

Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)

The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that the *shoresh*, root, of the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av v'Eim*, honoring parents, is a sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, to those who have acted kindly towards him. One who is a *kafui tov*, ingrate, is a *naval*, abominable person. He acts as if his benefactor, in this case his parents, are strangers to him. He quickly ignores the fact that his parents are the reason that he is here altogether. For this alone, he should honor them. One who does not honor his parents will soon present a similar attitude toward his Father in Heaven.

One has a relationship with his parents that is unlike any other relationship, because parents are his reason for being. They are a part of him, as he carries their DNA. Having said this, when a person has a low self-esteem or is just not happy with himself/herself, it might be reflected in the many ways he/she treats his/her parents. If parents are a part of a person, and that person has negative feelings about himself, these feelings will similarly be manifest towards his parents. The inverse is the intense love one develops for parents as the product of the positive feelings he has for himself/herself.

While honoring parents is (should be) a given, it becomes especially difficult when parents age, or become infirm, physically or emotionally. It requires extraordinary patience, commitment, love and extreme dedication to execute this *mitzvah* to the fullest extent when conditions such as age, infirmity, and cognitive impairment prevail. Some do what they “must” and, when relieved of their “turn,” breathe a sigh of relief and run. Others cherish every moment that they have with their parent(s) and consider it prime time. Both types should be aware that their own children are watching. So is their Heavenly Father.

We would do well to consider – over and over again – another aspect of parents: Parents never give up hope on their child – regardless of age and circumstance. Parents never forget about their child, because one does not forget about himself. The following incredible story underscores this verity.

It was October of 1973; the *Yom Kippur* war had broken out. *Horav Yisrael Lau, Shlita*, then chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, sought an opportunity to alleviate to some degree the sad state of those young soldiers who had been wounded, and were suffering both physically and emotionally. He was told that the best place for him was the hospital, which meant working round the clock to address the needs of the wounded and tend to various crises that arose from their traumas. Some soldiers were hanging onto life by a thread. Rav Lau's presence and ability to talk to the soldiers could make a major difference in their attitude and willingness to fight for life.

Rav Lau immediately acted on the advice and proceeded to the local hospital, prepared to do whatever was asked of him. It happened to be that this hospital was a burn unit that cared for those who had been wounded in explosions and fires, and those whose bodies had been critically burned. The pain that these brave men sustained was beyond description. The screams that one

heard from the rooms was something out of a bitter nightmare. The *Rav* went from room to room, bed to bed, offering whatever hope and solace he could provide. Alas, it was insufficient to assuage the terrible suffering these men were experiencing.

At the end of his visit, he entered a room where two physicians, a nurse and a middle-aged woman stood around the bed of a soldier who was yelling uncontrollably. The two doctors and the nurse were in the midst of speaking with the young man's mother. *Rav Lau* entered and immediately asked what he could do. The doctor replied that the soldier had been burned from head to toe. "There is nothing we can do for him. We keep on raising his morphine level to give him some relief. Nothing. We have been unsuccessful in our attempts to calm him down." *Rav Lau* whispered into the soldier's ear; perhaps his soothing words would help. Nothing. "Try to sleep," he said, "so that you will not feel the pain." Once again the response was continued screaming. Seeing that he could do nothing, the *Rav* left to stop by another room.

To hear a young, fellow Jew screaming loudly in response to excruciating pain is a devastating, emotionally painful experience. *Rav Lau* was shaken, his heart pounding, due to his feelings for the soldier and his inability to help him in any way. He paced back and forth, thinking to himself, "What can I do? What can be done to help this young man who had yet to commence the long road to recovery?"

Ten minutes passed, and *Rav Lau* realized that it had suddenly become quiet. No screams were coming from the soldier's room. He stopped pacing, owning up to the realization that if the screaming had suddenly ceased, something terrible must have happened. He ran to the room, tears flowing freely from his eyes. As a *Rav*, he would don his "other hat" and pay his final respects to this brave young man.

The *Rav* went to the room and walked in to find the soldier sleeping peacefully with his mother sitting next to his bed. *Rav Lau* was incredulous, and it was quite obvious. "What happened?" he asked. "I was here fifteen minutes ago and your son was hysterical. How did this radical change take place?"

"*Rav Lau*," the mother began, "my son was burned from head to toe, from top to bottom. Everywhere his skin is raw. During the entire time that he was screaming, I kept looking, searching for one spot, anything that was left unburned. Finally, I found a small spot behind his knee, about three inches in diameter, that I could put my finger on. I began to caress this spot and gently whisper to him, 'It is okay. Mommy is here. Mommy will not leave you.' I kept repeating this litany, as I continued to smooth his unburned skin. Before long, my son stopped crying and fell asleep."

An incredible story. Now for the postscript, and its connection to the concept of *Kibbud Av v'Eim*. Years later, *Rav Lau* would relate the story and add his own observation concerning a major verity in life (one which I feel we ignore more often than we care to admit): "Who was the one to give solace to the soldier? Who was the one to be able to quiet him down and help him forget about his

pain? His mother. Not the doctor, not the nurse, not his friend, not even the *Rav*. It was his mother, whose entire goal in life was to care for her child and love him unequivocally. Someone like that who really, really cares never gives up. She will search and search (in every nook and cranny) until she finds that one clear, unburned spot for her to caress and give comfort.”

As I prefaced the story, parents never give up on us. They always find a way to reach out and give comfort and hope. Why should we do the opposite?