

I Owe My Life to You

"When a man will have a wayward and rebellious son (Devarim 21:18)."

"This is a pretty serious crime, Avi. The son receives the death penalty."

"Yes, Chaim. Hashem Yerachem (Hashem should have mercy). How did he get himself into such a predicament?"

"The verse itself gives us a clue. 'He does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother.' A child who does not listen to his parents is bound to get into trouble."

"This is one of the foundations of the mitzvos of honoring and fearing parents, Chaim - carrying out their wishes."

"I have a question about that mitzvah, Avi. Perhaps you can answer it for me."

"I will try."

"The Talmud Yerushalmi in the beginning of Mesechta Peah calls the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'aim* (honoring parents) '*chamurah she'bi'chamuros*' (the most serious of the serious mitzvos). Why? What makes this mitzvah so severe?"

Much has been written on this subject, Chaim. *Kibbud av v'aim* is one of the *Aseres Ha'dibros* (Ten Commandments). These mitzvos are the most fundamental, and form the basis for all of the 613 mitzvos. Therefore, *kibbud av v'aim* is one of the foundations of the Torah. However, our sages give even more importance to this mitzvah. Tanna Di'Be Eliyahu (chapter 26) explains that all Ten Commandments are tied into *kibbud av v'aim*. One who honors his parents will never come to transgress the other commandments."

"I see."

"Furthermore, the Torah itself connects honoring and fearing ones parents to honoring and fearing The Creator, as the verses state, 'Honor Hashem with your wealth' (Mishlei 3:9), and 'Honor your father and mother' (Shemos 20:12). 'Fear Hashem your G-d' (Devarim 6:13), and 'A man will fear his mother and father' (Vayikra 19:3)."

"Fascinating."

"Cursing ones parents carries the death penalty, just as cursing Hashem. Striking ones parents and drawing blood also carries the death penalty, whereas striking another Jew is only a monetary crime. These laws all indicate the gravity of this mitzvah of *kibbud av v'aim*."

"I realize that this is a very important subject, Avi. Let me ask you a more fundamental question. Why is giving honor to parents so important?"

"Hmmm. Let's see. I suppose the best way to explain this, Chaim, is to give a dramatic example of the opposite middah - *chutzpah*. Look at Paroh. He made the following statement, 'The river is mine

and I created it' (Shemos Rabba). He believed that he was a g-d."

"That is ridiculous."

"True, but with an attitude like that, he did not have to respect anyone including Hashem. That is why he said, 'Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice?' (Shemos 5:2)"

"I am beginning to understand, Avi. If we do not properly honor our parents, we are demonstrating a denial of their giving birth to us."

"Yes. The gemora (Kiddushin 30b) states that there are three partners in the creation of a person - Hashem, the father, and the mother. These three give a child life. We owe our life to our parents. Now, let me ask you, Chaim, is there anything more precious than life? Imagine someone was told that he had one month to live. However, he could extend his life another five years by paying a huge sum of money. Would anyone refuse?"

"Of course not! Life is more precious than money."

"Exactly. Our parents gave us life, the most precious possession in the world. Therefore, we owe our lives to them. We owe them the most precious thing in the world. The Chayei Odom explains that respecting and honoring them is our way of repaying that debt. The Sefer HaChinuch adds that a child should realize in his heart that his parents are the reason that he is living in this world. Therefore, they are truly deserving of his ultimate honor. They brought him into this world and put much effort into keep him alive and raising him. When a person internalizes this fact, he will come to appreciate the goodness that The Creator does for him."

"What a compelling thought."

"The negative side of this mitzvah is equally serious. One who shirks this obligation is called wicked, as the verse states, 'The wicked one borrows but does not repay' (Tehilim 37:21). Not only that, he is compared to an animal."

"Why, Avi?"

"Because an animal feels no connection with the parents who bore him. If he gets hungry enough, he will eat his own mother. That is the ultimate lack of respect for parents."

"That is frightening. The Torah itself demonstrates the significance of this mitzvah by stating the blessing that comes from observing it - '*areichus yomim*' - long life. As the verse states, 'Honor your father and mother, so that your days will be lengthened' (Shemos 20:12). The gemora (Kiddushin 30b) adds that when a child honors his parents, Hashem considers it as if He dwells among them, and the child honors Him. The Gemora Yerushalmi counts it among those few mitzvos for which we receive reward in

both this world and the world to come. Our sages add that the children of the one who honors his parents, will go on the straight path, and be worthy of receiving Heavenly blessings. Therefore, they will come full circle. Those children will honor their father, just as he honored his parents (Abarbanel)."

"That is truly wonderful, Chaim. As good as the rewards for honoring parents are, the punishments for violating this mitzvah are equally severe. A child who humiliates his parents receives a curse, as the verse states, 'Cursed is the one who degrades his father or mother' (Devarim 27:16). The Chayei Odom states that a child who says that he owes no gratitude to his parents will become widowed, mute, and deaf."

"Oy vey! Okay, let's get practical, Avi. How do we honor and fear our parents?"

"The laws are listed in Shulchan Auruch Yoreh Deah - chapter 240, Rambam Hilchos Mamrim - chapter 6, Chayei Odom - chapter 67, and Kitzur Shulchan Auruch - chapter 26. Very briefly, we must honor them by serving them food and drink, helping them dress, and escorting them when they enter and leave. This should all be done with a happy facial expression. Fearing them includes not standing, sitting, or praying in their designated place, not contradicting or verifying their words, and not calling them by name. Some say that honoring them includes realizing their greatness, and loving them as much as they love him."

"I'm ready to honor my parents with all of my heart, Avi."

"May Hashem bless you and give you much reward."



Kinderlach . . . We owe the most precious thing in the world to our parents - our lives! How can we ever repay them? By honoring and fearing them. This is not just any mitzvah, but a huge mitzvah! It is a foundation of the entire Torah! Hashem makes this mitzvah very attractive to us by offering huge rewards in this world and the next. Kinderlach, your parents love you more than anything in the world. Love them back! Appreciate what they have done for you! Once you feel this in your heart, honoring and fearing them will become second nature. When you see your father or mother repeat this motto to yourself, 'I owe my life to you! Of course I will honor and fear you!'

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