

## Every man: Your father and mother shall you revere/fear. (19:3)

Interestingly, in the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, the Torah commands *Kabeid es avicha v'es imecha*, "Honor your father and mother" (*Shemos* 20:12), without adding the word *ish*, every man. It is almost as if the Torah were intimating a special command to one who is an *ish*, that he must fear his parents. What is the difference between *kavod*, respect, and *mora*, fear? *Horav Yosef Tzvi HaLevi Dunner, zl (Mikdash HaLevi)*, explains the disparity homiletically. The Torah is teaching us a valuable and vital lesson – one that I think is quite obvious in today's society. The Torah world, for the most part, has not fallen prey to this breakdown of moral obligation. As a secular psychologist put it:

"Nowadays, 'Honor your father and mother' is just a suggestion."

The *Rav* explains that someone who has matured, reached adulthood and has taken his place in society must still show *mora*, fear for his parents. Many people acquiesce to *kavod*, respect, since it does not place any heavy burdens on the son/daughter. On the other hand, fear is something we too often relegate to youth. Young people must fear their parents. Adults who are successful in life must be respectful, but fearful? No. The Torah teaches us that, regardless of a person's status as an *ish*, he is still obligated to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *mora*.

*Chazal (Pesikta Rabasi 23)* characterize the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av v'eim* as, "*chamur she'b'chamuros*," among the most difficult *mitzvos* to carry out properly. One must respect parents regardless of their suitability as parents. I have written numerous times that the Torah does not command us to love parents; rather, the Torah demands that we respect and fear them – under all circumstances.

The following story occurred concerning a man who was blessed with extraordinary longevity, whose mental cognition was in perfect working order past his one hundredth birthday. He was blessed with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who showed him the greatest respect and waited on him hand and foot, making sure that he was never in need of anything. This was carried out with love, devotion, and the understanding that serving their Patriarch was a privilege.

This man was troubled by a question that kept gnawing at him. He asked his son, "I do not know why I was *zocheh*, merited, such longevity. Am I a greater *tzaddik*, more righteous, than my parents who did not live a long life? Am I more worthy than my many friends who have passed away? Why did Hashem choose me for such an unprecedented life? Perhaps I did something special. Or maybe, Hashem wants me to experience the infirmity, illness and pain that often accompany old age."

The son had no answer for his father's query. Indeed, it was an anomaly. Hashem has His

reasons, which are all good. This, too, was good. It was the accepted response, but it did little to still his father's frustration. The son was a close *talmid*, student, of the *Novominsker Rebbe, zl*. When he heard that his revered *Rebbe* was planning a trip to *Eretz Yisrael* to (among other things) visit with *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, who was himself a centenarian, he asked that the *Rebbe* present his father's conundrum to the *gadol ha'dor*.

The *Rebbe* presented the man's question to *Rav Shteinman*, who immediately took hold of the *Rebbe's* lapels and declared, "I will give you the answer to this question. I insist that you relate this answer to him in the exact words that I use. You know that we are presently in the waning period of *galus* Edom, the exile personified by *Eisav ha'Rasha*. (This is not the forum to describe *Eisav's* psyche and behavior and how his minions continue until this very day to adhere to the contemptuous character traits which he personified.) The merit that *Eisav* accrued, which has served him throughout the generations and continues to support him, is the *z'chus* of his *kibbud av*. *Eisav* showed extraordinary honor to *Yitzchak Avinu*, in many ways setting the standard for this *mitzvah*. While his intentions were far from noble, on the surface his actions were exemplary. Now Hashem seeks to free us from the shackles of *Eisav's galus*. Thus, he gave us the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*, with the hope that we will perform this *mitzvah* with zeal and devotion. This is why, as we inch closer to the end of our *galus*, the Almighty extends the longevity of our aged, so that their children will be able to honor them longer and better."

The *Novominsker* was moved by this explanation. He added that many parents do not want to be a burden to their children. Every time they are compelled to call for a favor, they mull it over five times before they make the call. According to the aforementioned, this "burden" is actually Hashem's way of providing children with the opportunity to honor their parents, thus catalyzing an end to our *galus*.