

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

Every *mitzvah* is accompanied by *halachos*, laws, and customs which guide its fulfillment. If one does not adhere to them, the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* is nullified. Some *mitzvos* have numerous *halachos*, while others are simple and basic. The *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*, honoring one's parents, which is one of the most difficult *mitzvos* to carry out properly, has a considerable amount of laws and criteria which must be met in order to appropriately execute this *mitzvah*. Determining what is included in the term *kavod*, honor, and what is not and who is deserving of honor (i.e. an abusive parent) are beyond the scope of this paper. I would like to address what I feel is a commonsensical application of this *mitzvah*: making a phone call. Yes, making a simple phone call can be the fulfillment of *kibbud av v'eim*. As parents age and their lives become less complicated (or so we think), in some instances to the point of boredom, it would be nice to hear from their children. The phone call need not be long and drawn out. A simple, "How are you? Just checking up to see how you are doing. Can I get or do anything for you?" – or just to call and share your or your family's experiences – is sufficient. In our highly technological society, personal face-to-face, mouth-to-mouth conversation is at a premium. We are so busy, so consumed with ourselves, that we often forget our obligation to acknowledge and pay tribute to the people who brought us into the world and cared for us. In a normal family setting this is how it should be, and, for the most part, it is. We (sadly) see exceptions, for reasons which we find a way to rationalize. These are "complicated" exceptions.

Unfortunately, it gets worse. Some children have convinced themselves, or have been convinced by others, individuals who are either ill or evil, that it is acceptable not to speak to parents for whatever reason they have contrived. I read an article authored by a secular activist who, in a public forum, asked adults who had ceased speaking to parents to explain their decisions. One woman in her late 20's responded that she had not been in touch with her mother for ten years. When questioned concerning the reason for her extreme behavior, she replied that her mother, albeit loving her, was domineering. She felt that her mother would dominate her life if she would speak to her. The writer sensed that someone else had catalyzed this woman's decision, such as an incompetent therapist, who placed his stamp of approval on his patient's selfish, hurtful decision. Obviously, this therapist had been an accessory to an act of malfeasance, both to the parents and to his patient. This is an insubordination on the part of the adult child concerning the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*. As I have reiterated a number of times, the Torah enjoins us to honor our parents, not love them. Understandably, some parents are victims of their own issues, which result in their inability to execute their roles properly. It may be difficult to love such biological progenitors (I did not use the word "parents," because the true meaning of the term may not apply), but honoring them is an irrevocable Divine imperative.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl, writes (*Orchos Yosher*) that, for many *mitzvos* and transgressions, the reward or punishment is reserved for the World to Come. *Kibbud av v'eim*, however, does not

brook such postponement. The Almighty punishes or rewards for the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim* in this world. Therefore, in all likelihood, the way one acts towards his/her parents might very well be the precursor for the manner in which their children will act toward them.

Someone who was asked to speak to a group of youngsters asked Rav Chaim, "What *mitzvah* should I emphasize and encourage them to perform to its fullest extent?" His almost immediate response was: *kibbud av v'eim*. He was further asked, concerning a boy who had just turned *bar mitzvah*, which *mitzvah* he should be *mekabel*, accept upon himself, to carry out scrupulously. Rav Chaim replied that his father, the *Steipler Gaon*, *zl*, was asked the same question, and he replied that it should be *mitzvas kibbud av v'eim*.

*Horav Chaim Brim, zl*, was wont to say, "The barometer for ascertaining one's level of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, is in the manner in which he fulfills the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*." Need we say more?

From the time that he was *bar mitzvah*, *Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl*, would personally read *Megillas Esther* for his mother, who had difficulty hearing. He made a point to read loudly and clearly, meticulously emphasizing every *trop*, cantillation note. He did it this way, so that she would not be compelled to make use of a hearing aid. Rav Shlomo Zalmen's son related that, years later, when he read the *Megillah* for his grandmother, he observed that she no longer heard anything at all. When he mentioned this to his father, the sage replied, "It never entered my mind that she had the ability to listen in accordance with *halachah*. Everything that I did was so that my mother should be calm and feel good about listening to the *Megillah*." Maintaining a parent's self-esteem is also *kibbud av v'eim*.