

## Honor your father and mother, so that your days will be lengthened.

The *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, were inscribed on two tablets. Hence, the name: *Luchos*. The Ten Commandments are divided equally with: five devoted to *mitzvos bein adam laMakom*, between man and G-d; and five devoted to *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro*, between man and his fellow man. Interestingly, the *mitzvah* of *kibud av v'eim*, honoring one's father and mother, is listed on the tablet dedicated to *bein adam laMakom*. *Chazal* (*Kiddushin* 30b) teach that, when one properly honors his parents, it is considered as if he has honored Hashem. This is probably due to the fact that they "partner" with Hashem in the conception and birth of a child.

*Horav Avraham Pam, zl*, would cite the *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 68:6) concerning Yaakov *Avinu's* leaving home, due to his fear of Eisav and because the time had come to search for a wife. On the way, Elifaz, son of Eisav, attacked him and left him penniless. This was followed by Yaakov's continuing on to the home of the deceitful Lavan, the man who would be his father-in-law. Despite these hindrances, which would have impeded the goal of a lesser man, Yaakov moved on and established the underpinnings of *Klal Yisrael*.

How did he do it? From where did he garner the strength to overcome these trying situations? The *Midrash* explains that it was the knowledge that, "If I give up now, all of the efforts that my mother expended to assist me in obtaining the *brachos*, blessings, from my father will have been for naught." Rivkah *Imeinu* made many sacrifices for her son, Yaakov. She risked her marriage and, quite possibly, her life to guide Yaakov in the ruse to receive his rightful blessings. It was all so that Yaakov would derive the spiritual benefits of those blessings. How could Yaakov turn his back on his mother; how could he fail her? It was this sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, based upon a profound acknowledgement of the favor – and everything that went into its realization – that spurred Yaakov on in later life.

We all have obligations to our parents (and to our mentors). How often do we take the time to begin to contemplate our *chov kadosh*, holy obligation, to honor our parents in the manner they deserve? The *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim* is a command from Hashem, which is not contingent upon one's feelings of gratitude. It is just so much more "meaningful" when one feels a reciprocal responsibility. One who does not experience a feeling of gratitude might very well be expressing a personal deficiency of his own. Certainly, we find numerous families in which grown children act indifferently toward their parents as a result of a son or daughter's deficient character and self-serving attitude toward life in general and parents in particular.

Maintaining a strong sense of gratitude toward parents to the point that one would never let them down as he goes through life is a task which defines one's achievement. We should never forget upon whose shoulders we stand. *Horav Yisrael Meir Lau, Shlita*, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, never forgot his mother's last minute gesture. He went through his teenage and early adult life without

uttering the word, *Mameh*, until, out of deep respect and admiration for his mother-in-law, he began to call her *Mameh*. The last time that he had pronounced this word was when he was seven years old. At the last fraction of a second, his mother pushed him into the arms of his eighteen year old brother, as she realized with a mother's intuition that this was the only way to save him.

It was at the train platform in his hometown of Piotrkow, and the accursed Nazis were dividing up the "passengers," men going to one side and women and children to another. Young Yisrael Meir was small in build; thus, his mother was able to cover him up with an oversized pillow on which she had sewn several straps. In reality, it was a makeshift duffle bag. His mother told him always to hold onto the pillow, because it was his satchel containing his worldly belongings.

Standing by the train, his mother realized the consequences of male/female separation. The women and children were being sent to death camps, while the men would be spared, so that they could work until it was their time to be sent away. With the pillow on his shoulders, the young boy was covered and unnoticeable. He was holding on to his mother's hand, while his older brother stood to the side. His mother was directed toward a railcar, and Yisrael Meir thought that he was joining her. At the very last moment, his mother made an instantaneous decision. She shoved him (with the pillow on his shoulders covering him) in the direction of the men. The young boy had no idea what was happening. He heard his mother scream to his brother, "Take Lulek (Yisrael)! Goodbye, Lulek!" and he never saw his mother again.

Mother and son had no time for conversation, no hugs and kisses, no tearful embrace – just a wave, as the Nazis shoved her into the train. His brother did not understand. What would he do with a child, a seven year old boy? Yisrael Meir went into the rail car with the men (He was covered with the pillow, thus unnoticeable.) It was the most difficult moment of the war for him. He never before and never after cried as did on that day that he was separated from his mother. It took years to understand his mother's sacrifice. By pushing him away, she saved his life. He never forgot this act of courage. His mother's memory never left him. Indeed, he views this act of heroism as the shoulders upon which he has stood his whole life.