

She desecrates her father. (21:9)

Why should her father be blamed? Veritably, parents often must accept blame for their children's indiscretions, but it seems that here it is assumed. By exhibiting profligate behavior, the daughter of the *Kohen* has disgraced her father. We find a similar case concerning the family of Miraim *bas* Bilgah, whose family was disgraced as a result of her rebelliousness. Apparently, the Torah here blames the father. Later (*Parashas Ki Seitzei*) concerning the debasement of the *naarah ha'meorasah*, betrothed maiden, who was found guilty of infidelity, she is taken to the doorway of her father's home to be stoned. Her parents are blamed. Why? Who does not know wonderful, caring, loving parents who do everything in the world for their children, to no avail? It is a Heavenly decree that some must suffer. Some children go off the *derech*, despite every medium employed to circumvent and prevent these tragedies from occurring.

I think *Rashi* alludes to what might be the reason that the father is held in contempt concerning his daughter's disgrace, when he writes: "*Chilelah u'bizah es kevodo*, She profaned/disgraced and humiliated his honor; *She'omrim alav, arur she'zu yalad, arur she'zu gidal*, because they say about him, 'cursed is he that gave birth to this (girl), cursed is he that raised this (girl).'" The father reproved his daughter. He certainly had rebuked her numerous times. So why was it ineffective? I think the answer lies in one word – *kevodo*, his honor. The father was not as concerned with his daughter's crass and ignominious behavior and its effect on her religious observance, as much as he was concerned over what it was doing to his standing in the community. The father feared that his daughter's nefarious activities were a disgrace to his esteemed position.

I remember vividly years ago a student who began to gravitate towards non-observance. He still came to *shul*, but did not *daven*. He rarely put on *Tefillin*. He kept kosher at home. Once he left the house, *kashrus*, *Shabbos* and all of the other Jewish staples went out the window. I remember his father visiting me to attempt to somehow turn his son around. "I cannot tolerate him coming to *shul* on *Shabbos* dressed in jeans, a colored tee shirt with offensive designs and lettering all over it, and wearing sandals without socks. He is humiliating me! I can handle the (lack of) *Shabbos*, *kashrus*, etc., but why does he have to embarrass me in front of my friends?"

This is what concerned the father – not *Shabbos* – not *kashrus*, but the fact that his son's chosen dress code embarrassed him. *Kavod*, honor, esteem – that is what he cared about. His concern was for himself and his reputation – not his child's spiritual demise. When parents put themselves first, when their comfort zone precedes the spiritual and emotional needs of their children, then they must own up to their part in the children's spiritual departure from Jewish observance. *Es avihah hee michalelels*, "She desecrates her father": Apparently, this is all her father cared about when he admonished her to come home. After all, what are the neighbors and the people in *shul* going to say?