

The Spilled Wine: A Story of *Kavod* (Respect)

Rabbi Akiba Eiger invited many people to his Pesach seder. Young people and old, rich people and poor gathered around the table. Toward the beginning of the seder, one of his guests stumbled and his wine spilled on the beautiful white tablecloth. Everyone at the table stared in horror, first at the dark red stain spreading across the tablecloth, and then at the man who had spilled his wine, whose face was red with embarrassment. Silently everyone turned to look at the rabbi to see what he would do. Would he yell at the man who spilled the wine? Would he send him away from the table?

The rabbi stood up, bumped the table, and spilled his own wine. "I'm so sorry," he said. "This table is uneven. I forgot to warn you. There is often a problem with things spilling." And then the rabbi went on with the rest of the seder. Because of the rabbi's great show of respect for his guests, the man who spilled his wine stopped feeling embarrassed and greatly enjoyed the rest of his meal.

Rabbi Eiger embodies the virtue *lo lavayesh* (not embarrassing). The rabbis thought this was so important, one said, "A person who publicly shames a neighbor is like someone who has shed blood." (*Baba Metzia* 58b)

For discussion:

1. How would you feel if you were the guest who spilled his wine?
2. Why did the rabbi spill his own wine?
3. Was the table really uneven?

For family life:

1. Read *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes. Who is showing kavod? Who is not? Look out for examples of kavod (or the absence of kavod) in other books you read.
2. Take care to notice when children or adults in your family or community model kavod, especially *lo lavayesh*. Perhaps deposit a marble in a jar for each example of kavod, and have a special celebration when the jar is full.
3. Act out some embarrassing situations (someone falling, dropping something). How many respectful responses can children come up with?

Akiba Eiger was an eighteenth-century rabbi who was known for his hospitality. His story can be found in the haggadah *A Different Night*. Thank you to Nechama Retting and Tobey Greenberg for pointing out this story and some of the discussion and class life suggestions.