

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1, pages 255 -

Conversely, when he sensed any weakening or evasiveness, he became correspondingly depressed and sought to encourage them from afar. One of them wrote, apparently, that he considered himself unworthy of maintaining so high a level of Musar study and declared, inter alia: "Many have tried and have not succeeded, and so became the cause of profaning the Name of G-d. I, too, am afraid to wear a cloak for which I am unfit." R. Israel upbraided him strongly for such ideas: "I challenge your last remarks. It has been mistakenly accepted by the world to regard studying Musar in some special location as an indication of some superior level of saintliness. Hence if any one is noticed on his way to the Musar House, he is winked at (as if to say): Who is so presumptuous as to do so and hold himself out to be on such a level? Hence his conduct is minutely scrutinized: "Such a man should do that? — It is not so, my brother. This is no superior level. It is a necessity for the sick, polluted by sin and iniquity which lead to a bad end, to go there and to pour out his soul in the study of Musar, for it to save him to some extent from his troubles, subdue something of his evil inclination, that he not go wildly after [the promptings of] his heart. In truth, there is no question of any profanation of the Name of G-d. Here is not its place. The protection against such profanation is to cling all the more tightly to Torah and mitzvot, and not to let go. Not to want to be laughed at by one's friends is merely one's evil inclination. It extends its trotters (exhibiting its cloven hoofs as if to say : I am kosher). It wraps itself in a cloak of righteousness."

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