

Honoring Parents

Jewish Ethics: Lesson 3

By Rabbi Yudi Zarchi

Chabad of Markham

Rationale

- 1) At the root of this Mitzvah lies the thought that it is fitting for a man to acknowledge and treat with loving kindness the person who treated him with goodness, and he should not be a scoundrel, an ingrate who turns a cold shoulder [to him] – for this is an evil quality, utterly vile before G-d and mankind. It is for a person to realize that his father and mother are the cause of his being in the world; hence in very truth it is proper for him to give them every honour and every benefit that he can, since they brought him into the world and then, too, laboured through many troubles over him in his early years.

When he sets this quality firmly in his character, a person will rise from this to recognize the goodness of G-d, blessed be He, who is the primary Cause of existence and the existence of all his forebears, back to Adam, the first man. And [he will realize] that He brought him forth into the light of day, provided for his needs all his days [on earth], brought him to his proper state with all his limbs whole, and gave him a cognitive and intelligent spirit – and if not for his spirit with which G-d endowed him, he would be ‘like a horse, like a mule, without understanding’ (Psalms 32:9). Then let him reckon in his mind how very, very right it is for him to take care about serving and worshipping Him, be He blessed. (Chinuch, Mitzvah 33)

Honouring Hashem

- 2) Ulla lectured at the entrance to the Nassi’s house: What is meant by, ‘All the kings of the earth will acknowledge You, for they heard the words of Your mouth.’ Not the word of Your mouth, but the words of Your mouth, is said. When the Holy One, Blessed be He, proclaimed, I am [the L-rd your G-d] and You shall not have [the G-ds of others in My presence], the nations of the world said, ‘He teaches merely for his own honour. As soon as he declared, Honour your father and mother, they recanted and admitted [the justice of] the first commandments [too]. (Talmud, Kidushin 31a)

Partners

- 3) Our Rabbis taught: There are three partners in man, the Holy One, blessed be He, his father and his mother. When a man honours his father and mother, the Holy One, blessed be He, says, 'I ascribe [merit] to them as though I had dwelt among them and they honoured Me. (Talmud, ibid. 30b)

Kavod

- 4) Honour your father and your mother, in order that your days be lengthened on the land that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you. Honour your father and your mother as the L-rd your G-d commanded you, in order that your days be lengthened, and that it may go well with you on the land that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you. (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16)

Morah

- 5) Every man shall fear his mother and his father, and you shall observe My Sabbaths. I am the L-rd, your G-d. (Leviticus 19:3)
- 6) The Torah equates the honour and fear of one's parents with the honour and fear of G-d Himself. Exodus 20:12 states: "Honour your father and your mother," and Proverbs 3:9 states: "Honour G-d from your wealth." Similarly, with regard to one's father and mother, Leviticus 19:3 states: "A person must fear his mother and father," and Deuteronomy 6:13 states: "And you shall fear G-d, your L-rd." Just as He commands us to honour and fear His great name; so, too, He commands us to honour and fear our parents." (Rambam, Laws Concerning Rebels 6:1)

Parameters

- 7) What is meant by fear and what is meant by honour? Fear is expressed by not standing in his place, not sitting in his place, not contradicting his words, nor offering an opinion that outweighs his. He should not call him by name, neither during his lifetime nor after his death. Instead, he should say: "My father and my master...What is meant by honouring them? One should bring them food and drink, clothe them and cover them from their resources. If a father does not have financial resources and a son does, the son is compelled to sustain his father and his mother according to his capacity. He should bring him out and bring him home and serve him in all the ways one serves a teacher. Similarly, he should stand before him as one stands before a teacher. (Rambam, ibid. 6:3)

Exemption

- 8) When a person's father tells him to violate the words of the Torah - whether he tells him to transgress a negative commandment or not to fulfill a positive commandment, even if all that is involved is a point of Rabbinic Law - he should not listen to him, as can be inferred from Leviticus 19:3: 'A person must fear his mother and his father and keep My Sabbaths.' Implied is that all are obligated in honouring Me. (Rambam, ibid. 6:12)

Torah Study

- 9) Rabah said in the name of Rav Yitzchak the son of Shmuel, the son of Marta: The study of Torah is superior to the honouring of one's father and mother. For, for fourteen years that Yaacov spent in the house of Eber, he was not punished. (Talmud, Megilah 16b)

In-laws

- 10) And Father, see! Also, see the skirt of your coat in my hand, for in that I severed the skirt of your coat and I did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against you, but you are stalking my soul to take it. (Samuel 1, 24:12)

Siblings

- 11) The extra [letter] Vav [of the verse 'and your mother, is expounded] to include your elder brother [in this commandment]. (Talmud, Ketubot 103a)