

## Honor your father and mother so that your days shall be lengthened. (20:12)

*Kibbud av v'eim* is a difficult *mitzvah* to fulfill properly because there is no *shiur*, measurement, to it. The *mitzvah* has no limits, because one can always do more. Indeed, the great *Amora*, Abaye, who was an orphan (his father died before he was born, and his mother died in childbirth), considered himself fortunate, since he never transgressed this *mitzvah* (*Kiddushin* 31b). Why is *arichas yamim*, longevity, the stated reward for *Kibbud av v'eim*? Each generation is a link in a continuum that goes on until the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. This link is as strong as the relationship one has with his past. By honoring one's parents, he forges and concretizes his relationship with the past, thus "lengthening" his days. We always think as "lengthening" as going forward to the future. We forget that, more importantly, we can lengthen our days by going backward and connecting to the past. Indeed, we have no present, because every moment that passes transforms the present into the past. Without a past, the future has no foundation and is destined to be short-lived.

The *Strikover Rebbe, zl*, was walking down the street when he chanced upon a young man pushing his wheelchair-bound father. It was a hot, humid day, and the sweat was dripping profusely from the young man's face. It was obvious that pushing his father's wheelchair was no easy task. The young man was demonstrating extraordinary *mesiras nefesh*, devotion, to the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av*. The *Rebbe* later remarked to the young man, "The Heavenly angels immerse themselves in the River of Dinor. (The river is comprised of fire, and it separates this world from the World-to-Come. A soul must pass through the River of Dinor in order to cleanse itself of any residue of this material world before it can gain access to *Olam Habba*. The Heavenly angels release spiritual sweat from their great fear of Hashem. This sweat is the source of the 'water' which makes up the River of Dinor.) *Chassidim* immerse themselves in a *mikvah* (a natural collection of water, a living spring or ground water well). Your *tevillah*, immersion (in the sweat produced in the performance of the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av*), finds greater favor in my eyes."

*Kibbud Av* can take on a different form, one that, to the superficial observer, might be difficult to understand. (This is why he remains a superficial observer. His view of a subject or issue is perfunctory and lacks depth.) In the summer of 1942, the Nazi murderers were on the prowl for the *Bover Rebbe, zl, Horav Shlomo*, who, with the aid of false papers, was able to cross the Hungarian border into Neimark. It was there that the *Rebbe* and his son, *Horav Naftali, zl*, were taken into captivity and subjected to cruel persecution. They spent *Shabbos Kodesh* together as captives, waiting to be executed. It was only a matter of time. It was at this point that the *Rebbe* embraced his son and said, "Naftali, my precious son, you know that the body of a Jew is nothing more than physical matter, comprised of earth from the ground. The body can be persecuted and even destroyed. The other component of the Jew, his *neshamah*, soul, cannot be touched. It is eternal, untouchable by these beasts.

"I am your father, and you are my son. You still have one more *mitzvah* which you can fulfill before

they separate us: the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av*. I ask of you to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring your father. Please listen to what I am going to tell you. Tomorrow, they will take us out to be executed. It will be our opportunity to sanctify Hashem's Name. When the murderers kill us, remember to say, *Ki alecha horagnu kol ha'yom*; 'For You, we will die every day.' I have no doubt that the murderers will do everything to make me suffer as much as possible until that moment that my soul leaves my body. I will cry out loudly to Hashem, '*Shema Yisrael!* You, too, will cry out, *Shema Yisrael!* My last request of you, my dear son, is please do not cry when they torture me, because your weeping will befuddle me and restrict my *kavanah*, devotion." (I want to give up my life for Hashem and need to remain completely focused on this *mitzvah*.)

At the last moment, just before they were about to be executed, they were miraculously saved. They survived the war, came to this country and were instrumental in changing its spiritual panorama. I relate this story to underscore how far the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av* can extend and to show what coursed through the mind of a saintly *Rebbe* minutes before he thought he would die.

I conclude with a powerful comment from *Horav Chaim Brim, zl*, concerning the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av v'eim*. "If you want to determine if a person possesses *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, watch to see how he shows respect for his parents." My take on this is: One who does not go all out in his *Kibbud av v'eim* will not go all out in his fear of Hashem; alternatively, if he does manifest fear of Hashem, but does not act appropriately toward his parents, his fear of Hashem is a sham, because the two go hand in hand. We should honor our parents as a result of our sense of *yiraas Shomayim*. This is what Hashem asks of us.