

RESPECTING PARENTS

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לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי שני בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

THE WAY TO RESPECT

The Torah commands us to respect our parents. The Sefer HaChinuch explains the reason for this mitzvah, that a person should always appreciate what was done for him, and not be ungrateful. He must take to heart all the effort his parents have invested in him, in raising him and nurturing him. This will also bring him an appreciation for all the good which Hashem has bestowed upon him.

The mitzvah of respecting parents is exceedingly great and is equal to the obligation of respecting Hashem. In fact, a pauper, is not obligated in certain mitzvos, but for the mitzvah of respecting his parents, he is required to collect funds if money is needed.

(יתרו כ, יב, ס' החינוך מצוה לג)

Chazal specify the obligations of Kibbud Av Va'eim: serving parents food and drink, dressing them, taking them wherever they wish to go and standing up for them.

Chazal describe to what extent we are obligated to respect our parents: "Even if one's parents take his pouch filled with golden coins and throw it into the sea, in front of his eyes, he should not shame them, shout in their presence, or show anger in front of them. Rather, he should accept Hashem's decree ("Honor your father and mother") in silence.

(קידושין לא ע"א, רמב"ם ממרים פ"ו ה"ז, שו"ע יו"ד ר"מ ס"ד וס"ה)

Rebbi Tarfon treated his mother with such great respect, that whenever she wanted to go to sleep, he would bend down, enabling her to clamber onto him and climb into bed. Likewise, whenever she would descend from the bed, she would step down onto him and then onto the floor. Rebbi Tarfon once came to the Beis Medrash and began praising his degree of Kibud Eim. However, the chachomim told him, "You have not yet achieved even half of the honor that one is required to bestow upon his parents; has your mother ever thrown a wallet into the sea in your presence and you did not shame her?"

On one occasion, the mother of Rebbi Tarfon was walking on shabbos and her shoes tore. Rebbi Tarfon then placed his hands on the ground so that his mother could walk upon them, step by step, until she reached her bed.

Whenever Rav Yosef heard the footsteps of his mother, he would

say, "I shall stand before the shechina which is approaching".

(קידושין לא ע"ב ועיין מהרש"א, ירושלמי פאה פ"א ה"א)

On Moitzoei Yom Kippur the Rebbe Rashab would visit his mother Rebbetzin Rivkah and break the fast in her home. The Chossid Reb Zalman Duchman, who was once present there, related: "The Rebbe Rashab stood up from his place at the head of the table, at which everyone else did likewise, and approached the samovar located near the front entrance. He then prepared a glass of tea and brought it to his mother. "Beginning the new year with a mitzvah," Rebbetzin Rivkah exclaimed.

(לשמע און ע' 83)

Amongst the claims challenged to the Alter Rebbe while in prison, was a claim that chassidim do not have proper Kibud Av Va'eim. The Alter Rebbe replied that it is impossible that one who serves Hashem with davening, and strives to attain Yiras Shomayim (as the chassidim do), should not fulfill this mitzvah or any other mitzvah. The Alter Rebbe added that if there is someone amongst the chassidim who does not observe Kibud Av Va'eim, besides being unworthy of being titled Chossid, he does not even qualify to be called a human being (!), and the chassidim should not be evaluated based upon his actions.

(אג"ק אדמו"ר הזקן ח"ב ע' נט)

THE EXTENT OF KIBUD AV VA'EIM

The Chachomim teach that we learn the extent of respect for parents from a goy named Dama ben Nesina. Once, while sitting among Roman nobleman, his (disturbed) mother came over to him and ripped off the gold, embroidered silk cloak he was wearing, hit him on the head and spat in his face. She then took a shoe and began hitting him, but despite all this, he continued to sit in silence. Moreover, when the shoe fell from her hand, he lifted it up and handed it to her so that she not get upset.

On another occasion, the Chachomim wanted to purchase a precious stone from him, and were willing to pay a large sum of money. Nevertheless, he turned down their offer, because the box which held the precious stone was under the feet of his sleeping father. Hashem rewarded him with a Para Aduma, from which he gained back the profitable earnings he had lost from

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(קידושין לא ע"א ובתוס', ירושלמי פאה פ"א ה"א)

Someone once asked Reb Chaim Brisker, "Is it true that when the respect of parents includes some monetary expense, it is the parents' responsibility and not the son's?" "Yes," replied Reb Chaim, "That indeed is the halacha". The man continued, "Then here is my question: My father lives in a distant town and I have just been notified that he is ill and bedridden. Trust me; I want, to fulfill the mitzvah of Kibud Av, and travel to help him. But alas, what can I do? The way is a long one and the train ride is very costly, and my father does not have the money to pay for the ticket. Doesn't that mean that I am exempt from making the trip?" "True!" answered Reb Chaim, "You are not liable to take the train. Go instead by foot...!"

(אוצר כאו"א ע' תקמא)

The Rebbe was extremely scrupulous in this mitzvah. For many years, the Rebbe would take precious time to visit his mother each day and talk to her about various matters.

When the Rebbe's brother passed away in תשי"ב, the Rebbe made a special effort to hide this from her, not wanting to cause her unnecessary pain. The Rebbe instructed many people not to reveal this to her, and he went so far as to screen his mother's mail, to ensure that she would not hear of her son's passing.

(אג"ק ח"ו ע' קפג וע' רלו. מפי השמועה)

The gaon Reb Avrohom Dovid of Butchatch wrote that thirty days before visiting his parents, he would review the halachos of כיבוד אב ואם, in preparation to fulfill this important mitzvah.

(אוצר כאו"א ע' תקנא)

Chazal explain that even more important than the service done for our parents, is the way it is done. To demonstrate this they relate the following stories:

There was a son who took care of all his father's needs, feeding him the finest delicacies. One time, the father asked his son, "My son, from where do you have all this?" "Quiet old man!" the son retorted, "Just eat silently, like the dogs."

Another man earned a meager living by grinding in a mill. Once, the king's officers came to take his father away to the king's service. Seeing this, the son told his father, "Father! You can take my place in the mill, and I will go in your place, accepting any embarrassment it will entail."

The first son served his father well, yet earned Gehenom, while the second made his father work, but earned Gan Eden.

(ירושלמי פאה פ"א ה"א)

Chazal say that even one whose parents are complete רשעים, may not disrespect his parents. So much so, that even if (as a result of their grave aveiros) they were sentenced with the death penalty (in Beis Din) and are on their way to be punished, it is forbidden (for the son) to hit them or curse them.

(רמב"ם ממרים פ"ה ה"ב)

THE REWARD

Hashem promises long life to those who fulfill the mitzvos of respecting their parents. Chazal say that Yosef Hatzaddik's life was shortened because of a disrespectful gesture he expressed towards his father. Ten times during the conversations between Yosef and his brothers, the shvatim referred to their father Yaakov as "your servant our father", and Yosef heard, yet remained silent. Since silence can be interpreted as agreement; therefore, ten years were taken away from Yosef's life.

The Arizal writes that tzaddikim in Gan Eden are judged for things they may have done as young children, when seven or eight years old.

(יתרו כ, יב, פרקי דר"א פל"ט, מדבר קדמות להחיד"א)

When the Torah tells how Eisav would return exhausted from hunting, it adds the description, 'He felt as if he were about to die.' With these words, the Torah is letting us know that Eisav's descendants have merited their power, because he endangered his life to hunt for his father. We must take a lesson in how much exertion must be put in to sustain our parents.

(ספר חסידים ס' שמי"א)

The Rambam writes: One who does not respect his parents, his children will not respect him.

(מורה נבוכים ח"ג מ, תקיז)

In the tzava'ah (will) written for his children, the Rebbe Maharash writes: "First and foremost, I hereby order you, my sons and daughters, to be exceedingly careful in respecting your mother.

Although you have already been commanded about this in Torah, we nevertheless find that the Chazal reiterate this command. Even when you will grow older, [do not rely] on your own opinion and doubt your mother's words, and certainly do not to alter or go against her will.

"Especially since the reward for this mitzvah is long life in this world. Now, as you know, this entire world is worthless in comparison to one moment in Olam Haboh. So if in Olam Hazeh, lack of kavod is so detrimental that one can lose all the good of this world, how much more so with regards to Olam Haboh!"

(אג"ק מהר"ש ע' יב)

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