

Hashem said to Avram, “Go for yourself from your land. (12:1)

Chazal teach that, among the many practical issues that concerned Avraham *Avinu* regarding his departure from Charan, he also had a spiritual basis. In the previous *parshah*, the Torah records the death of Terach, father of Avraham – when, in fact, Terach died more than sixty years later. *Chazal* explain that Avraham was anxious about what people would say. His father was at a point in life that an able son would have been an advantage to him. For Avraham to abandon his father at this point in his life would open him up to public criticism, implying that he was acting with disrespect. Thus, the Torah records Terach’s death prematurely in order to assuage Avraham’s guilt, lest he create a *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem’s Name, by saying that Avraham was listening to G-d, while disregarding the health and welfare of his aged father.

The *Midrash* uses the words – *Ani potercha mi’Kibbud Av v’Eim, v’ein Ani poteir l’acheir mi’Kibbud Av v’Eim*; “I absolve you from the *mitzvah* of honoring your parents; I do not absolve anyone else from this *mitzvah*.” What does this mean? In what circumstances does Hashem absolve us from a *mitzvah* as important as honoring one’s parents?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, offers a penetrating insight into the meaning of *Chazal*’s statement. *Mitzvah* performance consists of multiple levels; similarly, the essence of a *mitzvah* can be understood in diverse ways. One person’s *mitzvah* may not be another person’s *mitzvah*, and the manner in which a *mitzvah* may be carried out by one person may not suffice for another person. In other words, *mitzvah* performance is more complex than it seems superficially.

Let me explain. Avraham *Avinu* had before him the *mitzvah* of honoring his parents. By remaining at home and attending to the physical needs of his aging parents, Avraham was enjoined to do what each and every one of us is obligated to do. Hashem knew that Avraham was concerned about leaving, for two reasons: first, he had a responsibility to attend to his parents; second, what would people say? It would not appear to be in his best interests to leave. His departure might catalyze a public outcry which could lead to denigrating Hashem’s Name.

The Almighty assuaged Avraham’s fears, ensuring him that the *mitzvah* of honoring his parents would be fulfilled in an even greater manner, when people would realize what kind of a special son his parents had raised. When a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, achieves a deeper and more elevated knowledge of Torah, each and every one of his religious/spiritual endeavors has a more profound meaning and reaches a higher, more elevated place in the spiritual sphere.

As an example, *Rav Zaitchik* cites the *halachah* that a *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, is exempt from the *mitzvah* of *aveilus*, mourning, even for a close relative. This exemption is the result of his lofty responsibility *vis-à-vis* the nation, while he is serving in the *Bais Hamikdash*. Someone who is so *davuk*, connected (in a state of clinging), to Hashem is prohibited from breaking that bond. Even a

temporary lapse would create an unnecessary and unacceptable breach in the relationship.

Honor/respect is measured by the nature of the individual who is tendering the respect. A simple, poor man who is not blessed with advanced literacy-and whose concept of reverence is limited to his ability and acumen-is obviously not able to provide his parents with a very glorified form of pleasure. One gives what he has and what he understands he should give. One whose “possessions” are meager is concomitantly limited in his gifting ability.

The illustrious son, who has earned a distinguished reputation based upon his erudition and prolific self-expression, is a more dignified person whose concept of honor is much more advanced and far more elevated. The average public envies the parents who are worthy of a son, who is such a *nachas*, source of satisfaction, to them.

It is all about one’s sense of values. In the financial world, the “*yeshivah* man,” who has spent most of his life immersed in the Torah, does not garner much respect. His financial portfolio is nothing to speak of. Thus, to individuals for whom the barometer of an individual’s success quotient is measured by his financial status, the *ben Torah*, who places Torah and his relationship with Hashem above all else, does not carry much weight. If his father runs in these circles, he might even tend to “cover up” the fact that he has a son that is “learning” (I must add that there are those who have chosen the path of *derech erez* as a means of earning a livelihood, but this does not necessarily bespeak their value system.) There are those, however, to whom learning does not carry much significance and to whom the only achievements which matter are those that pertain to the secular fields of endeavor.

Rav Zaitchik goes on to distinguish between the various *shevatim*, tribes, who own and cultivate the land-thus allowing them to fulfill the many *mitzvos* associated with property development and money managing-and the one *shevet* that owns nothing, *Shevet Levi*. They do not have much: their *nachalah*, inheritance, is Hashem. If one thinks about it, it is specifically because they have nothing that they warrant having everything – Hashem as their *nachalah*. They are Hashem’s legion, servants to the King. It all depends on one’s priorities-the importance is not found in the individuals choice of profession, but rather, in his choice of focus in life.