

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened. (20:12)

The fifth commandment, to honor one's parents, is a cornerstone of faith in the entire Torah. Our *mesorah*, tradition, is based upon a chain that has been transmitted throughout the generations from *Har Sinai*, where the Torah was given. This *mesorah* continues through this very day, through the vehicle of the parents of every generation. Each parent serves as a link to his child, maintaining this *mesorah* when he, in turn, becomes a parent. Without the respect demanded in the fifth commandment, we have no assurance that the other commandments will be observed.

Hashem, father and mother are partners in the creation of a child. Thus, one must honor his parents, because they are partners with Hashem. All things considered, despite being partners with Hashem, they, too, must honor Him. Thus, they may not ask their child to go against Hashem. Such respect for parents goes against the underlying basis of the goals of this *mitzvah*. One question that still remains: While it is true that parents must also honor Hashem, solely from the perspective of the partnership, one might contend that parents actually comprise the majority of the partnership. Should their demands not be recognized? Indeed, this is a rhetorical question, since there is no such thing as majority partners against Hashem. He grants life to all of the partners; therefore, in a sense, He is always the majority partner.

This idea is best explained with an insightful *mashal*, parable, by the **Maggid, zl**, of Dubno. There were once three brothers who decided to travel to three different parts of the world to develop a more cosmopolitan view of wisdom. They felt that exposing themselves to the varied wisdoms and disciplines of the multifaceted world community would enhance the individual wisdom of each of them. After one year, they returned to their home base to share with one another the new wisdom which they had mastered.

One brother related that he had learned to make a looking glass through which he could see all over the world. The second brother had learned to make a flying machine that could transport him to any destination in the world in a very short time. The third brother also had picked up an important piece of wisdom. He discovered a magic potion that had the ability to heal any ailment. There was no disease in the world that it could not tackle. The brothers were proud of their individual achievements. Time would tell when and how they could be put to good use.

One day, the brother who possessed the wonderful looking glass was gazing throughout the "world," when he saw a princess in a faraway country who had fallen gravely ill. The doctors who were treating her had already despaired of finding a cure to save her life. Her father, the king, was beside himself. This was his only child. Words cannot describe the scene playing out at the bedside of the young princess.

Seeing this, the brother immediately went into action. He called his two brothers, and they

immediately boarded the miraculous flying machine, taking along the cure-all potion which would hopefully save the life of the princess. They arrived in the kingdom and immediately went to the hospital where the princess was lying in bed, presenting a deathly pallor. Were they in time?

The brother who had the magic potion immediately went over to the distraught king to offer his services. What did the king have to lose? His daughter was at death's door. The brother administered the potion to the princess, and, within minutes, her color returned. A few hours later, she was sitting up for the first time in weeks. Two days later, the doctors declared her disease-free. She was cured of all illness. Overjoyed, and beyond belief, the king addressed the three brothers, "As reward for saving my daughter's life, I will give her hand in marriage to one of you. The problem is that the decision concerning who should marry her is something that the three of you must decide among yourselves.

The brothers began debating the issue, each one claiming that, without his contribution, the princess would not have been cured. "Without my looking glass, we would never have been aware of her illness" was the first brother's position. The second brother claimed, "Without my flying machine, we could never have transported the medicine." The last brother argued that the discovery and travel would have been meaningless without his magic potion.

Unable to reach a decision, the king turned to his daughter and said, "You decide which one you should marry." The princess was an astute young woman. She replied, "All three of you equally deserve to marry me. That, however, concerns the past, but, if I were to become ill again, only the brother who is in possession the miracle cure could save me. It is he whom I want to marry."

The lesson is simple and clear. Yes – there are three partners in a person, and one feels a sense of indebtedness to all of them. This sense of gratitude is only with regard to the past. As far as the future is concerned, we are far more beholden to Hashem than to our parents. Every moment of our lives is a special gift from Hashem. Without His Will, we simply would cease to exist.

When parental wishes come into an opposition with those of G-d, the future decides the issue. Without Hashem, we have no tomorrow. In fact, today is dependent upon Him as well! Both the child and his parents are in Hashem's debt. The question of precedence is a moot issue.

Upon perusing Rabbi Yechiel Spero's latest volume, "A Touch of Chizuk," I came across a story which is particularly inspiring and quite relevant to our *dvar Torah*. Rabbi Yosef Mendelovich was a Russian refusenik who fought fiercely for the freedom to practice his religion. (He was known as a "Prisoner of Zion." A political activist who has devoted his life to speaking out against religious persecution, especially of Soviet Jewry. One of the first and most famous refuseniks, his devotion and commitment to Judaism served as the standard for others to emulate.) The dread KGB took special joy in making his life miserable. While serving time in the Russian Gulag for some trumped up charges, he taught himself to *daven* and observe *mitzvos*.

The prison guards were the lowest form of humanity in a country not known for maintaining a very high level of humanity. They did everything within their power to break his spirit. The more they worked at destroying him, the more stoic he became. He showed them that his commitment to Hashem was stronger than their devotion to evil. He had a greater will to fight for freedom than they had to take it from him.

He wanted to wear a head-covering, but *yarmulkes* were not accepted as part of the prison uniform. Thus, instead of wearing the traditional *yarmulke*, he took a handkerchief and wrapped it around his head. (Interesting how some of us feel that wearing a *yarmulke* in public is not *pc*). It was a constant battle to wear that handkerchief, but it was a battle that he won.

One day, after being locked up for some time, he was informed that his elderly father was coming to visit him. This was very unusual. His father was not a well man and the long journey to the Gulag was not an easy trip. Once again, the guards were determined to break his spirit by testing his will. Waiting with bated breath for his father's arrival, he sat in the waiting room with his handkerchief on his head. His father had arrived and was waiting on the other side of the door. One can only begin to imagine the excitement, the yearning of son for father, and father for son. As he was about to go to meet his father, the guard stopped him and said, "Remove your head-covering!"

Yosef was confronted with a dilemma. According to Jewish law, there was no problem with removing his head covering. He knew that his father was waiting anxiously to see him. On the other hand, he also knew that this was a test – a test to see if they could break him. If he gave in and removed his handkerchief – then they had succeeded in defeating him. Once defeated, it would be most difficult to once again ascend the spiritual ladder. So he refused to remove his head covering. The guards, heartless animals who did not know the meaning of compassion or decency, likewise refused to budge. "No visitation," they said. Instead of running through the open door into his father's embrace, he returned to his cell – miserable, but triumphant. The guards did not succeed in breaking him. Sadly, his father would never see him again. He took ill shortly afterwards and succumbed to his illness.

This is a very sad story – one that has the reader asking, "Was he correct in his refusal to remove his handkerchief? Was he right in "*probbing frumkeit*" taking a stringent stand concerning his observance of this one tradition – at the expense of his aged father's desire to see his son, to have a little *nachas*, before he died?"

I am not one to decide right or wrong. One thing I am certain of, however, is that when his father's *neshamah*, soul, ascended to *ginzei Meromim*, the Heavens Above, it viewed the refusal of his son, Yosef, from a different vantage point. The *nachas* that the *neshamah* experienced then is indescribable. In fact, I wonder if Yosef Mendelovich's handkerchief in this world did not translate itself into a special crown for his father in the Eternal World.