

Greeting a Rabbi or superior

"הנותן שלום לרבו והמחזיר שלום לרבו... גורם לשכינה שתסתלק מישראל"
(ברכות כז:).

Is greeting a Rabbi or superior proper etiquette? The Rabbis of the Land of Israel and Babylonia differed on this question. In the Land of Israel, greeting a superior was required. In Babylonia, it was avoided or perhaps even forbidden.

The respective practices of these two communities are recorded in the Talmud Yerushalmi and many generations later in the 'Book of Differences', a late composition from the Land of Israel. The former recounts how the Babylonian Rabbi Eliezer avoided the elder Rabbi Yochanan following the verse in Job "The lads saw me and hid. The elders got up and stood" (29:8). Lads show respect by not showing themselves; while elders show respect by standing up.

In the Babylonian Talmud itself the very same Rabbi Eliezer teaches: "One who greets his Rabbi and returns his Rabbi's greetings . . . causes the Shekhinah to depart." (*Berachoth* 27b). However, most of our Sages, notwithstanding the Talmud Yerushalmi could not take this teaching at face value. Rashi and Maimonides understood it to mean that one may not greet his Rabbi or superior in the same manner as he does his friends, but in humble fashion, bowing before the Rabbi.