

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY

By: Rav Moshe Taragin

Etzion Foundation cordially invites you
to attend its Annual Dinner
Rabbi Ari Berman '87
Guest of Honor - Rabbinic Tribute Award
Dr. Mark and Brenda Gardenswartz - Parents of the Year
Elana Stein '00 and Tova Warburg Sinensky '00
Alumnae of the Year, Stella K. Abraham Beit Midrash for Women
Alumni of the Yeshivat Har Etzion Classes of 1985 and 1986
Tuesday, the 21st of March 2006
Grand Hyatt Hotel, NYC

SHIUR #08: REVERING A PARENT

The Gemara in Kiddushin (31b) describes the responsibilities entailed in the mitzva of *mora av ve-eim* – revering a parent. The Torah (Vayikra 19:3) describes the mitzvah in general terms: "*Ish imo ve-aviv tira'u*" — "Each of you must revere his mother and his father." The Gemara provides a list of activities which are prohibited based upon the mitzva to revere a parent.

The Gemara's list includes two activities which sound similar: "[a child] may not stand in his place nor sit in his place." The simple reading suggests that two zones of the parent may not be usurped by the child – where the parent stands and where he sits. It certainly is intriguing that the Gemara establishes two separate categories, rather than just issuing a general injunction against occupying the parent's accustomed space. Perhaps the *issur* of standing in his place is more difficult to define than sitting in his place, namely his chair; thus, banning sitting in his chair may not have implied a ban upon standing in his place. Therefore, the *beraita* specifically proscribes standing in the spot one's parent typically inhabits.

Indeed, this is the simple understanding, but Rashi (ibid., s.v. *Lo omed bi-mkomo*) provides a very different opinion as to the nature of the first *issur*, not to "stand in his place": that it refers to consulting with his father's colleagues in the same fashion that his father would conference with them. Presumably, Rashi is disturbed by the seeming redundancy of forbidding a child's use of his parent's seat as well as his "place" of standing. Instead, Rashi expands the ban to include behaving in a manner which imitates parental behavior.

This expansion of the *issur* raises a fascinating question about its nature. Can the prohibition truly apply to a form of behavior, or might it only apply to a particular item or location? Clearly, according to Rashi, a child may not mirror or mimic parental behavior regardless of WHERE he behaves in this manner. One can honestly question whether the mitzva of revering a parent can really apply to a behavioral pattern.

Perhaps this structural issue depends upon a broader question. The Torah mentions a general mitzva to revere a parent, but it does not delineate the expressions of this mitzva. *Chazal*, in the *beraita* cited in Kiddushin, offer several negative models. We may ask: do the *Chakhamim* merely list acts to avoid and pose these cases as examples of actions which insult a parent; or do the *Chakhamim*, based upon the Torah's template, actually sculpt HALAKHICALLY forbidden activities? The Torah does not specifically proscribe the action of sitting in a parent's chair; it speaks only generally about revering a parent. It is the *Chakhamim* that prohibit a parent's chair in the very same manner that a mixture of meat and milk are forbidden; they operate upon the Torah's model and actually fashion hard and fast ACTIONS or LOCATIONS which are forbidden. According to this view, the *Chakhamim* cannot prohibit behavior per se; they can only impose a categorical prohibition upon a place or an action. By contrast, Rashi, by introducing a prohibition upon behavior which mimics a parent, may feel that the *Chakhamim* never translate the Torah's prohibition into hard and fast categories; instead they merely raise certain suggestions for avoiding behavior which would compromise the reverence due a parent. Any form of behavior, even if it is vague or undefined, is prohibited as long as it can be construed as giving insult or lessening reverence.

A similar model emerges from a dispute between Rashi and the Ramma (Rabbi Mei'ir Ha-levi, author of the *Yad Ramma*, cited by the Tur, Y.D. 240) about yet another clause of the mitzva of *mora*. After banning a child from using his parent's "place" of standing or sitting, the Gemara prohibits a child from contradicting his parent or resolving his dispute ("*ve-lo makhri'o*"); once again, the second phrase appears somewhat redundant. Rashi (ibid.) believes that each clause refers to a prohibition of contradicting one's parent's stated position. The first clause prohibits frontal contradiction, whereas the second clause ("nor may he resolve his dispute") refers to siding with the disputant of one's parent. Initially, one might have reasoned that siding with one's parent's disputant is permitted, as it does not entail outright contradiction; therefore, the Gemara specifically targets this situation to confirm its forbidden nature. The Ramma disagrees with Rashi, presumably claiming that an extra clause is not absolutely necessary to ban a child from agreeing with a disputant; such behavior would be subsumed under the primary prohibition of contradicting a parent. Instead, the Ramma claims that the *issur* applies to someone who actually agrees with his father's position but voices that agreement in a manner which indicates hubris or arrogance - as if the parent requires his approval or arbitration.

Conceptually, the aforementioned issue may be relevant within this *machloket* as well. If *Chazal* actually institutionalize specific actions as prohibited, it may be impossible to ban a child from approving his parent's view: even if contextually that approval indicates disdain or dismissal, the ACT of agreement cannot be outlawed. Perhaps Rashi is forced to interpret the *issur* as referring to contradiction because only this ACT of disagreement can be banned. An ACT of approval which possesses negative contextual consequences cannot be formally prohibited. Does this mean, by extension, that the Ramma, by defining the prohibition as contextual agreement, may view the prohibition of *mora* in fundamentally different terms? In such a case, we would say that *Chazal* never concretize the prohibition but instead discourage certain general patterns of behavior which may be disrespectful. By listing these forms of behavior, they do not institutionalize certain distinct ACTIONS as forbidden but merely recommended certain situations to be avoided; even an action which is inherently respectful, if performed in a context which connotes dismissiveness, can be forbidden.

What makes the above analysis ironic and even questionable is the striking reversal of positions. Regarding "stand[ing] in his place" Rashi is willing to prohibit contextual behavior, whereas regarding "resolv[ing] his dispute" Rashi is unwilling. Conversely, the Ramma does prohibit contextual behavior in the situation of "resolv[ing] his dispute," whereas, for some reason, he is not willing to do so in the instance of "stand[ing] in his place." Indeed the Beit Yosef (ibid., 2) asserts that the Ramma and Rashi fundamentally agree and would both prohibit contextually dismissive behavior. However, a more literal reading suggests that the Ramma may disagree with Rashi, arguing against this type of contextual prohibition. The reversal of positions between Rashi and the Ramma does pose a problem as to what each of them holds about this issue. However, CONCEPTUALLY, it appears that the very same issue is at stake.

Yet a third manifestation of this issue may emerge from an interesting extrapolation of the Rambam. Though the *beraita* lists only four examples of the prohibition of *mora*, the Rambam (Hilkhot Talmud Torah 5:5) adds a fifth: not speaking a parent's personal name. This position stems from a gemara in Sanhedrin (100a) which mentions that Geichazi was punished for using the personal name of his *rav* Elisha (with the extrapolation from *rav* to parent). Rashi (ibid., s.v. "Bi-shmo") comments that by prefacing the *rav* or parent's name with a title of honor (e.g., Rabbi Shimon or *Abba Mori* Re'uven), the student or child is allowed to say the personal name. This exception to the rule may indicate that the actual name is never forbidden for the child to speak; it is merely the dismissive nature of speaking that name without any honorific that is proscribed. Hence, when the name is mentioned in an honorable fashion, it is permissible. As such, Rashi's leniency would indicate the absence of a formalization of the prohibition.

Alternatively, we may claim that the actual personal name of the parent is indeed prohibited for the child to speak. By appending a title of honor, the child effectively alters the name. He is no longer speaking the name "Re'uven;" rather, he has conjugated an entirely different appellation by prefacing the personal name with this title. Even though the actual name is forbidden (and not just the dismissive connotations of a child speaking the name aloud), the preface permits the use of a newly conjugated designation.

Perhaps a *nafka minah* between the two ways of understanding Rashi's loophole (and by extension of understanding the structure of the prohibition) would be the question of mentioning the name with an honorable SUFFIX (rather than prefatory title). If Rashi's leniency is based upon the honorable nature of the mention, it should matter little whether the title is prefatory or appended. By contrast, if the addition of a prefix alters the name by creating a new conjugation and skirting the formal prohibition of mentioning a parent's name, we may wonder as to the permissibility of adding a suffix. Does a suffix alter the very name the same way a prefix does? Perhaps we would permit the former but prohibit the latter.