

# HALOCHOSCOPE

**This week's question:**

**The mother of a homeowner is his *Shabbos* guest. When the time comes for *betzias hapas*, breaking and serving the bread, should he give her a piece before giving his wife?**

**The issues:**

- A) *Kibud* and *morah av va'eim*, respecting one's mother
- B) *Vekidashto*, order of precedence
- C) *Betzias hapas*
- D) *Kibud ishto*, honoring one's wife

## A) *Kibud Av Va'aim*

Honoring parents involves two Scriptural *mitzvos*, *kibud* and *morah*. *Morah* means fear, 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 'fear **from**', implying being afraid of consequence or of a watchful eye, and 'fear' without 'from' but with an indirect object in the word '*es*', implying awe of greatness. Awe 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, the son 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.

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.

Our case involves *kibud*, because the son is actually feeding his mother. It also involves *morah*. By giving his mother the bread first, he shows reverence. If he gave her after another person, it would show a lack of reverence. It is also likely that the mother is not interested in slighting her daughter-in-law. She would prefer to be given the bread later, to avoid friction. May she waive *morah*? May the son make the assumption that his mother waives it? May he place his *shalom bayis* before his own *kibud* and *morah av va'eim*? [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**

The order of precedence at a meal starts with washing hands. 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. It is considered honorable to wash first. Washing last reduces the waiting period between washing and eating. Some maintain that a homeowner has a duty to honor a prominent 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.

The Talmud provides for a departure from the correct order, *mipnei darkei shalom*, when following it would lead to strife. Though a scholar should come before a *kohain* for everything, we give the *kohain* precedence for an *aliyah*. He may not waive this right. However, this only applies to Torah reading. A *kohain* may waive his right to wash and eat first. He may also waive his right to lead *bircas hamazon*. On the other hand, a scholar may not yield his right to eat first or to lead *bircas hamazon* to an ignorant *kohain*, to conform with honoring him as a *kohain*. He may, however, give *reshus*. This means that it is indeed his right, and he uses that right to grant the privilege to another.

The rules for different *mitzvos* and honors vary. For *aliyos* and *bircas hamazon*, we have already detailed certain specifics. For *betzias hapas*, as we shall see, it is preferable for the homeowner to do it. Any guest might be sparing with food that is not his own. For *bircas hamazon*, a guest should be honored, since he will be in a position to bless the homeowner. There is an order of precedence, and the one whose right it is has the right to honor another. For washing and eating first, the homeowner has the right. In some instances, he may honor another with it. However, it should not lead to strife.

For *krias hatorah*, there is an order of precedence after the first *aliya* as well. A *levi* is given the second *aliya*, and a scholar should be given the third *aliya*, and so on. One would expect seniority to play a role with regard to other group situations, including taking food. On the other hand, to avoid delays between the *brocha* and eating, perhaps one should eat as soon as he can. The *botzaia* passes the bread along to those nearest first. Accordingly, the order would only apply if the seating arrangement is by seniority as well. In former times, when couches were used, the seating arrangement had to be according to seniority. Furthermore, a scholar should not recline next to an ignoramus. Nowadays that we sit at a table, it is often most convenient to allow those other than the homeowner to choose a seat of their own preference. When two people eat together, the junior defers to his senior when taking food from the serving platter. If the junior takes first, he is a glutton. This implies that it is a matter of *derech erez*, manners. Accordingly, it should also apply to three or more people.

In our case, we are concerned with the right to eat first, after the *botzaia*. *Darkei shalom* is involved, as is the concept of a mother waiving her right. [See Brochos 46b 47a Gitin 59b Sanhedrin 23a Derech Eretz 7:1, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 165:2 167:14 170:12 20 201:1-2, commentaries. Otzar Kibud Av Va'aim Dinei, 240:39.]

### **C) Botzai'a**

When many people, especially a family, all eat at one table from the same loaf of bread, one is given the honor of reciting the *brocha* and distributing it. He should eat the first piece before he distributes the rest to those present. However, some say that he may distribute it first, or while he eats with his other hand. The others should not eat before the *botzaia*. If the homeowner is present he 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. He should still say '*bireshus rabosei*', as though he is requesting or was granted the right, out of humility. 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. The Talmud might not refer 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*.

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 could certainly honor his father or mother in this way. [See Brochos 39-40 46a, Gitin 59b, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar 167:11 14 17 18 274:1, commentaries.]

#### **D) Kibud ishto**

We have mentioned the concept of *darkei shalom*, institutions to avoid strife. One facet of this applies in the home. One should honor his wife more than himself. Nonetheless, the wife is really obliged to honor her mother-in-law as well. The poskim actually discuss a similar situation: an elderly father moves in with his married son. The son retains his seat at the head of the table, because his wife sits next to him. It would be inappropriate for the father to sit at the head flanked by his son and his daughter-in-law. [Incidentally, this is less inappropriate when the mother is the guest.] However, the father should still be served before anyone else, but the son is *botzaia*.

There is a *minhag* based on *kabalah* that a man gives his wife bread before anyone else. Furthermore, some say he should give it to her before he eats his own piece. Some say this applies only on *Shabbos*, and some say only on Friday night. On Friday night there is a special obligation to share one's food with his wife. This might also factor in here. Honoring a wife more than oneself does not mean to defer *betzias hapas* to her. He is the homeowner. Besides, she has an obligation to honor him as well. However, by giving her the bread first he honors her. In any event, this *minhag* complicates our case. One does not hand the bread to the other person, but places it before him. Accordingly, perhaps the best solution is to cut both pieces first and to place them simultaneously before both the mother and the wife. [See Kesubos 64b. Rambam Ishus 15:19-20. Sh Ar OC 167:18 EH 70:1-2, commentaries. Ar Hash YD 240:11. Kaf Hachaim OC 167:20.]

In conclusion, the bread should be placed before both of them at the same time.

**On the parsha ...** They spoke out against Hashem and Moshe ... Why did You (plural) take us out .. [21:5] They equated the servant with the Master [Rashi]. We have sinned, for we spoke out against Hashem and against you .. [21:7] Why would the Israelites repeat their offense again? They realized that part of the reason for the punishment was their equating the servant with the Master! They could have said separately, "We spoke out against Hashem, and we spoke out against you!" They did not blame the Exodus equally this time. Rather, based on Hashem sharing His respect with scholars, they meant to show Moshe honor.

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