

TALMUD TORAH 5:5

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

5. It is forbidden for a student to refer to his teacher by name, even while not in his presence. This is only the case if his name is unusual, such that anyone hearing it would recognize that it is him [the teacher]. He should not mention his [the teacher's] name in his [the teacher's] presence - even to call others by his teacher's name - just as he behaves regarding his father's name. Rather, he should alter their names - even after their death.

He should not greet his teacher or respond to his greeting as friends greet each other and respond. Rather, he should bow in front of him and say, with awe and respect: *Shalom Alekha, Rebbe* (Peace be upon you, my teacher). If his teacher greets him, he should respond *Shalom Alekha Rabbi uMori* (Peace be upon you, my teacher and master).

Q1: Why the emphasis on "reverence" for his teacher's name?

YE (Yitz Etshalom): See Sandy's comments below. The model here, as in other Halakhot, seems to be reverence for parents - and one expression of that reverence is not calling father/mother by name, not calling others by name if it is the same etc.

It may be that all of this is, as Sandy says, "representational reverence"; or, it may be that our Rabbis understood that the prohibitions against misusing God's Name(s), as explicated in the Torah, reflect a model of earthly awe, based on distance. The difference between these two explanations is essentially one of starting point - is God the essential model, upon which parent/teacher awe is based? Or is the parent/teacher the starting point, upon which - and around which - the Torah builds our relationship with God?

Q2: Why the distinction between being in front of his teacher or away from him (in front of him, we may not even call someone else by name if his name is the same as teacher's - but away from him, it is only referring to the teacher that is prohibited).

YE: Two possibilities: a) it may be (mis)understood that we are calling our teacher directly; (see RaDBaZ, MT Mamrim 6:3) b) it may be a greater form of disrespect in his presence - as if that name takes on special impact when the teacher is around.

There is something subtly instructive about the way this Halakha is formulated. Although it seems to point to "God-like" worship of the teacher, at the same time it draws on the inherent distinction. In the case of God, everywhere is "in front of Him" - unlike the teacher.

Q3: Does the qualifier of "unusual names" apply only to the first clause - referring to the teacher - or does it apply to the second clause - calling others by the same name in front of teacher - as well?

YE: From another location in MT (Mamrim 6:3) it seems clear that this clause applies to both cases.

By the way, the Halakha in Mamrim is phrased in an unusual way, considering the phrasing in our Halakha (TT 5:5): (in the context of honor/awe for parents)"...If his father's name, or his teacher's name are the same as other people, he must alter their [the other people's] name. It seems to me that one need not be careful about this except in the case of a name which is unusual that is not commonly used. However, names which are [commonly] given to people, such as Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Moshe etc. - in any language and at any time - he may call others [by these names] not in his [father's - and teacher's?] presence..."

The formulation is strange in several ways. First of all, R includes, seemingly without reason, the teacher. Secondly, R shares his innovation, of the unusual name, in this place only - but in our Halakha (TT 5:5), it is treated as a given. (see Kesef Mishneh, TT 5:5 - he is not comfortable with R's innovation of the "unusual name").

R may be introducing the entire notion in Hilkhos Mamrim (where he codifies the Halakhot of children's obligations towards parents) to teach us that the basic problem with referring to a parent/teacher by name stems from honor/awe for parents, which is extended - perhaps by *Qal vaHomer* logic - to teachers. R already set up this *Qal vaHomer* in 5:1. Therefore, the proper place to introduce it is in the discussion of honor/awe for parents. At that point, in order to demonstrate that the teacher's-name-issue is an expansion of the parent's-name-issue, R includes "the teacher" in that Halakha.

Q4: Why bow to his teacher? Doesn't this (again - see posting on 5:1) bring us to the danger of "teacher-worship"?

YE: Yes! That may be why the Gemara in Berakhot (27a-b) states that one should not pray facing his teacher. Tosafot explains that that would look as if you were bowing to your teacher. Evidently, Tosafot's reasoning is that since a student has (and must have) a high level of reverence for his teacher, if he bows in the teacher's direction during prayer - that may look as if the student was worshipping the teacher.

Q5: Why is there a set formula for the greeting and response to the teacher?

YE: On one hand, the student may feel that it is inappropriate to respond at all - speaking itself (certainly in some cultures) is considered a sign of "excessive" familiarity. (See, for instances, the studies on children from immigrant families who are told by their American teachers "Look at me when I am talking to you" when they are being chastised - and the same behavior at home [looking at the parent, instead of down at the ground, when being "yelled at"] gets them into more trouble for being disrespectful. In some cultures, even today, "familiarity" is considered disrespectful and a lack

of the proper awe due parents and teachers.) Conversely, the student is, after all, with his teacher for many hours and in many day-to-day circumstances (which is how the student would "pick up" his teacher's characteristics etc.) - and may feel that a casual greeting is acceptable - especially if his teacher initiated it. Therefore, we have a median - yes, a response, but not casual, rather quite formal and structured.

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