

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

What Does *Kavod* Mean To Me?

Study Session

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KOACH
on campus



The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

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The following materials have been created by **KOACH** for the enhancement of your on-campus programming. They are designed to be adjustable based on your interests and the available time. This packet contains background materials and a facilitator guide. These will help you build conversations around the text and create connections between the text and contemporary life.

Questions? Send them to: Weinstein@uscj.org

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: What Does *Kavod* Mean to Me?

Facilitator Guide

Overview and Objective

Just what is respect? Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin demanded it in their famous song from which the title of this study packet takes its name. Although we are told to show respect for our parents and teachers, we live in a culture that often champions challenging authority. Respect remains somewhat of an enigma in today's society. We are often told that we are lacking it towards others, yet we frequently feel that we are never accorded enough respect ourselves. We are not given clear guidelines about how to demonstrate respect, and we are not sure exactly who deserves it.

In Hebrew, the word for respect or honor (used in this study guide interchangeably) is "*kavod*." It is interesting to note that word *kavod* (and its root *kaf, bet, dalet*) can also mean "heavy" or "glory," two words both connected to the theme of respect.

This study guide contains three sections that explore what the value of respect meant to our Jewish ancestors and what it means to us today. The first two sections are each composed of a page of texts and a page of related questions. The third section contains three modern scenarios which can be used to spark discussions about the value of respect. The study packet will seek to answer the questions: who deserves our respect, how do we show respect, and how do we integrate respect into contemporary life?

Although this material is presented as a progression, you need not follow the format from beginning to end. Each section can stand on its own or be combined with other sections or additional texts. You may want to use one of the texts as a basis for a *d'var torah*.

Alternatively, you can place one of the texts on the center of your Shabbat dinner table and use it to spark an informal discussion. Be creative with the material and have fun!

Definitions and Biographies

Maimonides- Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, also called the Rambam. Scholar and physician from the 12th century. Lived in Spain, Morocco, Israel, and Egypt. Author of such works as the *Mishneh Torah* and *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

Yalkut Shimoni- Extensive anthology of legal and narrative midrash on the *Tanakh*. Compiled by Shimon ha-Darshan in the 13th century in Salonica, Greece.

Section One– Who Deserves Our Respect?

Texts:

ויקרא פרק יט:יח

לֹא-תִקֶם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Do not rise up in vengeance and do not bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you shall **love your neighbor as yourself**; I am the Lord.

Leviticus 19:18

שמות פרק כ:יב

כִּבֹּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יַאֲרְכּוּן יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

Honor your father and your mother so that your days will be lengthened upon the land that the Lord, your God, has given you.

Exodus 20:12

He who pays respect to his teacher, is it as if he were paying respect to the Divine Presence.

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Eruvin 5:1

משלי פרק ג:לה

כְּבוֹד חֲכָמִים יִנְחָלוּ וְכִסְיִלִים מְרִים קְלוֹן:

The wise will inherit honor, but the fools will receive shame.

Proverbs 3:35

מסכת קידושין דף לג:א

ר' יוחנן הוה קאי מקמי סבי דארמאי אמר כמה הרפתקי עדו עלייהו.

Rabbi Yohanan used to rise before the elder Arameans (non-Jews and idol worshippers), saying: 'How many troubles have passed over these!'

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 33a

Discussion Questions:

1. Before reading the excerpts in this section, ask students the following questions:
 - a. Think about the role of the value of respect in your life. To whom do **you** believe you must show respect and why? To whom does **society tell you** to show respect and why? (some ideas: politicians, intellectuals, celebrities, clergy etc.)
 - b. Are there specific people who are not worthy of respect?
2. Have students read the sources in this section. They can just survey them at first, rather than reading them closely and discussing each detail. Ask them to list all the people to whom the classical Jewish sources require us to show our respect. Are any of the choices surprising (such as the idol worshippers)? Do they agree with all the people listed? Is anyone missing?
3. Have students read the excerpt from Leviticus 19 closely. Ask what it teaches about respect and why. Look at the phrase in bold and point out that a number of Rabbis suggest that instead of the translation “love your neighbor as yourself,” the phrase should be read as “love your neighbor because he is as yourself.” How do these different translations affect the text’s meaning? How do the two translations teach different lessons about the value of respect?

Section Two – How to Show Respect

Texts:

<p style="text-align: right;">ויקרא פרק יט:ג אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת־שַׁבָּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם :</p> <p>Fear your mother and your father, and keep my Sabbaths, I am the Lord, your God. <i>Leviticus 19:3</i></p>	<p style="text-align: right;">שמות פרק כ:יב כִּבְדֹּתְךָ אֶת־אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוֹן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ :</p> <p>Honor your father and your mother so that your days will be lengthened upon the land that the Lord, your God, has given you. <i>Exodus 20:12</i></p>
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מסכת קידושין דף לא:ב

ת"ר איזהו מורא ואיזהו כיבוד מורא לא עומד במקומו ולא יושב במקומו ולא סותר את דבריו ולא מכריעו כיבוד מאכיל ומשקה מלביש ומכסה מכניס ומוציא.

Our Rabbis taught: What is "fear" and what is "honor"? "Fear" means that he [the son] must neither stand in his [the father's] place nor sit in his place, nor contradict his words, nor tip the scales against him. "Honor" means that he must give him food and drink, clothe and cover him, lead him in and out.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 31b

ילקוט שמעוני שמות פרק יג: סימן רכו

דרך ארץ תלמיד טוען פנם ומהלך לפני הרב ברם הכא לא ימיש עמוד הענן יומם. דרך ארץ תלמיד מלביש את הרב ברם הכא ואלבישך רקמה. ר' סימון אומר פורפירון. דרך ארץ תלמיד מנעיל את הרב ברם הכא ואנעלך תחש. דרך ארץ הרב ישן ותלמיד עומד על גביו ברם הכא הנה לא ינום ולא יישן שומר ישראל.

A student is required to carry a torch and walk in front of his teacher (to light the way)...A student is required to help his teacher dress...A student is required to help his teacher put on his shoes...A student is required to stand by his teacher while he sleeps.

Yalkut Shimoni, Beshalach, 226

Discussion Questions:

1. Before reading the texts, ask the following questions:
 - a. How do you show respect to your parents, your teachers, and your friends?
 - b. Can you think of an instance when you should have shown respect to someone, but instead treated them disrespectfully? If you are comfortable doing so, share the experience and your feelings with your study group.
 - c. Similarly, can you think of an instance when you showed respect to someone who did not anticipate being treated positively? How did you behave? How did the other person respond? How did you feel?

2. Have students read the quote from Leviticus and the quote from Exodus in the bolded text box. Ask them to describe the differences between the two statements. Although there are a number of differences between the texts, focus on the difference between the command to fear one's parents in Leviticus 19:3 and honor one's parents in Exodus 20:12. Ask students why they think there are two different passages about how to behave towards one's parents. How are "fear" and "honor" similar? How are they different? Next, have students read the passage from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Kiddushin* 31b. Discuss how this passage describes the difference between "fear" and "honor." Do you agree with the Talmud's distinction?

3. Read over the excerpt from Tractate *Kiddushin* a second time, along with the passage from *Yalkut Shimoni*. Both selections describe traditional ways of showing respect to parents and teachers. Are these methods of showing respect still practical and applicable in modern society? If not, are there new methods of showing respect to parents and teachers that should be advocated?

4. Section Three – Modern Scenarios: Respect in Our Lives Today

Directions: This section provides a method of looking at how to apply the value of respect in contemporary society. Read the different scenarios together, discuss the issues they raise, and suggest solutions. This section is a great way to summarize the entire study packet, but it can also be used as an activity on its own.

Situation 1

Your friend Adam needs your advice. His stepfather never treated him well when he was a child. In fact, some people might say that his stepfather was verbally abusive. Adam does not like his stepfather, and tries not to be around him as often as possible (which is easier now that he has gone away to college).

However, last semester, Adam's stepfather became ill. Yesterday, Adam's mother called her son and asked him to live at home and help care for his stepfather. As you are Adam's most religious friend, Adam wants to know if you think that the commandment to "honor your mother and father" demands that he return home to care for his stepfather, despite his personal feeling towards the man. Drawing from both the source materials and your discussions on the topic of respect, do you think Adam has a responsibility to help take care of his stepfather? If so, what does his responsibility entail?

Situation 2

Sarah just won the lottery! Because she has such a generous soul, Sarah decides to use a significant portion of her newfound riches to help fight the war against poverty. Sarah wants to establish a charitable fund or organization that will offer aid to those who are hungry and homeless in a respectful manner, allowing the recipients of her *tzedakah* to maintain their dignity. Although enthusiastic about her goal, Sarah is confused about how to implement such a project. She also wonders if the Jewish tradition teaches anything about giving charity in a respectful manner. As Sarah's best friend, you tell her that the medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides taught that there were eight levels of *tzedakah* (listed on the following page). Look at these levels of *tzedakah* and explain to Sarah how they teach about showing respect to the less fortunate. Do you have any ideas for Sarah about how she can set up her charitable fund or organization in way that allows those she helps to maintain their self-respect?

Situation 3

Your passion is politics. In your spare time, you enjoy sitting with your friends, drinking coffee, and debating the plusses and minuses of such topics as free trade, military intervention, and government involvement in social issues. You and your friends also often debate the character and policies of one of the two senators from your state. Although many of your friends think that this senator is a benevolent genius, in your political opinion, the senator's politics range from being moronic to downright dangerous. It just so happens that this senator is scheduled to come speak at your university next week. You have tickets to attend his lecture and you are wondering how you should you behave when he speaks. Should you applaud at the end of the senator's speech as a sign of respect even if you strongly disagree with what he says? If there is a question and answer session afterwards and you wish to ask a question, does your question have to be asked in a particularly respectful tone? Is it respectful of the senator to organize a student protest to greet him outside the lecture hall? Is it respectful to the ideals of the United States to refrain from protesting?

Maimonides Eight Levels of *Tzedakah* in the *Mishneh Torah*: (from the least to most praiseworthy)

1. Grudgingly offering donations.
2. Giving willingly and cheerfully, but giving less than one should.
3. When asked, giving directly to the poor.
4. Giving directly to the poor without being asked.
5. When the recipient is aware of the donor's identity, but the donor does not know the identity of the recipient.
6. When the donor is aware of the recipient's identity, but the recipient does not know the owner's identity.
7. When neither the owner nor the recipient know each other's identities.
8. Giving a loan, helping someone find work, or entering into partnership with someone so he or she will not have any further need to ask for charity.

Additional Resources

- The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-by-Day Guide to Ethical Living by Joseph Telushkin. Harmon/Bell Tower, 2000.
- The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues by Nachum Amsel. Jason Aronson, 1994.
- Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: A Jewish Approach to Modern Personal Ethics by Elliot Dorff. JPS, 2003.
- To Do the Right and the Good: A Jewish Approach to Modern Social Ethics by Elliot Dorff. JPS, 2004.