when speaking to others.

### **Permitted Flattery:**

1. Flattering our spouse in order to promote Shalom Bayis.
2. Flattering our students and colleagues to smooth the way for them to accept our *Tochacha*.
3. Flattering a Rebbe to get him to teach us Torah.
4. Flattering a creditor to stop him from exerting pressure on us.
5. Flattering the rich even if it purely for the sake of gaining benefit from them.
6. Even though we may praise a person lavishly when he is not present, we should avoid praising him too much in his presence, even if we mean every word we say, because to other our words may appear to be empty flattery.

### **“Do Not Grant Them Grace”:**

1. In relating to non-Jews, the Torah says: “Do not grant them grace.” This prohibition includes:
  - Not giving them gifts
  - not even praising them (e.g. “How beautiful is this person!”) or any other form of compliment.
2. The prohibition applies even if the praise is true and deserved.
3. If the praise is unjustified, the prohibition to flatter the non-Jew is clearer.
4. If the gift or compliment is for a constructive purpose - such as for a boss or a worker, a business partner, a neighbour, a Shabbos goy, or someone with political influence - and there will be mutual benefit from the exchange, then the gift or compliment is permitted, and in some cases, encouraged.

5. We are permitted to pray for the peace and success of the government of the country, state, and or city where we live.