

## Honor your father and your mother. (5:16)

The *Luchos*, Ten Commandments, are divided into two parts: *bein adam la'Makom*, between man and G-d; *bein adam la'chaveiro*, between man and fellowman.

The fifth commandment, the *mitzvah* to honor one's parents, almost appears misplaced, since it is included among the *dibros bein adam la'Makom*, when, in fact, one may argue that respect for parents, according them pleasure and satisfaction, belongs among the *dibros bein adam la'chaveiro*.

Upon perusing the commentary of the *Rishonim*, we note that this is actually the case. The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that among the *shoroshei hamitzvah*, root/origin of the *mitzvah*, is to teach a person not to be an ingrate, to instruct him to appreciate and express his gratitude to the one who benefits him, who shows him kindness. Ingratitude is a sign of a *naval*, abominable person, who has no human decency. We are here because of our parents; they brought us into this world and cared for us into our adulthood (and usually much more than that). How appropriate it is to be grateful for all that they have done. Once this character trait has been ingrained into our psyche, we will realize that everyone in this world, each and every creative and living organism throughout the generations, are all here because of Hashem, Who has cared for all from the very beginning of time.

Clearly, from the *Sefer HaChinuch* it appears that the *mitzvah* to honor one's parents is built upon the foundation of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. Make no mistake, however, says *Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita*, in thinking that gratitude is the reason for *Kibbud Av v'Eim*. It is not simply a reason – it is its essence. There is a specific *mitzvah* to pay gratitude to one's parents. This is carried out through the medium of honor. The *Mashgiach* supports this exposition from the passage in the *Talmud Bava Metzia* 33a, whereby, if one is confronted with a lost article belonging to his father and a lost article belonging to his *rebbe*, that of his *rebbe* precedes that of his father. The reason given by the *Talmud* is that his father brings him into this temporal world, while his *rebbe*, by teaching him Torah, catalyzes his entrance into *Olam Habba*, Eternal world. This indicates that one must pay gratitude to his father for bringing him into this world, and an appropriate vehicle for expressing this gratitude is *kavod*, honor.

The fact that the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av* serves as a *nimshol*, derivative lesson, concerning the importance of gratitude impels us to pay gratitude to the Supreme Benefactor: Hashem. Thus, *Kibbud Av v'Eim* is a *mitzvah yesodis*, foundation *mitzvah*, which teaches a primary principle concerning serving Hashem. This is why it is placed among the *mitzvos bein adam la'Makom*.

Apparently, honor is designated as a primary vehicle for *hakoras hatov*, and, as such, is given primacy with regard to the *mitzvah* of honoring parents. We wonder why it has been designated such distinction. Is this the only manner for expressing gratitude to our parents? Incidentally (observes the *Mashgiach*), we recognize another aspect to our relationship with our parents:

*morah*, fear. There is a *mitzvah* to fear (awe) one's parents. This is carried out by not doing anything negative towards them, like sitting in their seat, etc. The *Rambam* (*Sefer HaMitzvos* 311) writes that one should act in the presence of his parents with fear, as if he were to be in the presence of a king. The same awe, fear, trembling that is part of being in the presence of a mortal king should be reflected in the attitude one manifests with regard to his parents. Why is this? What would be wrong with having a relaxed, casual relationship with one's parents? Why all the *morah*?

The *Mashgiach* quotes *Sforno* (*Vayikra* 20:9), who explains why one who curses his parents receives the death penalty: "Such a person is unprepared to fulfill the dictum of the *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 1:8), *Shema beni mussar avicha v'al titosh Toras imecha*; 'Listen my son to the ethical character (rebuke, instruction) of your father, and do not abandon the Torah of your mother' Such a person (who curses his parents) will not accept the *mitzvos* of the Torah, because he will not accept them from his parents.

One who does not fear his parents will not learn from them the meaning, value and obligation to be an observant Jew. He will not be *mekabeil*, accept/receive, the Torah from them as it has been transmitted throughout the generations heralding back to Moshe *Rabbeinu* at *Har Sinai*. This is called the *mesorah*, transmission/tradition. The maintenance of the *mesorah* is through the *morah*, fear, children manifest towards their parents. The compelling nature of this relationship empowers them to receive the Torah and observe its edicts as transmitted to them by their parents. Children who honor and obey their parents will accept their instructions, which will shape them into servants of Hashem. Thus, the purpose of *kavod*, honoring parents, is not only for the parents, but also for the children – who, as a result, become refined in the Torah way. [Of course, this is greatly dependent upon the parents – not only religiously, but ethically and morally.]

The *Mashgiach* notes the idea that two primary lessons can be derived from the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av v'Eim* as expressed by the *Meshech Chochmah* (in his commentary to *Parashas Va'eschanan*). He explains that *Kaasher tzivcha Hashem Elokecha*, "As Hashem, Your G-d, commanded you" (*Devarim* 5:16) applies to both concepts. The first concept is of *hakoras hatov* for everything that one's parents have done for him, but what about parental abandonment, parents who either do not care or are unable physically / emotionally to care for their children? Does "honoring" them apply? Yes, because, "As Hashem commanded you." The *mitzvah* of honor is a Divine directive, thus a *mitzvah* for all time, under all conditions. Likewise, the concept of *mesorah* has its challenge when parents are not *mesorah*-conscious. Parents who do not encourage their children to follow in the *mesorah* might (to the uninitiated) not qualify as individuals deserving of *kavod*. The Torah forewarns this with, "As Hashem commanded you." Hashem has given us the *mitzvah*. Parental behavior does not disqualify them from our obligation.

*Kibbud Av v'Eim* is the transitional *mitzvah* which connects *bein adam la'chaveiro* and *bein adam la'Makom*, for, without the "honor imperative," we will have difficulty carrying out the *mitzvos bein adam la'Makom*.

This story was recorded years ago in *Peninim*.

After writing the above, concerning the significance of parents as links in our *mesorah*, this experience deepened the meaning of this concept for me. It took place sixteen years ago, when, during my mother-in-law's illness, I often spent *Shabbos* with her at Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn. Early *Shabbos* morning, I would go to *Shomer Shabbos shul* to *daven* with the early *minyan*. One *Shabbos* morning, shortly before *kriyas haTorah*, the reading of the Torah, a man burst into the *shul*. He was disheveled and wore dirty clothes. The hairs of his beard and *payos* were all-over. He proceeded to walk up to the *Bimah* and declare: "I am *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*, and I demand *Shishi* (considered by many to be the preeminent *aliyah*). The man raved on from there, expounding on his preeminence and demand for respect from the congregation.

People laughed. The more he spoke – the more they laughed. Well – not everyone considered it funny. There was one young man sitting in the corner of the *shul* (next to me) who appeared quite accepting of this scenario. It seemed as if he were used to it, almost a weekly occurrence for him. While I did not laugh at the poor man, his behavior was "funny." I turned to the young man and (without thinking) said, "You must agree that the man is funny." He waited a few seconds, looked me straight in the eye, and said, "Not if it is your father!"

Apparently, his father had succumbed to the many pressures of a demanding life in *chinuch*, coupled with a series of classes that had rewritten the rules of discipline and laws of *mentchlichkeit*. The parents of these spoiled children were not any better, and, in many cases, they were the cause of their children's aggression. Regardless of his father's emotional condition, the son stood by him and made it his business always to be in *shul* when he had his outburst