

## **“Honor your father and your mother.” (20:12)**

The Fifth Commandment, honoring one's parents, is a bedrock of our faith. Our tradition is based on the chain of transmission from Avraham *Avinu* to his descendants who received the Torah at *Har Sinai* and handed it down in its entirety from generation to generation. This chain links parents with children who later transmit the “Torah” to their own children. Thus, the Fifth Commandment enables the observance of the preceding four commandments.

The *mitzvah* of *Kibud Av v'Eim* carries with it some profound emotional fulfillment. For the most part, people have a difficult time feeling a sense of indebtedness to others. By his very nature, man thrives on independence. Thus, he finds the need to appreciate and offer gratitude extremely constraining. Therefore, children should be taught the importance of honoring parents. Indeed, it should be demanded and deserved. While demanding respect of a child will be effective for a period of time, in the long run, a person should earn the respect of his child both by the way he treats his child and by the respect that he personally projects.

*Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, explains that one of the major factors that can contribute to engendering a climate within which children willingly choose to truly honor their parents is when parents themselves serve as role models, when they are individuals who are prepared to eschew their personal agendas in favor of others, be it spouse, peers or Hashem. In other words, respect breeds respect; it is more natural to respect a parent who demonstrates respect of others.

To paraphrase *Rav Hirsch*, “Why do parents have difficulty training their child to comply willingly with their expectations without having to force the issue? Is it possible that it is related to the fact that self-discipline is the one character trait that children raised in a non-observant environment do not witness in their parents? When we appear before them as military officers who issue orders, how can we expect them to learn to be disciplined?”

“Those who live by the Torah and joyfully carry out its dictates teach their children by their personal example the meaning of submitting to a Higher Will. In the eyes of the child, the Torah is like grandparents. Just as his parents willingly and joyfully submit to its call, in its most minute details, he, too, can learn from their example to joyfully and willingly submit to the will of his parents.”

Moreover, as the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* writes: “A father who truly has mercy upon his children should study Torah, perform good deeds, and maintain a strong relationship with Hashem and with his fellow man. Thus, his children will consider it an honor to have such a parent.”

One should not have to be worthy of his child's respect, but, regrettably, in today's society, children see through the transparency of parents who do not practice what they preach. This, in turn, influences the manner in which they fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av v'Eim*. A child should honor his parents because the Torah says to do so. This should be his only source of motivation. It

does not always work this way. At times, a parent's hypocritical behavior can even catalyze his child's lack of *mitzvah* observance, as demonstrated by the following story:

*Horav Moshe Blau, z.l.*, once traveled abroad and was a guest in the home of a distinguished European lay leader. During a discussion with his host, the latter suddenly broke down and cried bitterly. His sons were not as committed to a Torah lifestyle as he would have liked them to be, and this caused him great anguish. On Friday night, *Rav Blau* was sitting in this man's house, when he saw one of his host's sons touch an object that was *muktzah*, set apart, not to be moved or picked up on *Shabbos*. The father told his son that the object was *muktzah*, and he should not touch it. After *Shabbos* was over, *Rav Blau* observed how the boy had taken out several gold pieces from their special display case and had begun playing with them. When the father saw this, he began to shout so loudly that the walls of the house seemed to shake. Seeing this, *Rav Blau* commented to the man, "I now understand why your children are lax in their observance. When it entails infractions involving *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, they notice that your rebuke is gentle, but when it comes to money, you begin to shout uncontrollably. You have thereby indicated to them your true values and priorities." The only thing to add to such a story is to be introspective and question ourselves as to the applicability of this narrative to our own personal lives.

I close on a positive note with an example of the extent of *Kibbud Av v'Eim*, manifest by one of our *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah leaders. *Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, z.l.*, distinguished himself not only in his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah, but also in his exemplary *middos tovos*, positive character traits. Indeed, he was a giant in both areas. His adherence to the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av* was legendary. To the very end of his life – and even beyond – he epitomized this "*mitzvah*." In his *tzavaah*, last will and testament, he wrote, "The monument on my grave should be a standard size. Certainly, it should not be higher than that of my dear parents." There are some people that "take" throughout their entire lives, and there are those unique few who are always "giving." Even when they leave this world, they make certain that the giving continues.