

Kavod - Honor **Primary Texts**

Biblical Meanings of *Kavod*

1. [From the ten commandments] “Give *kavod* to your father and your mother; that your days may be long upon the land which *Adonai* your God gives you.” (Ex. 20:12)
2. “A woman of grace obtains *kavod*; and men of power obtain riches.” (Proverbs 11:16)
3. [Joseph instructing his brothers...] “You shall tell my father of all my *kavod* in Egypt and of all that you have seen. Now hurry and bring my father down here.” (Gen. 45:13)
4. [Moses to Israelites] “Now in the morning you will see *kevod Adonai*....” (Ex. 16:7)
5. “*Kevod Adonai* abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. On the seventh day [God] called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.” (Ex. 24:16)
6. [God to Solomon] “Behold, I have done according to your words. I have given you a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like you before nor shall any like you arise after. But I have also given you that which you have not asked—both riches, and *kavod* so that there shall not be any among the kings like you all your days.” (1 Kings 3:12-13)
7. “Holy, holy, holy is *Adonai Tsevaot!* The whole earth is filled with God’s *kavod!*” (Isaiah 6:3)

***Kavod* in the Talmud**

1. “*Kevod habriyot* [the *kavod*—honor—due to every human-being] is so great that it suspends a negative precept in the Torah.” (Meg. 3b)
2. “There are three partners in creation: the Holy One of Blessing, the father, and the mother. When a person gives *kavod* to his father and mother, the Holy One of Blessing says, ‘I consider it as if I had lived among them and they had given *kavod* to Me.’” (Kid. 30b)
3. “[Ulla the older taught that when God revealed the first two commandments (“I am *Adonai*, your God” and “You shall have no other gods...”—Ex. 20:2-3)] the nations of the world said: “God is saying this only for *kevod atsmo* [for God’s own honor].” But when God said: “Honor your father and your mother,” they retracted [their position] and acknowledged the first [two commandments].” (Kid. 31a)
4. “Whenever R. Tarfon’s mother wanted to climb into bed, he would bend down and she would climb [on him to get] into bed. And whenever she got out [of bed], she would descend on him [in order to reach the floor]. R. Tarfon came and praised himself [on account of the honor he showed his mother] at the house of study. They said to him: ‘You have not yet reached half of the honor [that one can show his parents]’” (Kid. 31a)
5. “Whenever R. Yosef would hear the footsteps of his mother, he would say: ‘I shall stand before the *shechina* (the divine presence), which is approaching.’” (Kid. 31a)

6. “They asked R. Eliezer: ‘How much should one honor father and mother?’ He answered them: ‘To the point that if [a parent] takes a money purse and throws it into the sea in [the child’s] presence, [the child] does not embarrass him....” (Kid. 31b)
7. “Ben Zoma teaches: ‘Who is worthy of *kavod*? The one who treats other human-beings with *kavod*. As it is said: ‘For those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who scorn Me, I will scorn.’ (1 Sam. 2:30)” (Pirkei Avot, 4:1)
8. Chelbo said: ‘Always a man should be careful [regarding] the *kavod* of his wife, because blessing is found in his house only because of his wife.’.....[Rava said]....: ‘Honor your wives so that you will attain riches.’” (B. Met. 59a)
9. Yosei teaches: ‘The one who honors the Torah, will be honored by others.’” (Pirkei Avot, 4:6)
10. “The one who learns from his fellow a single chapter, or a single law, or a single verse, or a single saying, or even one letter—must treat [the teacher] with *kavod*.” (Pirkei Avot, 6:3)
11. “R. Elazar ben Shamma says: ‘Let the *kavod* of your student be as dear to you as your own, and the *kavod* of your colleague as the reverence for your rabbi, and the reverence for your rabbi as the reverence for Heaven.’” (Pirkei Avot, 4:15)
12. [The situation: You are studying Torah and come across the section of the Torah which contains the *shema* (Deut. 6:4). While you are studying this section, you realize that it is time to pray the *shema*. You refocus yourself and now begin *praying* these words in order to fulfill the requirement of reciting *shema* in the morning. At that moment, your teacher walks in. Ordinarily, if a teacher enters a room while you are studying, you are required to rise and greet the rabbi—give *kavod* to the teacher. In this case, however, you are in the middle of *praying*, not *studying*. This passage tells you what to do in such a situation....] “During the breaks [in between sections of the *shema*], one may give greeting and return greeting out of *kavod*. In the middle [of a section], one may give greeting and return greeting out of fear [lest one be punished for insolence].” (Berachot 13a)
13. “Eleazar b. Mathia said: ‘If my father orders me, “Give me a drink of water,” while I have a *mitsvah* to perform, I disregard my father’s *kavod* and perform the *mitsvah*, since both my father and I are bound to fulfill the *mitsvot*.’ Issi b. Judah maintained: ‘If the *mitsvah* can be performed by others, it should be performed by others, while he goes [and concerns himself] with his [father’s] *kavod*.’ Said R. Mattana: ‘The *halachah* agrees with Issi b. Judah.’” (Kid. 32a)
14. [This rather long excerpt illustrates the complexity of the hierarchy of the *kavod* system]
Isaac b. Shila said in R. Mattana's name in the name of R. Hisda: ‘If a father renounces his *kavod*, it is renounced; but if a rabbi renounces his *kavod*, it is not renounced.’¹ R. Joseph ruled: ‘Even if a rabbi renounces his *kavod*, it is renounced, for it is said: “Adonai went before them by day.” [Ex. 13:21—God serves as the guide for the Israelites, thus renouncing God’s own *kavod* by leading the way] “How can you compare [God to the rabbi]? There [in the example with God], it’s God’s world and God’s Torah--[in which case] God can suspend His *kavod*. Here [in the example of the rabbi], is the Torah his [that he can do as he pleases]?”

¹ That is, a father can ask a child to treat him *without* the *kavod* that is normally due to him but a rabbi cannot ask a congregant to do the same (i.e. a father can tell his son *not* to rise whenever the father enters a room but a rabbi cannot tell a congregant to call him by his first name)

Later Rava said, 'The Torah **is** his, as it is written: "And in *his* Torah will he rejoice, day and night.'" [Ps. 1:2]

But that is not so. For Rava was serving drink at his son's wedding, and when he offered a cup to R. Papa and R. Huna son of R. Joshua, they stood up before him [and let him serve them, thereby allowing him to renounce his *kavod* and wait on them] But [when he offered] R. Mari and R. Phineas son of R. Hisda, they did not stand up before him [and thereby did not allow him to renounce his *kavod*]. Thereupon he was offended and exclaimed: 'Are these rabbis and the others not!' [That is, why do these rabbis allow him to suspend his *kavod* while the others do not?].

Ashi said: Even on the view that if a rabbi renounces his *kavod* it is renounced, yet if a *nasi* [president of the sanhedrin] renounces his *kavod*, his renunciation is invalid. An objection is raised: It once happened that R. Eliezer, R. Joshua and R. Zadok were reclining at a banquet of Rabban Gamaliel's son, while Rabban Gamaliel was standing over them and serving drink. When he offered a cup to R. Eliezer, he did not accept it but when he offered it to R. Joshua, he did. Said R. Eliezer to him, "What is this Joshua? We should sit while Rabban Gamliel the great stands and serves us?" R. Joshua said to him, "We find one greater [than Rabban Gamliel] who served--Abraham was greater and he served [others]. Abraham was the greatest of his generation and it is written about him: 'And he stood over them [serving the three men who happened upon him in the desert] ...' (Gen. 18:8) Perhaps you will say that these men appeared to him to be ministering angels [and that is why he served them and thus, did not really suspend his *kavod* since they were greater than he]? No! They looked only like Arabs to him! And [you argue that] the great Rabban Gamliel cannot stand and serve drinks to us?"

Tsadok said to them: "How long are you all going to renounce the *kavod* of God while busying yourself with *kevod habriyot*? [i.e. Here you are bringing Abraham in as an example of one who suspends his honor by serving an inferior when you could have used God for proof!] If the Holy One of Blessing causes the winds to blow and the clouds to form and brings forth rain and causes the earth to bloom and arranges a table before each and every person, cannot the great Rabban Gamliel stand and serve drinks to us?"

"Now, if he [R. Ashi] said anything, he said as follows: Said R. Ashi, 'Even the one who argues that a *nasi* who suspends his *kavod*, his *kavod* **is** suspended, [would agree that] a king who suspends his *kavod*, his *kavod* **is not** suspended.' (Kid. 32a,b)

15. "One should not say: 'I will study [Torah] so that they will call me a scholar. I will learn *Mishna* so that they will call me a rabbi. I will teach so that I will become an elder and sit in a *yeshivah*. Rather, learn out of love and in the end, *kavod* will come.'" (Ned. 62a)
16. "Anyone can come up as one of the seven prescribed [Torah readers]—even a minor and even a woman. But the sages said: 'A woman should not read the Torah [at a service] because of the *kavod* of the congregation.'" (Meg., 23a)
17. "Ulla son of Rav asked Abaye: 'Is a scantily clad minor allowed to read from the Torah [during services]?' He replied: 'You might as well ask about a naked one. Why is one without any clothes not allowed? Out of *kavod* for the congregation. So here, [in the case of the scantily clad minor, he is not allowed] out of *kavod* for the congregation.'" (Meg. 24b)
18. "Whoever takes no thought for the *kavod* of the Creator, it would be fitting if that person had not entered the world." (Hag. 16a)
19. "All that the Holy One of Blessing created, for God's *kavod* did God create it." (Yoma 38a)

20. R. Joshua ben Levi teaches: “A person is forbidden to walk four cubits with an erect posture because it is said: ‘The whole world is filled with God’s *kavod*!’ Rav Huna son of Rav Joshua did not go four cubits with his head uncovered. He said, ‘The *shechina* is above my head.’” (Kid. 31a)

21. “R. Judah—others state, R. Nehemiah—said: ‘One must not cause himself to vomit in the street, out of *kavod*.’²

Our Rabbis taught: ‘If one searches his garments for lice [on the Sabbath] he may press [the vermin] and throw it away, providing that he does not kill it [since killing animals is forbidden on Shabbat].’

Abba Saul said: ‘He must take and throw it away, providing that he does not press it.’ R. Huna said, ‘The halachah is, he may press and throw it away, and that is his *kavod*, even on weekdays.’

Rabbah killed them, and R. Shesheth killed them. Rava threw them into a basin of water. R. Nahman said to his daughters, ‘Kill them and let me hear the sound of the hated ones.’” (Shabbat 12a)

² According to Rashi, one does not do this out of *kavod* for passersby in the street.