

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

Someone has his father over as a guest for a meal. Normally, the host acts as the *botzai*, who recites the *brocha* on the bread and distributes it. May the son honor his father with this position, and if so, should he do so? What if the father insists on the son doing it?

The issues:

- A) *Kibud* and *Morah Av Va'aim*; *Av Shemachal al Kevodo*, a father waiving his honor
- B) *Vekidashto*, showing special honor to a greater person
- C) The *Botzai'a*, distributing the bread

A) *Kibud Av Va'aim*

Honoring parents involves two Scriptural *mitzvos*, *kibud* and *morah*. *Morah* means fear, but can also mean awe or reverence. The Torah makes a point of equating mother and father, despite the natural fear for a father more than a mother. Similarly, mother and father are equated for *kibud*, though one might honor his mother more. [In a conflict, if parents are married, father takes precedence. Both son and mother are obliged to honor the father.] Some distinguish between the term 'fear from', implying being afraid of consequence or of a watchful eye, and 'fear' without the from but with an indirect object in the word 'es', implying awe of greatness. Awe or fear of greatness of a human detracts from the awe one should have for Hashem. However, Hashem 'shares' some of His awe with parents and with Torah scholars, commanding us to fear them as well. Thus, *morah av va'aim* is on a par with *Morah Shamayim*.

Kibud includes feeding and clothing the parent, and attending to his personal needs. The Talmud debates the funding for the food and clothing. We follow the conclusion that the child does not need to provide the funds, but must be involved in the act. If the parent has no funds, he could use *tzedaka* money. Generally, family members should come first when distributing *tzedaka*. However, the Talmud condemns one who uses *tzedaka* for *kibud av* when he could use personal funds for it.

Morah includes not standing in the parent's place, not sitting in his place, not contradicting his words, nor even voicing approval of his words. He may not imply that his father needs his approval or consent. Disobeying an order is a violation of *morah*.

How do we categorize the difference between *kibud* and *morah*? In one view, *kibud* involves active deeds, while *morah* involves passively refraining from slighting parents' honor. In another view, *kibud* involves benefiting the parent directly and personally. *Morah* involves a private obligation on the son to ingrain within himself, and conduct himself with, a sense of fear and reverence. [Rising when a parent approaches is considered *kibud*. The parent seems to gain no material benefit, but pleasure is also benefit. However, some consider it to be *morah*, showing reverence. Accordingly, it would apply even if the parent is not aware of it.] Both views can be reconciled. They might both

highlight different aspects of the distinctions between them.

The Talmud lists standing and sitting in a parents' place. Some explain 'place' as the position the parent has when consulting with elders, even standing. Some add the seat in *shul* where the father *davens*, and at home where he eats. There is a debate whether the latter view disagrees with the former. In one view, the former permits sitting in parents' seats at the table. Others maintain that there is a difference between sitting and standing and between two types of seat. A seat where a father consults with elders is so prominent that if a son even stands there without sitting down he shows himself to be equal to his father. At the father's eating seat the son can stand without sitting without feeling that he shows equality. Sitting is forbidden even in the father's absence. It looks all the more as though the son feels that he is as good as his father and can 'take his place'. This is not a violation of *kibud*, but of *morah*. In the son's own home, the seat at the head of the table is his own. However, if the father sits at another seat, the son seems to be showing equality, or even superiority. Yet, the son is acting as would any *baal habayis*, household head, treating his father as he would any guest. There is no obvious disrespect. Must the son actively give up his seat? Is this *kibud* or *morah*? Moreover, if he does give up his seat to his father, has he fulfilled *kibud*, or has he done something unnecessary? Is any table with father and son automatically a situation of *morah*? Then we need to discuss *betzias hapas*, and the order in which the food should be served.

What if the father wants the son to 'lead'? This brings us to *mehilas kavod*, waiving one's right to *kavod*. A parent can forgive a slight to his honor. He may also waive the right to be honored ahead of time. While the son will then not be obliged to honor the parent, he must still show respect. He need not rise fully, must lift himself visibly from his seat. Some distinguish between forgiving and waiving. If the parent waived *kibud*, the son is exempt. If the son already slighted the parent and the parent forgave him, the son is liable in the eyes of Heaven. Others say the son is not obliged, but fulfills a *mitzvah* while doing it.

The Talmud says that while the father can waive *kibud*, he may not allow *bizayon*, his son acting in a derogatory manner. Can *morah* be waived? It is the personal obligation of the son. The father is in no position to exempt his son. The Talmud debates whether a Torah scholar or *rebbe* may not waive his *kavod*. It is not his own Torah that is being slighted. [The conclusion is that once the *rebbe* studies it it becomes his own!] Some maintain that laxity in *morah* amounts to *bizayon*. *Morah* involves refraining from treating a father as an equal. However, this is a vicious cycle. If the parent wants the son to behave in a way that shows a lack of *morah*, contradicting him is defiance, and itself violates *morah*. Some say it depends whether the father insists or simply does not mind. Sometimes, the son can judge for himself. He might still fulfill *morah* by giving up his position as 'leader' if his father is not so insistent.

One posek discusses a permanent situation. The elderly father has moved in with his son. The practice is that the son keeps his old seat at the head and his father sits at the side. The father does not mind. Since the son is head of the house, and his wife sits next to him, this is *halachically* correct. The father should not sit next to his daughter-in-law. Some say that this is only a justification for the practice, but that common practice is not so. The father [or father-in-law] sits at the head. In addition, the posek is also addressing

a different issue. There is an opinion that one should not even sit right next to his father, with no-one between them. However, most poskim do not raise this issue. In the aforementioned case, this is another issue to address. Nonetheless, it seems that this posek holds that the son may sit at his usual seat at the head of the table. One can surmise from here that if the father is a guest, and the son is planning to keep his seat for the foreseeable future, this is even more obvious. If the son need not change his seat permanently, he should not need to change it temporarily. While others maintain that he should change it permanently when his father moves in, this could be due to the father having now assumed the role of head of household. Though he might not ask for this, it might still be part of the *mitzvah* of *kibud* or *morah* on the son. In a temporary situation, this would not apply. However, one could make the argument that changing in a permanent situation raises a *shalom bayis* issue. This might be taken into account by the opinion that the son should not make a permanent change. On an occasional basis it might not matter. [See Kidushin 31b-32b, Poskim. Toras kohanim, Kedoshim, commentaries. Tur Sh. Ar. YD 240:1-5 7 19 25, Ar. Hash. 9-11, commentaries.]

B) Vekidashto

Furthermore, all seem to agree that the father should be given his portions first, and that the father should wash his hands first. This seems to imply that the father should come before the son himself. However, as we shall discuss in the next section, it could mean that the father should come before all the others present at the meal. The idea that a prominent person be the first to wash is based on the *mitzvah*, *vekidashto*. One must 'sanctify' the *kohain* by letting him go first when people are doing a *mitzvah* or something of a holy nature. The classic examples of this are washing for meals, taking the bread after the *brocha*, *bircas hamazon*, and *aliyos* in *shul*. In some measure, a *Levi* also comes before others. In reality, a Torah scholar should come first, unless the *kohain* is also a scholar. There appears to be a possibility that the rules of *vekidashto* apply to a father as well. Though the actual *mitzvah* might not apply, the guidelines that are used for that *mitzvah* would be applied here too. This seems to be derived from the application of the rules to a Torah scholar. There, it seems that the rules of *vekidashto* apply. However, it is possible that the *mitzvah* of honoring a Torah scholar takes precedence over honoring a *kohain*. The same could be said of a son honoring his father.

The practice is that the homeowner should wash either first or last. This is because it is considered honorable to wash first, and washing last reduces the waiting period between washing and eating. The conclusion of some poskim is that if there is a prominent guest, the homeowner has a duty to honor the guest with washing last. The homeowner can then wash first, fulfilling at least one view. In our case, the issue also applies to getting the first portion. As we shall see, this might not mean the very first piece, which is meant to be eaten by the *botzai'a*, but the first of those that are distributed. Whoever is honored with this, is so honored throughout the rest of the meal. [See Gitin 59b, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. OC 165:2, commentaries. Otzra Kibud Av Va'im Dinei, 240:39.]

C) Botzai'a

When many people all eat from the same loaf of bread, one is given the honor of reciting the *brocha* and distributing it. He eats the first piece before he distributes it. The rules of *betzia* are lengthy in their own right; here we focus on the honor of who does it.

If the homeowner is present it should be he who is *botzai'a*. A guest or family member might worry about giving out too much and aggravating the homeowner. The homeowner will surely give out generous pieces. If there is no single person who 'owns' the food, or if the owner is not present, the most senior participant is given the honor. The Talmud discusses whether an owner may honor a prominent guest with this *mitzvah*, and concludes that he may not. However, it is unclear whether the Talmud refers to a guest who is more prominent than the homeowner. Accordingly, the poskim debate whether one may or should honor a Torah scholar or one's teacher with *betzias hapas*. Most poskim do not discuss a father in this context. Thus, if the father is not a prominent scholar, it is possible that the practice of honoring someone else might not apply here. However, some poskim assume that the father has the same prominence as any scholar. Presumably, this is a facet of *morah*. By honoring Torah scholars and not honoring a father, he would imply a slight to his father. It could also be an issue of *kibud*, which can be waived.

After being *botzai'a*, the same person should take the first portion of food as it is brought in. However, in this case, he may honor his *rebbe* or one who is greater than he is. Accordingly, one should certainly honor his father in this way. Though the Talmud uses a term implying that it is voluntary, it would seem that for a father, where two *mitzvos* could apply, one should do so. [See Brochos 39-40 46a, Gitin 59b, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. 167:14 17, commentaries.]

In conclusion, one should have his father wash first, and the son should wash last. If the father does not want to sit at the head, or does not mind, seating arrangements should not be changed. The son should be *botzai'a*, and eat his piece first. Then he should give his father. The father should be given the first portion of anything else in the meal.

On the Parsha ... And lean you hands on [Yehoshua] ... [27:18] Give him a meturgeman (spokesman) so he may lecture while you [Moshe] are still alive, that the people do not say "he had no right to push himself while his *rebbe* was living." [Rashi] If he would only begin ruling after Moshe's death, there would be no proof that it was due to Moshe giving him *Semicha*, permission to rule. Only if he did so in his lifetime would it be obvious. [See Sifri, Maharal] How is it possible at all for a *Rebbe* to give others permission to rule in his place? Is this a proof that a *rebbe* may waive his *kavod* or *morah*? The answer is twofold. As we see in the *parsha*, there must be a mechanism to pass the mantle on. Only one person can be in charge. And as we see in the *parsha*, it is actually an honor to the *rebbe* when his devoted student is given this honor. [See Shach YD 242:39] In the *rebbe's* or father's home, the son would need to continue the old order. In public, the *rebbe* gains great satisfaction from seeing his *talmid* honored in his stead. A *rebbe* visiting his *talmid's* community would have the same pleasure. Perhaps a father visiting his son's own house would also derive such pleasure.

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