

## Honor your father and mother, as Hashem, your God, commanded you. (5:16)

One would think that honoring parents is a logical *mitzvah* which requires no specific command from Hashem. It should be the result of overwhelming gratitude to parents for all that they do to nurture and support their children. In his *Haaemek Davar* commentary to the Torah, the *Netziv*, *zl*, notes that there are circumstances (including difficult children) in which *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, is sadly not a primary focus in life, when a child feels that respecting parents is a stretch beyond which they can tolerate. Let us face it: not all parents are perfect; neither are all children; not all situations and times are ideal. Thus, one might think the *mitzvah* to honor does not apply. The Torah teaches us otherwise. Hashem commanded – end of story. We must treat the *mitzvah* like a *chok*, a *mitzvah* whose logic defies human rationale.

Uniquely, we find no special injunction to love our parents – as we find concerning loving: Hashem; one's fellow man; the *ger*, convert. The Torah is cognizant that love is an unconditional term which might conflict with circumstances and personalities. Nonetheless, concerning the respect we are enjoined to give our parents, love plays no role; it is irrelevant. Veritably, it makes sense that the person who loves will render respect with greater ease, but one is not contingent upon another. No one says you must “like” it; just do it. That is life. It is not always about what one likes to do or what one wants to do; it is about what Hashem instructs us to do.

As an aside, I have always felt that parents should also respect their children. It makes for a much closer, more balanced, relationship. As *Horav S. R. Hirsch*, *zl*, observes, the word *kabeid/kovod* is related to *kaveid*, weight/heavy. In other words, to honor means to add weight, gravity, to one's parents. Some may view their parent as a “lightweight” (which they quite possibly might be): their achievements lacking; their integrity, both spiritual and ethical, leaving much to be desired. Thus, in the child's mind, he has little reason to demonstrate respect. The Torah does not think so. Part of respect is to add weight to your opinion of your parents, raise their esteem in your eyes. Nonetheless, this has nothing to do with love. To love one's parents might be a requisite that, for some, in certain situations, might be difficult – even impossible.

A secular writer decries the fact that in our secular-oriented, contemporary society, parents invariably place greater demand on garnering their children's love than demanding their respect. Thus, we have the painful consequence of seeing adult children whose relationship with their parents are, at best, tepid to non-existent. Perhaps this is why the Torah focuses on honor, which is an action/behavioral command, rather than love, which is emotion-oriented. By respecting, adding weight to our parents' esteem, we learn to appreciate, hence to love.

Too many parents focus on the love aspect of the relationship they have with their child – not demanding his respect but his love. As a result, the child grows up spoiled, narcissistic, not only with regard to his parents – but with regard to society, in general. Upon themselves achieving the

milestone of parenthood, such children will, due to the model set by their parents, not receive respect from their own children. And there is always the guilt that one experiences when he realizes the messed up life he is living which has resulted in his mistreatment of his parents, who sadly are now either too old, or too gone to understand the difference. At the end of the day, he did not give them respect.

Therefore, it is all about respect. Indeed, one who focuses on love, rather than on respect (as enjoined by the Torah), will probably have neither!

I recently came across an excellent article by a *baalas teshuvah*, who raised the issue of children who become observant and, often as a result of their newly-found “self-confidence,” neglect to show proper respect to their parents, who have yet to become observant. Obviously, this shows a lack of sensitivity and goes against everything Jewish observance teaches. There is a proper and sensitive manner for addressing all situations – if a person is prepared to listen.

On the flip side, the following vignette is inspiring. A couple who lived in Yerushalayim approached *Horav Shmuel Salant, zl*, with the following question: Their children, who lived in America, were sending them a very significant monthly stipend to cover their needs. Their children were unfortunately no longer observant. Is it appropriate to accept their support?

“What is the *shailah*, question?” he replied. “Your children have only one *mitzvah* left – to honor their parents, and you want to take that away from them as well?!”