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Women's Whispers: No daddies here, please

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07/16/2010 15:49

People are always aghast when they hear me address my father. I call him by his distinctive Hungarian nickname, and he never protests. Although I was a child of the '70s, we were no hippie family. Discipline and manners were the cornerstones of my parents' child-rearing methods. My father and I were not on first-name bases with each other because he thought we were equals.

The Talmud prohibits calling a father or teacher by name, even after their deaths (*Kiddushin* 31b). Some opinions say that a parent may waive a child's obligation in this matter, but only if there is no humiliation to the parent: A father may concede his right to respect, but never accede to being shamed by his child.

A person who contravenes this rule is not merely considered to have violated a single rule. She or he is labeled an *apikores* – apostate – a person who has thrown off the yoke of divine law (*Sanhedrin* 100a). One rabbi suggests that Elisha's disciple Gehazi was struck with the terrible disease of leprosy because he referred to his teacher by name (II [Kings](#) 8:5).

Whenever, in violation of the rule, I call to my father by his name, my husband objects, chiding me for being disrespectful. My father retorts strenuously in return, "Viva disrespectful?" he laughs. "She's too respectful!"

My father's great-grandparents came to America from Hungary in the 1880s; a son and a daughter were born to them in the land of their sojourning. Family legend has it that one day the son came home from school and addressed his father as "daddy." The father was so incensed at his son for using that insolent-sounding title that he ordered the family to pack up and return to Hungary. There are more plausible explanations for the emigration, such as the insufferable American weather, but the family legend prevails.

After her coming to Europe, the American-born girl, Malka (Maali), married a butcher,

settled in a primitive Hungarian town, and bore 14 children. For 20 years, she used to say, her foot did not rest from rocking the cradle. We do not know why the family remained in Hungary as life became increasingly unbearable for Jews in the 1930s and '40s. Maali, after all, was American; couldn't she and her children have escaped to the free world?

Apparently there was talk on this subject, because the objections to the idea have survived in family legend. Maali had many daughters who were admired for their blondness and their handiwork skills. Some crocheted doilies and some spun businesses out of the breezes floating past them. These women shared a dismal shortcoming: their singleness. No matter how exceptional their financial acumen or beauty, they could not find husbands. In America, the adults whispered among themselves, the unmarried women would become *shaigetzes*, apostates, prostitutes, worse! America was the land of sinners. The family did not emigrate.

Maali and nine of her children were murdered in Auschwitz. Not one of the talented single girls was among those saved. Most of those who did survive immigrated to the New World and, inheriting a shard of their sisters' gifts, became immensely wealthy. Some kept the faith of their mother.

So when people ask why I do not call my father daddy, or dad, and how he can put up with my alternative, I cannot answer in a single breath. Because, I would have to explain, our clan was murdered by reason of that name.

Of late, I have begun to call my father papa, as my children do. He does not protest. He's not one to fuss about titles, or other superficial things, but there are no daddies in his home or in the home of any of his children or grandchildren.

A pox on your respect.

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