

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

The imperative to honor one's parents is etched on the same Tablets as the belief in Hashem and the admonishments prohibiting murder and immoral relations. It is a special *mitzvah* which defines, not only our relationship with our parents, but our relationship with Hashem as well. One who does not see the need to honor parents will not see the need to honor Hashem. The *mitzvah* has nothing to do with gratitude, because we received it in the wilderness at a time in which parents did not provide for their children's needs. Hashem did. [It has not changed. Hashem is still the sole Provider. He just does it through the agency of parents.] The *mitzvah* to honor one's parents is not contingent upon what they have done for us, but rather, it is based upon who they are and the institution they represent. Whether parents are good or bad, kindhearted, thoughtful, caring – or abusive, we honor them, because they partnered with Hashem in bringing us into the world.

Even the most loving parent can be demanding. This makes it difficult for their son or daughter, because he or she needs validation and acceptance. When they think it is not forthcoming, they become frustrated and even upset. This leads to friction, which is the precursor of transgressing the honor we owe our parents. Does this mean that it is always the fault of the son or daughter? I think not. If anything, the parents share culpability. I recently read an article in which a distinguished writer related sitting with the son of a famous man who had died. He asked the son what he would emphasize in the eulogy he would render for his father. He said, "I will remember that my father always made me feel special. He may have judged my actions, but he never judged me. When I went through a period of rebellion and dressed inappropriately, he would make a point of putting his arm around me in public to demonstrate to everyone that, as far as he was concerned, I was perfect just the way I was."

This is an incredible testament by a son who must have been a challenge. He will remember his father as making him feel that he was good enough. Sadly, some of the parents who really mean well laud one child over another, expounding one child's successes in contrast to another child's failures. Their excuse for this cruel behavior, "I am motivating him to work harder, like his older brother." This is not motivation, but unvarnished, inexcusable abuse. Children should not have to earn their parent's affection. It should be free and forthcoming. Is this not the way our Heavenly Father acts towards us?

It all has to start someplace. The Torah teaches, 'And these are the generations of Yitzchak ben Avraham; Avraham begot Yitzchak' (*Bereishis* 25:19). *Rashi* comments: "The *toldos* of Yitzchak are Yaakov and Eisav about whom the *parshah* will speak." This comment has an obvious problem of textual sequence. The Torah begins the *toldos* of Yitzchak and immediately informs us that Avraham begot Yitzchak. The offspring to whom the *pasuk* refers are those of Yitzchak – not Avraham.

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, offers an insightful explanation. The Torah alludes to us that, even when one is married and a father to his own children, he is (still) the son of his father. He

must remember to honor his father. “Fatherhood” does not divert one from “sonhood.” Furthermore, one should not forget the lessons and traditions of his youth. If he wants his son to follow his lessons, he must follow those his father has bequeathed to him.

One aspect of *kibbud av v'eim* we often seem to gloss over is the honor we must give our parents once they have passed from their earthly abode. The *Kedushas Levi* (*m'Berditchev*) was very stringent concerning *aveilim*, mourners, who are supposed to *daven* from the *amud*, lead the services, during their first year of mourning for a parent. He insisted that they recite *kaddish* at the appropriate place in *davening*. He explained that the souls of the departed benefit greatly from the positive spiritual activities of their children. Indeed, everything a child does affects the soul of his/her parent. Even if a son does not explicitly state that he is performing the *mitzvah l'iluy nishmos* his parents, it is automatically considered to be so. If one wants his activity to be counted on behalf of someone else, however, he must explicitly say the name of the deceased whose memory he is honoring.

I cite an incredible *Pele Yoetz* of which we should all avail ourselves. I will present parts of it with a free translation. “The principal way of honoring parents is after their death (*Kiddushin* 31b). One should do everything possible to bring pleasure to his parent’s soul every single day without fail. Not like so many ignoramuses who remember their parents only on their *yahrzeit* with a *kaddish*, a little *tzedakah*, or some Torah study. Woe is to those parents who expect their children to redeem them and elevate them because those children are doing practically nothing, and whatever they do is insignificant... instead, it is proper for a son to have his father’s image seared in his mind’s eye and imagine that his father is screaming at him bitterly from amid a burning flame, saying, ‘My son, my beloved, I beg you, save me from the sword hovering above my soul...’” The author goes on passionately exhorting everyone never to forget about their parents, even for one moment.

The *Chida*, *zl* (*Kikar L'Eden, Likutim* 5), writes that every *tefillah* and *mitzvah*, every word of Torah studied and every *chiddush*, original, innovative Torah thought, bestow reward on one’s parent as if they themselves had performed it... “As, in this way, he fulfills the *mitzvah* of honoring one’s parents more than any honor that he showed them in this world, and he will be a source of *nachas* for them.”

The *Minchas Elazar* (*Munkatch*) writes: “One should recite the phrase, *HaRachaman Hu yevareich es avi mori v'im morasi*, ‘May He bless my father, my teacher... and my mother, my teacher,’ even if he is not presently sitting at their table.” The *Sefer Darkei Chaim v'Shalom* writes that one should continue reciting this phrase even after his parents have passed on, for they require a blessing even in their Heavenly repose. *Rebbetzin Zilberstein, A.H.*, daughter of *Horav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, zl*, and wife of *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, made a point to eat a piece of bread daily in order to *bentch* and say the above phrase: *Ha'Rachamon*. She explained that she lived in Bnei Brak, and her elderly parents lived in Yerushalayim. It was very difficult to travel back and forth daily. As a result, she was missing out on the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*. She felt that by, reciting the *Ha'Rachamon* every day, she was honoring her parents – so she ate bread.