

Additional Resources for *Changing the World from the Inside Out* by Rabbi David Jaffe

Learn the Sources – Kavod/Dignity

The term “Kavod/כבוד” can be translated as “respect,” “dignity,” or “honor.” To begin our exploration of the meaning of this term let’s look at two quotes from Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe’s introduction to the middah of Kavod in his [Aley Shor II](#):

“The word “Kavod” is from the Hebrew root “K.V.D.” (which means weighty or heavy). The diametric opposite is the word “Klala”(curse) which comes from the Hebrew root “K.L.” (light). When I relate to someone with due seriousness I honor him, and if I treat him lightly it is as if I curse him.”

“...Kavod is external behavior mandated by and appropriate to a reality of inner holiness. Behold, you have within you a Tzelem Elokim Kadosh (holy divine image) – this requires you to treat yourself with a certain level of self-respect...”

How do these ideas find expression or not in the following statements about Kavod in Pirkei Avot, chapter 4:

"Rabbi Elazar HaKapar says: Three things drive a person from the world - jealousy, base desires and kavod."

רבי אלעזר הקפ"ר אומר, הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם:

"Ben Zoma says...Who is honorable? One who honors all others."

איזהו מכבד, המכבד את הבריות

What does it mean to be driven from the world?

For a further examination of the inner dimension of Kavod, see the ideas of the following two 20th century thinkers:

R. Shalom Noach Barzofsky (The Slonimer Rebbe). This excerpt is a commentary on the quote above from Pirke Avot 4:1:

When the Mishnah asks, “Who is dignified?” it does not mean, “Who is made dignified by other people,” as is the common understanding. What value is there in being dependent on other people giving you dignity? Rather, “Who is dignified? One who gives dignity to all people” is teaching that the gaze of one

person to another is like glancing in the mirror – if his face is dirty he will see in the mirror a dirty face. So it is the same when a person looks at the other – the amount that he is pure and refined internally, so he will look more generously upon the other and see good attributes. On the other hand, if he is infected with bad attributes and behaviors, so he will see bad attributes in everyone else. Therefore, the truly dignified person is the one who treats all people with dignity, who appreciates all people. This behavior is the true sign that he is dignified himself.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook - Middot Harayah: Kavod 4

The more lacking one is in inner perfection, the more nature will seek to gain perfection on an outer level. It is only in a state of low-level spirituality that there will be aroused in a person a desire to glorify himself before others, both with the virtues he possesses and with others he does not possess. It is therefore important for a person to enhance his level of inner perfection, and his self-assessment in relation to others shall always be in the proper measure.

What do you think “inner perfection” means?

What experience do you have with the relationship between self–kavod and giving kavod to others?

For Further study

The following Biblical, Talmudic, Medieval and Modern sources explore different facets of *Kavod*.

Source 1: The following Biblical, Talmudic and Modern sources explore Human Uniqueness:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ

And God said, "Let us make the human being in our image and likeness. (Genesis 1:26)

**נברא אדם יחידי בעולם ללמד שכל המאבד נפש אחת מעלין עליו כאילו איבד
עולם מלא וכל המקיים נפש אחת מעלין עליו כאילו קיים עולם מלא**

Humans were created unique, to teach that anyone who destroys a life it is as if he destroyed an entire world. And anyone who sustains a life it is as if he sustained an entire world.
Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 23a, Chapter 4, Mishna 9

We must recognize and know that the mitzvah to imitate God is not an impossible decree ...to become different than we are; rather, this great mitzvah befits us, especially once God has revealed this great love by informing us that we were created in God's image. The Divinity within us obligates us to become whom we really are in potential, whom we were created to be - to release the potential within each of us and become people who truly reflect God's image. A Talk by Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt'l, the "Alter of Slobodka" (1849-1927). Translated by Rabbi Nosson Scherman, from the Greatness Within Website

Questions:

What does being made in the "Divine image" imply for us as humans?

How is destroying or sustaining a single life equivalent to destroying or sustaining a world? What might be meant by "world?"

What behaviors, habits and/or practices do you do already that "reflects God's image?"

What might you do differently if you were to intentionally "reflect God's image?"

Source 2: Mishneh Torah, Laws of Character Development, 5:2,9 (Maimonides, d. 1204, Egypt)

**כשהחכם אוכל מעט זה הראוי לו לא יאכלנו אלא בביתו על שולחנו ולא יאכל בחנות ולא
בשוק אלא מפני צורך גדול כדי שלא יתגנה בפני הבריות**

מלבוש תלמיד חכם מלבוש נאה ונקי ואסור לו שימצא בבגדו כתם או שמנונית

When the wise man eats the little which is fitting for him, he should eat it only in his own home, at his table. He should not eat in a store or in the marketplace, unless there is a very pressing need, lest he be viewed by others as lacking in self-respect...

A Torah Sage's clothing should be attractive and clean. It is forbidden that [a] blood or fat [stain] or the like be found on his garment.

Questions:

Why would eating in a store or marketplace be seen as a sign of lack of self-respect?

How do you react to these external markers of respect and self-respect? Why do you think you react this way?

In what external ways do you communicate self-respect?

What do you think should be the appropriate role for clothes and other externalities in the practice of Kavod.

Source 3: Pirkei Avot 4:3

אל תהי בז לכל אדם, ואל תהי מפליג לכל דבר, שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה ואין לך דבר שאין לו מקום:

He (Ben Azzai) used to say: Do not be scornful of any person and do not be disdainful of anything, for you have no person without his hour and no thing without its place."

Questions:

What kinds of people or things are you prone to disregard as insignificant? Why?

Have you ever been disregarded? What happened and how did it feel?

How might you act differently if you internalized Ben Azzai's advice?

Source 4: Pirkei Avot 4:18

(יב) רבי אלעזר בן שמוע אומר, יהי כבוד תלמידך חביב עליך כשלה, וכבוד חברך כמורא רבך, ומורא רבך כמורא שמים:

Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua said: Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own; the honor of your colleague as the reverence for your teacher; and the reverence for your teacher as the reverence of heaven."

Questions:

In each stage we are instructed to give honor at a level that is one step higher than expected. What might the effect of this strategy be on the giver of honor?

What is easy and what is challenging for you about honoring your students? Your colleagues? Your teachers?

Source 5: Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 31b

ת"ר... ואיזהו כיבוד... מאכיל ומשקה מלביש ומכסה מכניס

Our sages taught: What is *Kavod* [for parents]? ... to feed them, give them drink, dress them, cover them and accompany them.

Questions:

Why do you think *Kavod* is defined by the Rabbis as specifically physical assistance given to aging parents?

If you have taken care of an aging parent in this way, how was it an experience of *Kavod*?

What are other ways you honor your parents?

How does honoring parents relate to the other ways you understand *Kavod* (eg. uniqueness, dignity)?