

Honor your father and your mother... so that your days will be lengthened and so that it will be good for you. (5:16)

The commandment to honor one's parents is included in the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, which in and of itself indicates its significance. Indeed, it carries such weight that, when *Klal Yisrael* were still in *Marah* prior to receiving the Torah, they had already been commanded to observe this *mitzvah*. Furthermore, rarely does a *mitzvah* publicize its accompanying reward, as the Torah does regarding the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*. *Arichas yamim*, longevity, is nothing to disdain. We should all merit such reward.

The *Tolner Rebbe, Shlita*, related that he had heard from an elderly Jew about an incident that had taken place fifty years earlier. This man had developed a serious illness which the doctors whom he had consulted all felt would have a negative effect on his lifespan. Hearing the devastating news, the man was filled with dread. At the time, he was relatively young, with hopefully a long and productive life ahead of him. He could neither eat nor sleep as a result of his overwhelming anxiety. To allay his nerves, he decided to travel to Bnei Brak to seek the sage advice and blessing of the *Chazon Ish*. It took him a few days to scrape together the funds to pay for the trip.

He arrived at the home of the saintly *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation. After a short while, he was ushered into the *Chazon Ish's* room, where he broke down delineating his immediate concern and fears. The *Chazon Ish* listened and then asked, "Do you have a father or mother (who are still alive)?" He shook his head affirmatively. "How much did it cost you to travel to Bnei Brak?" The man replied with the exact number. The *Chazon Ish* looked at the man contemplatively and asked, "When was the last time that you spent (even) one fifth of this sum (for the trip) on your parents? Rather than spend money on a "sure" (reward) *mitzvah*, you traveled instead to Bnei Brak which is sometimes "open" and sometimes "closed" (reference to the sage's ability to see his blessings pierce the Heaven and effect a positive response), and even when it is open, a positive response is not guaranteed."

The man told the *Tolner*, "The simplicity and straightforwardness in which the *Chazon Ish* expressed himself shook me so that I immediately immersed myself in the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim* with utmost fervor. *Baruch Hashem*, it seems to have paid off. The disease has not affected my longevity."

Kibbud av v'eim is a *mitzvah* which is demanding, because one never knows if he has fulfilled it properly. It goes without saying that, as parents age, giving them the proper honor, providing for their needs, can present challenges. This is especially true if a parent is ill or alone. Children have their own familial obligations and responsibilities to consider. One may not ignore the fact that one's spouse enters into the equation. In an ideal situation, everyone is on board with sincere devotion and respect for the parents, but how many situations are ideal? The following story can happen to anyone (and probably has). It demonstrates the reality of life and the weaknesses of the

living.

A fine young man, whom we will call Yossi, started his morning realizing that he had parked his car in a no parking zone. To his chagrin (and slow anger), he found a 500-*shekel* ticket on his windshield. He just knew it was not going to be a “good” day. He removed the ticket, placed it in his pocket, and proceeded to drive to his office in one of the government ministries. Traffic was far from light, but moving. His anxiety level was high to begin with when he realized that the driver in front of him was traveling at half the speed limit. He honked his horn to no avail. He then noticed the sign on the back of the windshield: New Driver. No other lane was available. No one would let him in. Finally, he saw an opening to pass the driver, who was literally crawling. It meant crossing in a double yellow zone. He would take his chances. If he was careful, nothing would happen. Foolishly, he forgot to look in his rear-view mirror where he would have noticed the police cruiser that was driving right behind him. This time, the ticket amounted to 1,000 *shekel*. It was beginning to be a very expensive day. Fifteen hundred shekel was a hefty sum to pay for carelessness.

Rather than arriving at work early, he entered his office an hour late. His superior was not happy, since a major government conference was taking place and everyone in the office was involved in its preparation. Yossi had a high position in the ministry. Thus, he was critical to its success. Everything seemed to have smoothed out, until an hour later Yossi received a call from the nursing home in which his father was a resident, “Your father refuses to eat. This could prove dangerous to his already frail health.” Now what? How could he ignore his father? He had no one else. On the other hand, he had a responsibility to his office. When he shared his dilemma with his supervisor, the response was, “We are counting on you. This conference could be the turning point in your career.” His superior was not happy, and he made his feelings quite evident. Nonetheless, Yossi said that his father needed him.

While Yossi did the right thing, his attitude after a day of mishaps was far from positive. He was beside himself with anger, “How could my father do this to me?” He burst into the nursing home’s dining room and made a beeline for his father who was sitting in his wheelchair reading a book. “*Abba*, how could you do this to me?” he screamed. “I have a life and a job. Please eat your food, so that I can go back to work – if I still have a job.” His father continued to refuse to eat. This pushed the button that catalyzed Yossi’s diatribe, “Do you realize how much time and money I spend on you? Why can you not eat like everyone else?”

This is the last time that I will put up with this nonsense!” Yossi had lost it. His father had aged and was weak, both physically and cognitively, but he understood enough to know that his son had hurt him. He began to cry. He tried to wipe away the tears, but was unable to. He did everything to preserve his own dignity (even if his son had not), “Go, my son. I will take care of myself. Go back to your job. I will make it.”

His father turned his wheelchair around and proceeded to wheel himself out of the dining room. Yossi screamed, “*Abba*, where do you think you are going? You have not eaten. This is why I

dropped everything to come here.” His father was no longer listening. He was on his way to his room. He had suffered enough indignity for one day.

Yossi’s father had been reading a book, which, in his haste and tension, he had left on the table. Yossi picked it up and began to read. It was his father’s diary – dated 1971.

“Today I refused to go into work to attend an important event being held outside of the city. Our Yossi was having ear surgery. How could I leave him? The money I will lose? Yossi is more important. I will do anything for my child.

“I spent the night in the hospital with him. I held his hand to assure him that I was there and would not leave him. It was difficult for him to eat, but I fed him slowly, small spoons of food. What does a father not do for his child? I held him in my arms and said, ‘Yossi, *Abba* will never leave you. I love you more than anything.’”

The story has a sad ending, but it does not have to end this way. We all have our moments, when, after tension and anxiety overwhelm us, the first ones we lash out on are the people who are most vulnerable – our aged parents. *Kibbud av v’eim* presents many challenges, but, with the right attitude, we can triumph over them.