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"Taking Responsibility for Torah"

HUMAN DIGNITY, HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, AND KIBBUD AV VA'EM WEEK FOUR SUMMARY OF SBM 2018

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Rabbi Klapper began shiur by highlighting the ambiguities of the Gemara's question "eizehu kavod eizehu yir'ah". Does the question presuppose intuitive definitions of *kavod* and *yir'ah*, and seek to differentiate between the two seemingly similar categories? Or, does the question presume no prior knowledge of the categories of *kavod* and *yir'ah*, and seek to define them?

It is curious that the gemara lists examples of *kavod* and *yir'ah* for parents rather than precisely defining the categories. We realized that all the examples of *yir'ah* were *DON'Ts* and all the examples of *kavod* were *DOs*. We noted that strangely, obedience was absent from both these lists, even though obedience seemed the central element in many of the narratives about Kibbud Av Va'em we've seen in the gemara.

The next step was exploring the various ways in which several of the listed examples can be interpreted. To take one from each list:

Under *yir'ah*, we find *v'lo machriyo* = you shall not weigh in on a controversy in which a parent has taken a position. Rashi limits this to the case of a parent who is a *chakham* (and the subject matter to *halakhab*). Rav Chananel ben Shmuel contends that the prohibition applies regardless of the parent's expertise (and to all subjects (or perhaps: all subjects except for *halakhab*)). We asked whether their positions reflect differing standards as to what kind of parent deserves reverence - does *kavod* require deference to a parent who is a fool? or rather relate to the context and nature of reverence - is casual disagreement about trivia an act of irreverence?

Under *kavod*, we find *maakhilo* - causes him to be fed. Does this require the child to provide the parent with food, to personally serve the parent food (or to ensure that the parent is served by a competent butler)? The same issue arises with regard to all the other listed examples of *kavod* - do they require provision of goods or rather of services?

This issue may be at the core of the the question the *gemara* next poses: *mishel mi* = who is responsible for the financial costs of

kibbud (and perhaps *yir'ah*)?

Our two options are either *mishel ben* = *kavod* must be financially paid for by the child, or else *mishel av* = the financial costs of *kavod* are borne by the parent. It is tempting to assume that the *mishel ben* position demands more of the child than the *mishel av* position. However, this may not be so, in fact the reverse may be true. If the child is exempt in terms of monetary obligations, it must be that the obligation is on actions. This may imply that the child cannot outsource his obligations to hired others if it becomes too onerous, and also that he is expected to contribute his time and his patience. Another possibility is that the child may be obligated to provide both money and service.

The gemara challenges the *mishel ben* position by citing a *beraita* which rules that a child can feed their impoverished parent with food set aside as *ma'aser ani* (=the poor tithe given in the third and sixth years of the shemittah cycle). If *kavod* imposes a financial obligation on the son, satisfying *kavod* from a pool designated for the poor generally may be considered illegal "double dipping", since it diminishes the total resources set aside for the class of poor people.

The gemara answers that the obligation of *kavod* can be satisfied with the parent still poor and still hungry. At that point there is no double dipping involved in feeding the parent with *maaser ani*. However, the *beraita* concludes by citing Rabbi Yehudah as declaring that "A curse should fall on one who feeds their parent *maaser ani*". Since *kavod* has been satisfied, why the curse? The gemara answers that "Nonetheless, it is degrading". If it is degrading, how can the obligation of *kavod* have been satisfied?

Rabbi Klapper suggested, following an idea of Rav Hershel Schachter and building on an answer given in shiur by Amir Zinkow, that perhaps parents are owed not only the special obligation of *kibbud av va'em*, but also that the general obligation of *kavod habriot* (=human dignity) has particular manifestations in the relationship between children and parents. While this standard

obligation of *kavod* applies equally to every person, what is considered to be *kavod* can vary depending on the relationship with the person.

This can explain why one may not use *maaser ani* to feed a parent even after the obligation of *kibbud av va'em*-has been satisfied. Perhaps receiving charity in the context of a parent-child relationship is degrading, and as such, would be considered a deficiency in the baseline level of *kavod* which every person deserves.

The gemara next cites a beraita in which Rabbi Eliezer answers the question “How far does *kibbud av v'em* extend” by citing the case of a parent throwing a wallet full of money into the sea. The child must not humiliate the parent. The pronouns of the statement are ambiguous- כדִּי שִׂטוֹל אֲרַנְקִי וְיִזְרַקְנוּ לִי בַפְּנֵי וְאִינוּ מַכְלִימוּ. Whose wallet? Even if the child’s wallet, must the parent indemnify the loss if we hold *mishel av*? If the wallet belongs to the parent, or if the parent must indemnify the child, it may be hard to understand why this case would be used as an extreme case of *kibbud*. Rabbi Klapper asserted that in fact children do often develop a sense of entitlement to their parents’ money, and become angry if parents spend money on their own pleasures that diminishes the child’s financial expectations.

We next delved into various rishonim.

The Sefer Charedim believes that the *chiyuv* is extremely far reaching, comparing the parent-child relationship to that of a king and servant. Sefer Charedim suggests that the child is obligated in all demands of the parents, barring only a parental request for a child to violate *halakhab*. He also contends that *kavod* is intended to express and/or inculcate *ahavah* =love.

The Ramban suggests that the core *chiyuv* of *kibbud av va'em* is providing the parent הנאה =benefit. He is therefore compelled to explain various cases of obedience as providing psychological benefits for the parent, but he is unwilling to say that obedience per se gives the parents a relevant benefit.

The Sefer HaChinuch explains that the obligation of *kibbud av va'em* is meant to imbue children with a sense of gratitude for those who provided for them”.

The Sefer Yereim suggests that there is no set amount required for *kibbud av va'em*, and proposes that the more careful one is to fulfil this command to better. We noted that this seemed odd both because *kibbud av va'em* is not listed among the mitzvot that “have no measure”, and because the case of *maaser ani* indicates that there is in fact a set requirement.

Rabbi Klapper suggested that the *halakhic* portions of the text which delineate specific requirements can be understood in conjunction with the heavily *midrashic* stories that illustrate great acts of *kavod* by drawing a distinction in *kibbud av va'em*. The standard level is *chiyuv* =obligation, relating the the examples of *kavod* and *yir'ab* outlined in the *beraita* and perhaps to the more expansive interpretations of the *rishonim*. However, inherent in the *mitzvah* is also a level of *kiyyum*, where the child may act beyond what she or he is called upon to do. In this regard, we can comprehend the extreme narratives of רבי אבהו and אתא רב דימי (Kedushin 31.) as going above the letter of the law.

We discussed other textual oddities present in the *gemara* and *rishonim*. The *gemara* exempts women from *kibbud av va'em* because of רשות אחרים. What does רשות אחרים mean, and how could it exempt women from an unambiguous halakhic obligation? (We noted Rabbi Mordechai Willig’s position that the exemption is socially contingent.)

Tzipporah Machlah Klapper suggested that perhaps from the plural אחרים we can infer that the *gemara* was talking about her children, rather than her spouse. Rabbi Klapper believes that this constraint points to a larger limitation on *kibbud av va'em*. *Kibbud av va'em* is one relationship that at times overrides some relationships (אם יעסוק בכבוד אביו הלא אבידת חבירו קודמת כדאמרין -Tosfot- [ב"מ דף לב](#) (באלו מציאות)), yet can also be overcome by other relationships. Perhaps the marriage relationship supersedes the parental relationship *halakbically*. This suggests that husbands as well must prioritize their marital relationship over their obligations of *kibbud av va'em* where those conflict.

Another interesting observation we made was that though the Rambam brings many of our *sugyot* down to *halacha*, he never mentions the idea שלשה שותפי באדם, that G-d and parents are partners in each human being. How could he omit one of the most foundational text related to *kibbud av va'em*? (Note that Tur promptly reinserts it in his own code.) Perhaps for the Rambam, *kibbud av va'em* is has no emotional bearing on the parent-child relationship and really addresses the child and Hashem alone. Thus Rambam explains that a child should remain silent and respectful even when their parents publically humiliate them is because וְיִירָא וְיִפְחַד מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים שְׂצֹהוּ בְּכֹךְ, he must be in terror and fear of the King of Kings Who has commanded him to show *kavod* to parents. In stark contrast to Sefer Charedim, he says nothing about the child’s emotional relationship to the parent. For Rambam, at the root of *kibbud av va'em* is truly *kibbud Shamayim*. Yet perhaps he goes too far in removing the human relationship from the equation, and his position leaves too much space for abuse.