

Dear Friends,

The goal of Torah Learning Project is to give you a study experience that is both intriguing and uniquely satisfying. We invest much time and effort to ensure that your learning gives you a deep sense of personal fulfillment and leaves you wanting more.

In order to achieve this, we have created a dynamic, original curriculum that features:

- Thought-provoking issues
- Helpful, informative synopses
- Materials for 40 minutes of study
- Clear, easily understandable language and layout
- Challenging questions to consider at the end of each lesson

Our sincere aspiration is that your learning leaves you with a distinct sense of personal enrichment and a desire to continue growing in your studies.

We look forward to making many more rewarding learning experiences available to you in the future.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde
Director

Chavrusa Sushi is a coordinated network of creative learning programs geared toward the young working Chabad Professional. For comments questions or requests to join the Chavrusa Sushi Network, please email Director@Torahlp.com.

Visit us on the web at Torahonthego.com.

ב"ה



Outline

- » The Mitzvah
- » Before Sinai
- » Reasons for the Mitzvah
- » Reciprocity
- » Honoring Hashem
- » Guardians of the Faith
- » Practical Fulfillment
- » Reverence
- » Reciting a Brocho
- » Gratifying Ones Parents
- » Feeling it in the heart
- » Extent of the Mitzvah
- » Parents Should Not Take Advantage
- » When Honoring Parents Conflicts with Performing Mitzvos
- » Respecting the Older Brother and Step-father/Step-mother
- » In-laws
- » After Their Passing
- » Burden of Payment
- » Placing One's Parents in a Nursing Home
- » Abusive Parents
- » Reward for Honoring Parents

Kibud Av Va'em

The Mitzvah

Our parents brought us into this world. When we were infants, unable to take care of ourselves, they fed us, clothed us, bathed us, cleaned up our messes, educated us, and loved us more than life itself. What do we give them in return?

The Torah instructs us to honor our parents:

Shemos 20:12

כְּבֹד אֶת-אָבִיךָ, וְאֶת-אִמְּךָ, לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ, עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר-הִיא
אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ

Honor your father and your mother, in order that your days be lengthened on the land that the Hashem, your G-d, is giving you.

Before Sinai

Interestingly, the mitzvah of honoring parents is not a uniquely Jewish practice that began at Har Sinai. We find that the practice of honoring ones parents predated the giving of the Torah.

For example, as punishment for the 22 years that Yaakov did not honor his father, he was made to mourn the loss of his son Yoseph for 22 years (until he discovered that he was still alive in Mitzrayim):

Bereishis 37:34

וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שָׁמַלְתָּיו וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁק בְּמַתְנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים:

Yaakov rent his garments, and he put sackcloth on his loins, and he mourned for his son many days.

Rashi explains:

Rashi, Ibid.

ימים רבים - עשרים ושתים שנה משפירש ממנו עד שירד יעקב למצרים, שנאמר (פסוק ב) יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה וגו' ובן שלשים שנה היה בעמדו לפני פרעה, ושבע שני השובע ושנתים הרעב כשבא יעקב למצרים הרי עשרים ושתים שנה, כנגד עשרים ושתים שנה שלא קיים יעקב כבוד אב ואם.

Many days: Twenty-two years from the time he (Yoseph) left him until Yaakov went down to Mitzrayim, as it is said: "Yoseph was seventeen years old, etc." (Bereishis 37:2), and he was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh, and the seven years of plenty, and the two years of the famine (Bereishis 45:6) when Yaakov came to Mitzrayim. Here are 22 years corresponding to the 22 years that Yaakov did not fulfill [the mitzvah] to honor his father and mother.

We know that a person can only be punished for transgressions that they are obligated to fulfill. Even if Yaakov chose to keep the Torah before it was given, his observance would be voluntary, and he would not be bound by its laws to the extent of receiving punishment for their transgression. This indicates that honoring parents was considered an obligation even before Yidden were instructed to keep the mitzvos at Sinai.

Moreover, we find that the Torah is concerned with Avraham's reputation if he were to leave his aging father alone and travel abroad, implying that honoring ones parents was seen to be an obligation even in Avraham's times:

Rashi, Bereishis 11:32

למה הקדים הכתוב מיתתו של תרח ליציאתו של אברם, שלא יהא הדבר מפורסם לכל ויאמרו לא קיים אברם את כבוד אביו שהניחו זקן והלך לו.

Why then did the Posuk relate Terach's death before Avram's departure? So that the matter should not be publicized to all, whereby they would say: "Avram did not fulfill the honoring of his father, for he left him in his old age and went away."

The Rebbe explains:

Likutei Sichos vol. 5, pg. 160

כיבוד אב איז א זאך וואס רירט אן ישובו של עולם. ד.ה. די מצוה פון כיבוד אב, בשלימותה און ווי א באזונדער ענין, איז געגעבן געווארן צו אידן אין "מרה"! אבער אויף וויפל כיבוד אב איז נוגע צו ישובו של עולם, איז מען דערויף געווען אנגעזאגט פון פריער.

Honoring one's parents is important for "the establishment of the world." This means that while the mitzvah of honoring parents—in its entirety, and as a distinct concept—was only instructed to the Yidden at "Marrah" (where the Yidden were given several commandments even before Sinai)! To the extent that honoring parents is necessary for

“the establishment of the world,” one was expected to observe it even before [Marah].

How is honoring parents a basic concept to the “establishment of the world”?

Reasons for the Mitzvah

The “logical” and “universal” nature of this obligation is understood in terms of our obligation to repay our parents in kind for all they have done for us:

Reciprocity

According to Midrash, honoring ones parents is about repaying our parents for bringing us into the world, caring for us, raising us etc.:

Sefer Chareidim Ch. 1:37

אמרו במדרש שכל מצות כיבוד אב ואם הוא פרעון החוב שחייב האדם לפרוע לאביו ולאמו הטובה שגמלוהו.

The Midrash teaches that honoring parents is the debt that one owes his father and mother for all the good that they have done for him.

Shenei Luchos Habris, Shaar Haosiyos, Os Daled, Derech Eretz

אמרו במשל הדיוט, אב אחד מפרנס עשרה בניו באהבה וברצון, ועשרה בנים לא מפרנסים באהבה וברצון אב אחד שלהם.

There is a common idiom: One father lovingly and willingly supports ten children. Ten children, on the other hand, do not lovingly and willingly support

their one father.

Parents are naturally inclined to love and care for their children. Children, on the other hand, do not naturally feel the same way about their parents. For this reason, it is necessary for the Torah to instruct a person to do for their parents the types of things that their parents did for them.

The Chinuch (likely authored by Rabbi Aharon HaLevi of Barcelona 1235-c. 1290) adds that honoring parents in reciprocation for all they have done to raise us, serves to train us in the art of gratitude, and brings us to recognize all that Hashem has done for us:

Sefer HaChinuch 33

ראוי לו לאדם שיכיר ויגמול חסד למי שעשה עמו טובה, ולא יהיה נבל ומתנכר וכפוי טובה, שזו מדה רעה ומאוסה בתכלית לפני אלקים ואנשים. ושיתן אל לבו שהאב והאם הם סיבת היותו בעולם ועל כן ראוי לו באמת לעשות להם כל כבוד וכל תועלת שיוכל, כי הם הביאוהו לעולם. גם יגעו בו כמה יגיעות בקטנותו.

וכשיקבע זאת המדה בנפשו - יעלה ממנה להכיר טובת האל ברוך הוא, שהוא סבתו וסבת כל אבותיו עד אדם הראשון. ושהוציאו לאויר העולם, וסיפק צרכיו כל ימיו, והעמידו על מתכונתו ושלימות איבריו, ונתן בו נפש יודעת ומשכלת. שאלולי הנפש שחננו האל - יהיה כסוס כפרד אין הבין. ויעריך במחשבתו כמה וכמה ראוי להיזהר בעבודתו ברוך הוא.

It is only appropriate for one to recognize and reciprocate kindness to those who have dealt kindly with him, and certainly not to act in a vile manner, estranging oneself and being an ingrate,

for this is a bad character trait that is completely despised by both Hashem and man. One should appreciate the fact that his parents are the source of his very existence in this world, and it is therefore appropriate for him to act as respectfully and beneficially as he can. Besides having brought him into the world, they also expended tremendous effort in raising him as a child.

When this trait [of honoring ones parents] becomes fixed in ones soul—he will come to recognize the goodness of Hashem, for He is the reason for his existence and the reason for the existence of all of his forefathers [all the way back to] Adam Harishon, and He provides him with all of his needs throughout his entire life, and He keeps him intact and in good health, and gave him a neshamah to know and think, for without the neshamah that Hashem graciously bestowed upon his - he would be like a horse or mule without understanding, and he should meditate at length in his thoughts how worthy it is to heed Hashem's service.

Honoring Hashem

The mitzvah to honor one's parents is of such importance, that it is listed as number five of the aseres hadibros. Interestingly, the aseres hadibros comprise of mitzvos bein adam lamakom (between man and Hashem), and mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro (between man and man); and while you might expect the mitzvah of honoring parents to be listed among the

mitzvos between man and man, it in fact appears among the mitzvos between man and Hashem:

Why is this?

We find that the honor due to ones parents is likened to the honor due to Hashem:

Rambam, Laws of Mamrim 6:1

כבוד אב ואם מצות עשה גדולה וכן מורא אב ואם שקל אותן הכתוב בכבודו ובמוראו, כתוב כבד את אביך ואת אמך וכתוב כבד את ה' מהונך, ובאביו ואמו כתוב איש אמו ואביו תיראו וכתוב את ה' אלהיך תירא, כדרך שצוה על כבוד שמו הגדול ומוראו כך צוה על כבודם ומוראם.

Honoring one's father and mother is a positive commandment of great importance, as is fearing one's father and mother. The Torah equates the honor and fear of one's parents with the honor and fear of Hashem Himself. Shemos 20:12 states: "Honor your father and your mother," and Mishlei 3:9 states: "Honor Hashem from your wealth." Similarly, with regard to one's father and mother, Vayikra 19:3 states: "A person must fear his mother and father," and Devarim 6:13 states: "And you shall fear Hashem, your G-d." Just as He commands us to honor and fear His great name; so, too, He commands us to honor and fear our parents."

Why is the honor due to ones parents compared to the honor due to Hashem?

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman 1194–1270) explains:

Ramban, Shemos 20:13

עשרת הדברות חמשה בכבוד הבורא וחמשה לטובת האדם, כי כבוד את אביך כבוד האל כי לכבוד הבורא צוה לכבוד האב המשתתף ביצירה

In the aseres hadibros, five are for the honor of the Creator and five are for the good of man. “Honor your father” is for Hashem’s honor since for the honor of the Creator, He instructed to honor the father who participates in creation.

When the Ramban refers to the parents’ participation in creation, he is referring to the following statement from the Gemara:

Nidah 31a

תנו רבנן: שלשה שותפין יש באדם, הקב“ה ואביו ואמו.

Our Sages taught: There are three partners in the creation of man, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, his father, and his mother.

The Ramban does not make any mention of the concept of gratitude or reciprocation in his explanation of the mitzvah at all. In fact, it seems as if the mitzvah has little to do with the parents, and everything to do with the honor of Hashem.

To fully understand the uniqueness of this approach, it is necessary to examine a story in Gemara related to this

mitzvah.

The Gemara relates that the nations of the world took issue with the first of the aseres hadibros, until they heard the one about honoring one's parents:

Kidushin 31a

בשעה שאמר הקב"ה (שמות כ) אנכי ולא יהיה לך, אמרו אומות העולם: לכבוד עצמו הוא דורש, כיון שאמר (שמות כ) כבד את אביך ואת אמך, חזרו והודו למאמרות הראשונות.

When Hashem said "I am [Hashem, your G-d]... there shall not be unto you [any other gods]..." the nations of the world said: He seeks his own honor. Once Hashem said "honor your father and your mother" they returned and admitted to the earlier commandments.

The Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai 1724–1806) explains:

Chida, Pesach Einayim, Kidushin ibid.

אוה"ע היו סוברים כמ"ש הרמב"ם דהשי"ת חלק כבוד לכוכבים וגלגלים ונתנם במרום וזה מעשה שעשה וממנו ילמדו לכבדם ולהשתחוות להם, ואח"כ ששמעו אנכי ולא יהי לך אמרו לכבוד עצמו הוא דורש שנתקנא ח"ו ואין רוצה שיכבדו לשום א' ולא אתי דיבור ומבטל מעשה, וכששמעו כבד את אביך והשוה כבודם לכבודו כביכול, מינה ידעו דח"ו לא נתקנא דהרי ציוה לכבד או"א בתוקף הכבוד והשוה כבוד או"א לכבודו, ומוכרח דנתן למזלות וכוכבים וכו' במרום להאיר לעולם השפל אבל לא לעובדם ולהשתחוות להם וחזרו והודו למאמרות דייקא דאף שהוא דיבור אינו סותר המעשה ח"ו

The nations of the world maintained, as the Rambam writes, that Hashem gave honor to the stars and planets and placed them in the heavens. This is the action that He did and from it they learned to honor and prostrate themselves to them [i.e. to the stars]. Later, when they heard “I am [Hashem your G-d]” and “you shall not have unto you [any other gods]” they said “He seeks His Own honor,” i.e., that He became jealous and does not want honor to be given to anyone else. However, his word cannot take back an action (of giving honor to the stars and planets. Thus, we must follow His actions over his words and continue to worship the stars). When they heard “honor your father” where Hashem considered their honor as his own honor, so to speak, from this they knew that Hashem was not jealous, for He instructed to honor ones father and mother with the utmost respect, and compared the honor of a father and mother to His own honor. This proves that He placed the constellations and stars etc. in the heavens to give light to the lowly world, but not that they should be worshiped and bowed to. They [the nations] then returned and admitted to Hashem’s “words,” for although they were [only] words, they did not contradict Hashem’s actions.

Why are parents different to the stars and constellations in that they are deserving of our honor, whereas the stars and constellations are not even though we benefit from their

light? How are parents unique in this regard, that their honor and reverence is considered an obligation, whereas, the same respect and honor shown to any other force in this universe is considered idolatry?

This leads us to a powerful insight as to why we are obligated to honor our parents:

Likutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 93

כל הכוכבים כו' לא רק שאין להם שליטה וממשלה ח"ו מצד עצמם, אלא גם זה שעל ידם מנהיג הקב"ה את העולם ומשפיע לעולם, הרי אין להם שום בחירה כלל להשפיע או לא להשפיע, או להשפיע כך או כך, כי הקב"ה הוא לבדו המשפיע על ידם, כגרון ביד החוצב בו – ולכן אין ראוי לחלוק להם שום כבוד;

משא"כ או"א שנחשבים שותפים להקב"ה בבריאת האדם, אף שבאמת גם חלקם הוא מהקב"ה שהוא המהווה ומחי' גם את האו"א (כי כמו הארץ שתוציא צמחה ע"י הכח שניתן לה מהקב"ה במאמר תדשא הארץ דשא, כן הוא הזרעת האדם ואשתו ע"י מאמר פרו ורבו) – עכ"ז נקראים שותפים להקב"ה בבריאת האדם, כי הם בעלי בחירה ובידם להזדווג או לא להזדווג, ולכן חייבים בכבודם...

כי יצירת הוולד (ע"י כח ההולדה) הרי היא רק בכח הא"ס שבהורים, שנמצא בהם רק מפני שהקב"ה קבע כח של א"ס בטבע האדם, וא"כ אין זה כבוד האב והאם מצד עצמם, אלא רק כבוד הא-ל, כח הא"ס שבהם...

All of the stars etc., not only do they not have their own control and dominion, but even the fact that Hashem uses them to run the world and endow the world, they have no choice whatsoever to endow or to refrain from endowing, or to endow

a specific amount; for Hashem alone is He who endows through them, as an ax in the hands of a woodchopper. Therefore, it is not befitting to show them any honor whatsoever.

Parents, on the other hand, are considered partners with Hashem in the creation of man. Although, in truth, even their part is from Hashem—for He creates and enlivens even the parents (just as the ground gives forth vegetation because of the power given to it by Hashem in the statement “let the ground sprout grass,” the same applies to a man and his wife in bringing about a pregnancy through the statement “be fruitful and multiply”)

Nevertheless, they are considered partners with Hashem in the creation of man, because they have the freedom to choose, and they can choose to pair (and have children) or not to pair, and therefore one is obligated in their honor...

For the creation of a fetus (though the power to give birth) is only with the power of the Infinite that exists within the parents, and that is found within them only because Hashem instilled a power of the Infinite into the nature of man. Thus, it is not the honor of the father and mother themselves, but the honor of Hashem—i.e., the power of the Infinite that resides within them...

According to this explanation, the honor due to parents is related to the choice they made in bringing their children into this world. Hence, the mitzvah to honor parents is unrelated to any form of reciprocation for specific kindnesses in the raising and care their children, but rather for the parents' role in the fact of their existence. For their choice to have children. And because this creative power belongs to Hashem, it is really Hashem to whom the honor is due. However, Hashem instructed that honor be shown to the parents within whom His creative power is present. Therefore, this commandment is listed among the commandments between man and Hashem (as opposed to the ones between man and man).

Similarly, the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Leow 1520–1609) writes that the purpose of this mitzvah is to become aware of Hashem's involvement in our own creation (through our parents):

Maharal, Tiferes Yisrael, Chapter 41

ואחר שציונו שנדע שהוא ית' פעל העולם ואינו מקרה, עדיין יש לחשוב שאף שאין ראוי שיהיה המציאות הכללי במקרה, אבל מציאות הפרטיים יחשבו שהם במקרה... הודיע לנו כי אף מציאות הפרטיים אינו במקרה כלל, וציונו לכבד את האבות. ואם היו התולדות במקרה אין כאן כבוד לאבות כי האבות הם עילה פרטית. ולכך מי שמכבד האבות מעלה אני עליהם כאילו כבודני כי דבר זה כבוד ג"כ למי שמשותף בתולדה זאת, שלא באה התולדה במקרה.

Even after Hashem commanded us to remember [by observing Shabbat] that the world does not exist by chance, it would still be possible to believe that the individuals in this world exist by chance and are not specifically created by Hashem. One

might think that existence in general must have been pre-ordained, but not the individual existence of each person... By commanding us to honor parents, Hashem is informing us that each and every individual exists by virtue of His specific will. If we, as individuals, were created by chance, there would be no reason to honor parents. It is for this reason that the Sages taught that when one honors his parents it is as if he has honored Hashem Himself, for by honoring them he has demonstrated his awareness that Hashem was involved in his own creation.

Guardians of the Faith

An additional reason for honoring parents:

Rabbi Yitzchak Abravanel (1437–1508) points out that honoring parents is a prerequisite for accepting the transmission of tradition (that is perpetuated by children receiving from their parents):

Abravanel, Shemos 20:12

הנה יסוד המצוה הזאת היא כדי שתהיה קבלת ההורים חשובה בעיני האדם ויאמין בה ויסמוך עליה כמ"ש (דברים לב:ז) "זכור ימות עולם בינו שנות דור ודור שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך".

The basis of this mitzvah [of honoring parents] is the fact that the very basis of our faith is that which has been transmitted to us by our parents and ancestors, as it is written (Devarim 32:7), "Recall

the days of old, ponder the years of each generation. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will speak to you.” [We can only accept the traditions that we receive from our ancestors if we have an attitude of respect toward them.]

In his book *Keren L'Dovid*, Rabbi Eliezer Dovid Greenwald (1867–1928) explains this point, that our responsibility to honor our parents is related to their role as guardians/custodians of the faith, for if we do not show honor to them, how will we learn to respect the faith that was transmitted to us by them?

Sefer Keren LeDavid, Yisro

אמרו חז"ל שהוקש כבודם לכבוד המקום ו"ל הטעם שהחמירה תורה בזה כי הנה אנחנו מאמינים בני מאמינים בבורא ית' מצד קבלת אבותינו שראו עין בעין נסים ונפלאות שעשה עמנו השי"ת במצרים ובמדבר ובמעמד הר סיני וקבלנו כל זה מאבותינו ומאבות אבותינו אשר הורישו לנו מורשה אמונת אומן, ומי שמזלזל בכבוד אבותיו גם קבלתו איננה בטוחה.

The Sages have taught that the honor due to parents is compared to that due to Hashem Himself. One explanation of why the Torah is so demanding of honoring parents is because we are descendants of generations believing in Hashem. We received our faith from our parents and ancestors who transmitted to us the miracles and wonders that Hashem performed for us during yetzias Mitzrayim, in the desert, and at the revelation at Sinai.

Therefore, someone who shows disregard towards his parents and ancestors undermines the strength of the tradition he receives—for how can he know that his faith is true if he disrespects those who have transmitted it?

The Ohr Sameach (Rabbi Meir Simchah Cohen of Dvinsk 1843–1926) writes that, for this reason, the mitzvah to honor Hashem is inherent within the mitzvah of honoring parents (for honoring parents is a prerequisite to all other mitzvos):

Meshech Chochma, Vayikra 19:3

הא דקרי לכבוד אב הכשר מצוה... משום שבכבוד אביו ואמו יש מה שנוגע לאדם למקום, שכל מוסדות הקבלה מהר סיני הוא הקבלה הנאמנה, ונתנה למשה מסיני, ומסרוה דור אחר דור לזרעם אחריהם, והודיעו בנים לבני בניהם יום אשר עמדו בחורב, וכן עד עולם. ואם דור יבזה אביו וילעג למוסרי הקבלה, אז פסקה תורה מישראל... ואם כן כבוד המקום שיש במצוה זו בכבוד אב הוי הכשר מצוה.

The reason that honoring one's parents is called (Yevamos 6a) a "prerequisite for a mitzvah" [although it is a mitzvah in and of itself] is because included within honoring one's parents are things which are relevant to [our responsibilities to] Hashem. The foundation of our tradition from Sinai is the accurate transmission, which was given to Moshe at Sinai and passed from generation to generation retelling [the account of what they experienced] when standing at Sinai. Therefore, a generation which despises their parents and mocks

those handing down the tradition, will cause the Torah to be lost from the Yidden. Hence, the honor of Hashem which is inherent in honoring one's parents is considered a "prerequisite for a mitzvah."

Practical Fulfillment

Now that we have explored various reasons for honoring ones parents, we will learn what honoring parents entails.

What does the mitvah of honoring parents require of us practically?

The Gemara clarifies:

Kiddushin 31b

ת"ר... איזהו כיבוד... מאכיל ומשקה מלביש ומכסה מכנים ומוציא.

The Rabbis taught: What is [meant] by honoring [one's parents]? Honor means to feed them and give them to drink, to clothe them, to escort them when they enter and when they leave.

The mitzvah to "honor" includes two types of activities: 1) To ensure their needs are met (they have food, clothing, etc.) and 2) to pay them respect as one would a dignitary (to escort them etc.).

The mitzvah to honor one's parents is not limited to these specific forms of feeding, dressing, and escorting one's parents, but it applies to any and all forms of paying them respect, as Rabbi Menachem Meiri (1249–1315) writes:

כשם שאדם חייב לכבד את אביו ואת אמו ר"ל להאכיל ולהשקות
להלביש ולכסות להכניס ולהוציא כמו שהתבאר כך חייב לכבדם בכל
מיני כבוד וזהו מן הדברים שאין להם שיעור למעלה

*Just as a person is obligated to honor his father
and his mother, i.e, to feed them, give them to
drink, clothe them, escort them in and out, as was
explained, in the same way he is obligated to honor
them with every type of honor, and this is one of the
matters that have no limit as to how much one can
do.*

The Chida, Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai writes (in Sefer L'David Emes 5:34) that any honor afforded to parents that is customary in the place where the son lives, becomes an obligation (since by not affording parents that honor, it would appear as if he is dishonoring his parents). For example, in communities where it is customary for a son to stand when his father is called to the Torah (and remain standing until the father returns to his place), it becomes an obligation for the son to follow this practice in that community.

Reverence

In addition to the obligation to honor ones parents, there is also a mitzvah to revere them:

אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ

Every man shall revere his mother and his father...

Notice the change in order of father and mother between the verse that instructs one to honor (where the verse states “father” before “mother”) and to revere (where it mentions “mother” before “father”). The Talmud points out an insight into how one’s relationship with one’s mother and father is different in respect to these two areas:

Talmud, Kidushin 30b

רבי אומר: גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם, שכן מכבד את אמו יותר מאביו, מפני שמשדלתו בדברים, לפיכך הקדים הקב“ה כיבוד אב לכיבוד אם; וגלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם, שהבן מתירא מאביו יותר מאמו, מפני שמלמדו תורה, לפיכך הקדים הקב“ה מורא האם למורא האב.

Rebbi Says: It is revealed and known before the Holy One Who spoke and the world came into being, that a son honors his mother more than his father because [his mother] wins him over with [pleasant] words; therefore the Holy One, Blessed is He, put the mention of honoring one’s father before the mention of honoring one’s mother. And, it is revealed and known before the Holy One Who spoke and the world came into being, that a son is more reverent of his father than his mother, because [his father] teaches him Torah; therefore, the Holy One, Blessed is He, put the mention of revering one’s mother before the mention of revering one’s father.

How is the mitzvah of revering one’s parents fulfilled practically?

The Talmud explains:

Talmud, Kiddushin, ibid.

ת"ר איזהו מורא... לא עומד במקומו ולא יושב במקומו ולא סותר את דבריו ולא מכריעו.

The Rabbis taught: What is [meant] by revering [one's parents]? Reverence [means] neither standing in his customary place, nor sitting in his seat, not contradicting his words, and not passing judgment over his father's opinion.

I.e., “honoring” entails positive actions you do for them, whereas “revering” entails those ways of showing respect by “not doing.”

The Semak (Sefer Mitzvos Katan by Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yosef of Corbeil 1210-1280) lists the mitzvah to revere ones parents under the mitzvos belonging to the heart, whereas he lists the mitzvah to honor ones parents under the mitzvos performed by the body.

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829–1908) codifies this distinction in his work Aruch Hashulchan:

Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 240:8

הכיבוד והמורא שני עניינים הם כיבוד הוא ענייני מעשים בפועל כמו להאכילו להשקותו וכיוצא בזה... והמורא הוא יראת המעלה דמורא הוא בלב ולכך כל דבר המסור ללב נאמר בו ויראת מאלקיך.

Honor and reverence are two different things, honor refers to practical actions, like feeding, giving to

drink and the like...whereas reverence is the awe inspired by those of higher rank, and since awe is in the heart, concerning everything that depends on the heart, the posuk states: "and you shall fear Hashem."

Reciting a Brocho

Usually, when one performs a mitzvah, one is instructed to recite a brocho. For the mitzvah of honoring ones parents, however, no such brocha is recited. Several reasons are given for this:

Since a parent is able to forgo their honor, we do not recite a brocho. This is because it is possible for the brocho to be in vain if the parent decides to forgo on their honor.

Another reason is because we do not recite a brocho on any mitzvah that entails doing favors for others, since, if that person decides to reject the favor, the mitzvah is no longer a mitzvah and the brocho was recited in vain.

Alternatively, we only recite blessings over mitzvos that have a set time, whereas the mitzvah of honoring ones parents is ongoing as there is no time when one is free from its obligation.

Some commentaries are of the opinion that we do not recite brochos over mitzvos that are logical, and since honoring ones parents is the logical thing to do, we do not recite "Blessed are You...Who commanded us..." (when we would fulfill the mitzvah even without being commanded).

We also do not recite a brocho "Who sanctified us, and commanded us" for mitzvos that are not unique to us as

Yidden, and since goyim also honor their parents, we do not recite a brocho on the mitzvah.

Gratifying Ones Parents

While honoring one's parents requires certain actions, its fulfillment is not dependent on the action alone, i.e., what one does for his parents, but how he makes them feel. As Rabeinu Yonah of Geronah (13th century) writes:

Rabeinu Yonah, Iggeres Hateshuvah, 3:70

עיקר כיבוד אב ואם הוא לעשות להם נחת רוח בין בדברים בין במעשים.

The main way to honor parents is to bring them gratification, whether through words or deeds.

Kidushin 31a, Rashi and Tosafos

תני אבימי בריה דרבי אבהו יש מאכיל לאביו פסיוני וטורדו מן העולם. רש"י: שנענש עליו שמראה לו צרות עין על סעודתו. תוספות: ובגמרת ירושלמי גרסינן מעשה באחד שהיה מאכיל לאביו פסיוני פעם אחת אמר לו אביו מאין לך כל אלה אמר ליה סבא מאי איכפת לך עד דטחון ואכול כלומר לעוס ואכול כעין כלבים דמדשין ואוכלים.

Avimi, the son of Rabbi Avahu, taught: It is possible to serve one's father the finest delicacies and in doing so, forfeit his right to existence.

Rashi: I.e., he will be punished for showing his father resentment over the meal he is serving him.

Tosafos: The Gemara Yerushalmi illustrates this

with an example. It once happened [regarding] someone who regularly served his father a fine type of fowl. Once his father inquired, "How are you able to obtain this delicacy on a regular basis?" The son responded, "What do you care, old man? Just keep grinding and eat," as if to say, "just keep chewing and eating as dogs who chomp and eat."

Feeling it in the heart

In his work *Sefer Chareidim*, Rabbi Elazar Azikri (1533–1600) points out how when it comes to honor, the sentiment matters, in some ways, more than words or actions. Therefore, it necessary to develop genuine respect, by finding things that you respect and admire about your parents.

Sefer Chareidim, Ch. 1:35

כבד את אביך ואת אמך מצינו כבוד בלב... ואם הכבוד בדברים ובמעשה בלבד ולא בלב הרי משה אותם לו שהם מאוסים ונבזים בעיניו רק מכבד אותם בפה מחמת שהשי"ת צוה... אלא... שידמה בלבו שהם גדולים ונכבדי ארץ שזהו עיקר כבודם ומתוך כך ודאי יכבדם בדבור ובמעשה.

"Honor your father and your mother" – This honor applies to one's feelings and emotions as well as actions. If one displays honor for parents only in (superficial) speech and deed (without heartfelt concern), he shows that in reality he considers them to be lowly people and honors them only "because Hashem says so." Rather, he must develop an attitude wherein he sees them as truly great

and honorable people, and this is the main aspect of honoring parents. Once one has developed this attitude, it will be easy for him to honor them sincerely in his speech and action as well.

Moreover, Rabbi Azikri extends the mitzvah of honoring parents, to loving them as well:

Sefer Chareidim 9:37

לשון הזוהר פרשת כי תצא: בגברא דאשתדל בתר אבוה ואמיה דרחים לון יתיר מגרמיה ונפשיה רוחיה ונשמתיה וכל עלמא דהוה ליה חשוב לאי למעבד ביה רעותא דאבויה ואמיה ולמפלח לון ביה, עכ"ל. למדנו שקבלה בידם שבכלל כבודם האהבה. ודין הוא, שהרי אמרו במדרש דכל מצות כיבוד אב ואם היא פרעון חוב שהבן חייב לפרוע לאביו ולאמו הטובה שגמלוהו...ובכלל הפרעון שיאהב אותם אהבה עזה כדרך שהיו הם אוהבים אותו ולא יהיו עליו לטורח ולמשא כבד.

The Zohar praises “the son who looks after his father and mother and who loves them more than his own self, to the point that he would be willing to give up everything he had if only to do the will of his parents and to serve them.” This depiction teaches us that Chazal understood that the obligation to honor one’s parents includes loving them. And this follows logically; for doesn’t the Midrash teach that honoring one’s parents is a debt that one owes them for all that they have done for him? If so, part of that debt is the obligation to love one’s parents intensely, as they love him, instead of feeling that they are a heavy burden or a bother.

Practically, however, most opinions maintain that one is not required to love ones parents—only to show them honor and reverence—as it is impossible to instruct a person to feel love in their heart when it is not there.

Extent of the Mitzvah

The Gemarah cites incidences that demonstrate exemplary examples of what it means to honor ones parents:

Kidushin, Ibid

שאלו את ר"א עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם אמר להם כדי שיטול ארנקי
ויזרקנו לים בפניו ואינו מכלימו

They asked Rabbi Eliezer: To what extent is one obligated to honor his father and mother? He answered them: To the point that if the father takes [his] wallet and throws it into the sea in his [son's] presence, and [the son] doesn't embarrass him.

Before the father throws the wallet into the sea, the son is allowed to stop him from harming his property, and even after the damage has been done, he can take him to court to claim damages. However, once the wallet can no longer be retrieved, what good is there in the son shaming his father? Rather, he should treat him respectfully and not shame him for his actions.

Similarly, we find that the righteous gentile, Dama ben Nesinah, put up with great disgrace from his mother before the nobility of Rome, yet he did not shame her:

פעם אחת היה לבוש סירקון של זהב והיה יושב בין גדולי רומי ובאתה אמרו וקרעתו ממנו וטפחה לו על ראשו וירקה לו בפניו ולא הכלימה

It once happened that [Dama the son of Nesinah] was dressed in a gold-embroidered silk cloak and sitting among the nobles of Rome, when his mother came, hit him on the head and spat in his face, yet he did not shame her.

In another story of Dama ben Nesina, we find an example of the extraordinary lengths he was willing to go to respect his father:

בעו מיניה מרב עולא עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם אמר להם צאו וראו מה עשה עובד כוכבים אחד באשקלון ודמא בן נתינה שמו פעם אחת בקשו חכמים פרקמטיא בששים ריבוא שכר והיה מפתח מונח תחת מראשותיו של אביו ולא ציערו אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל...בקשו ממנו חכמים אבנים לאפוד...לשנה האחרת נתן הקב"ה שכרו שנולדה לו פרה אדומה בעדרו נכנסו חכמי ישראל אצלו אמר להם יודע אני בכם שאם אני מבקש מכם כל ממון שבעולם אתם נותנין לי אלא אין אני מבקש מכם אלא אותו ממון שהפסדתי בשביל כבוד אבא וא"ר חנינא ומה מי שאינו מצווה ועושה כך מצווה ועושה עאכו"כ דאר"ח גדול מצווה ועושה ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה

They asked Rav Ulla: How far does the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother extend? [Rav Ulla] answered them: Go and see what one idolater did in Ashkelon, and his name was Dama son of

Nesinah. It once happened that the Sages wanted to buy a certain merchandise from Dama at a price that would give him a profit of six hundred thousand gold dinars, but the key to the chest that contained the merchandise was lying under his father's pillow (and his father was sleeping at the time), and [Dama] did not disturb [his father].

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel...The Sages wanted to buy stones for the Ephod [the high priests apron] from him...

The following year, Hashem gave [Dama] his reward, and a parah adumah [red heifer] was born in his herd. The Chachomim went to him to purchase the parah adumah. [Dama ben Nesinah] said to them: I know you, that if I would ask from you all the money in the world, you would give it to me. However, I ask from you only the amount of money that I lost as a result of honoring my father.

Rabbi Chanina said: Now if one who performs a precept without having been commanded to do so [for Dama was not Jewish] receives such a reward, then one who performs a precept having been commanded to do so, how much more so does he receive reward! For Rabbi Chanina said: One who performs a precept having been commanded to do so is greater than one who performs a precept without having been commanded to do so.

Another example of the lengths which one should go to respect his parents:

Yerushalmi, Peah 3b

אמו של ר' טרפון ירדה לטייל לתוך חצירה בשבת והלך ר' טרפון והניח שתי ידיו תחת פרסותיה והיתה מהלכת עליהן עד שהגיעה למיטתה. פעם אחת חלה ונכנסו חכמים לבקרו. אמרה להן התפללו על טרפון בני שהוא נוהג בי כבוד יותר מדאי. אמרו לה מה עביד לך? ותניית להון עובדא. אמרו לה, אפילו עושה כן אלף אלפים עדיין לחצי כבוד שאמרה התורה לא הגיע.

Rabbi Tarfon's mother went to her courtyard to take a walk on Shabbos [and her shoe tore and she could not continue to wear them]. Rabbi Tarfon went and placed his two hands under her feet, and she walked on them until she reached her bed. One time Rabbi Tarfon became ill, and the Chachomim came to visit him. His mother said to them, "Pray on behalf of my son, for he conducts himself with exceptional honor towards me." They said to her, "What does he do for you?" and she relayed the occurrence to them. They said to her, "Even if he were to do this thousands upon thousands [of times], he would not sapproach one half of the honor that is stipulated in the Torah."

Parents Should Not Take Advantage

While children are instructed to go to great lengths to show respect to their parents, Shulchan Aruch cautions against parents taking advantage and burdening their children with

the mitzvah of honoring them:

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:19

אסור לאדם להכביד עולו על בניו ולדקדק בכבודו עמהם שלא יביאם
לידי מכשול אלא ימחול ויעלים עיניו מהם...

It is forbidden for a person to burden his children by being particular about them honoring him.

[This is so that] he will not pose a stumbling block before them, rather he should forgo [his honor] and close his eyes to their actions...

When Honoring Parents Conflicts with Performing Mitzvos

What should a person do when their parents wishes conflict with the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos? Is one obliged to listen to them even in such a situation?

The Sifra (a Talmudic work often cited in the Gemarah) points out the answer to this question from a biblical verse:

Sifra, Kedoshim 1: 5

יכול אמר לו אביו ואמו לעבור על אחת מכל מצוות האמורות בתורה
ישמע להם ת"ל ואת שבתותי תשמרו אני ה' כולכם חייבים בכבודי.

One might think that if his father or mother tells him to transgress one of the commandments stated in the Torah, he should listen to them. Therefore, the Torah says (Vayikra 19: 3), "[A man must fear his mother and his father], and my Shabbass you

shall guard, I am Hashem your G-d,” – you are all obligated to honor Me (i.e. the obligation to obey Hashem outweighs that of honoring parents).

Rambam rules in this casze:

Rambam, Hilchos Mamrim 6: 12

מי שאמר לו אביו לעבור על דברי תורה... אפילו של דבריהם, הרי זה לא ישמע לו.

A child must not listen to a parent asking him to transgress a commandment of the Torah or of the rabbis.

For instance:

Pischei Teshuva, Yoreh Deah 240: 22

היה רוצה להתפלל בבית הכנסת שמתפללין שם יותר בכוונה ואמו מוחה בזה אין צריך לשמוע לה.

If someone wants to daven in a shul where [the congregation] davens with more devotion, and his mother protests, he does not have to listen to her.

A proof from this is from the fact that, although Yaakov was punished for not honoring his father for the years he travelled to the house of Lavan, he was not punished for the 14 years that he studied in yeshivah:

Megillah 16b

גדול תלמוד תורה יותר מכיבוד אב ואם שכל אותן שנים שהיה יעקב

אבינו בבית עבר לא נענש.

Torah study is greater than the mitzvah of honoring parents, for [although] Yaakov Avinu [was punished for not honoring his parents for the 22 years he spent in Lavan's house, he] was not punished for the 14 years he studied Torah at the academy of [Shem and] Ever.

Moreover, a child need not obey their parents' wishes in choosing a spouse:

Rema, Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240: 25

וכן אם האב מוחה בבן לישא איזו אשה שיחפוץ בה הבן א"צ לשמוע אל האב.

If the father protests against the son marrying a specific woman that he wishes [to marry], the son does not need to listen to his father.

However, this is only when their decision is not based on religious grounds:

Sdei Chemed, Ma'areches Caf 147

מה שפסק רמ"א ביו"ד סוס"י ר"מ דאם האב מוחה בבנו מלישא אשה שיחפוץ דאינו שומע אל אביו, נראה פשוט דכל זה אינו אלא כשהבן רוצה ליקח אשה הגונה הישרה בעיניו והאב רוצה לעכב בידו. אמנם אם הבן רוצה לקחת אשה שאינה הגונה לו כלל ודאי שחייב לשמוע לו.

The Rema's ruling that a son does not need to listen to his father who opposes him marrying the woman he desires. only applies when the father protests his

son marrying a girl who is morally and religiously good for him. But if the girl is not right for him [his character or religious level will suffer as a result of the marriage], he must listen to his father.

Respecting the Older Brother and Step-father/ Step-mother

There are certain people who you are not required to respect on their own, however, the Torah requires you to respect them anyway out of respect for your parents, as long as your parents are still alive.

Talmud, Ketubot 103a

תניא: כבוד את אביך ואת אמך, את אביך - זו אשת אביך, ואת אמך - זו בעל אמך, ו"ו"ו יתירה - לרבות את אחיך הגדול! הני מילי מחיים, אבל לאחר מיתה לא.

It was taught: "Respect ("es") your father and ("es") your mother," "es your father" [the extra word es comes to include] the wife of your father, "and 'es' your mother" [the extra word "es" comes to include] the husband of our mother; the extra "and" [in "and your mother"] comes to include his older brother! However, this is only during the parents lifetime, but not after their passing.

In-laws

While in-laws are not considered parents, we learn from David Hamelech that one should show them honor. David was being pursued by his father-in-law, Shaul Hamelech, who

had three thousand men gathered and was chasing David with the intent of killing him. Nevertheless, David referred to Shaul with respect. To demonstrate his goodwill, David surprised Shaul while he was relieving himself in a cave and severed the skirt of his coat to prove that he could have killed him, but did not. In relating this incident to him, he related to him as “father” showing the type of respect one would to a biological parent. This is cited as the source for respecting in-laws (although it is not altogether clear whether the respect due to them is the same as parents).

Shmuel I 24:11

וְאָבִי רָאָה גַּם רָאָה אֶת כְּנָפֵי מְעִילָךְ בְּיָדֵי כִי בְכָרְתִי אֶת כְּנָפֵי מְעִילָךְ וְלֹא
הִרְגִיתִּיךָ דַּע וּרְאָה כִּי אֵין בְּיָדֵי רַעְהָ וּפְשָׁע וְלֹא חָטָאתִי לָךְ וְאַתָּה צָדָה
אֶת נַפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָּהּ:

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.

After Their Passing

A child's obligation to his parents does not end with their passing, but continues even after they are no longer of this world:

Peleh Yoetz 1:20

ועיקר הכבוד הוא שיהא מכבדו במותו וכל אשר בכחו למעבד ליה

ניחא נפשא יעשה מדי יום יום לא ישכח.

A central form of honoring parents is remembering them after their death and doing whatever one can to serve as a source of merit for them.

Derech Pikudecha, Mitzvah 33

בכלל מצות כיבוד הנחוג בכל תפוצות ישראל, שיאמר הבן קדיש בציבור עבור נשמת אביו ואמו... כי זה נחת רוח להנפטר ועילוי לנשמתו...

Included in the mitzvah of honoring parents is the universal practice of the son reciting Kaddish during the year after the passing of his parent. This brings great contentedness to the parent's soul...

Burden of Payment

Nowadays, there is a phenomenon called “the sandwich generation,” in which middle-aged people who are taking care of their elderly parents are at the same time trying to raise young children. This often creates a burdensome situation both in terms of dividing one's time between caring for one's parents and for one's own family, as well as the financial and physical burdens that come along with child-rearing and taking care of the elderly. What are one's monetary obligations when it comes to caring for one's parents? What must one attend to personally, and what can be delegated to others? And when is one allowed to commit their parents to a nursing home?

The Shulchan Aruch writes concerning the financial obligation of a child in caring for his parents:

זה שמאכילו ומשקהו, משל אב ואם, אם יש לו. ואם אין לאב, ויש לבן, כופין אותו וזן אביו כפי מה שהוא יכול. ואם אין לבן, אינו חייב לחזור על הפתחים להאכיל את אביו. אבל חייב לכבדו בגופו, אע"פ שמתוך כך בטל ממלאכתו ויצטרך לחזור על הפתחים. ודוקא דאית לבן מזונות לאיתזוני ההוא יומא, אבל אי לית ליה, לא מיחייב לבטל ממלאכתו ולחזור על הפתחים.

The obligation to feed ones parents and give them drink, is from the parents' resources, if they have. And if the father doesn't have, and the son does, we oblige him to provide for his father based on his abilities. If the son does not have, he is not required to beg in order to feed his father. However, he is required to honor them with his actions [i.e., to personally attend to their needs], even though this will cause him to lose out on work and he might come to depend on welfare [for his own livelihood]. This is only when the son has enough food to sustain him [and his family] for that day, but if he does not, he is not required to lose out on work and depend on welfare.

The Rema (Rabbi Moshe Isserles 1520–1572) in his notes to Shulchan Aruch writes:

אינו חייב ליתן לו רק מה שמייחייב ליתן לצדקה. ומ"מ אם ידו משגת, תבא מארה למי שמפרנס אביו ממעות צדקה שלו. ואם יש לו בנים רבים, מחשבים לפי ממון שלהם, ואם מקצתן עשירים ומקצתן עניים,

מחויבים העשירים לבד.

He is not obliged to give his parents more than he is obliged to give to tzedaka. However, if he can afford it, “let a curse come upon he” who sustains his father from his tzedakah funds. If the father has many children, we assess them based on their financial status, if some are wealthy and some are poor, only the wealthy are obliged.

Placing One’s Parents in a Nursing Home

Ideally, one should personally tend to the needs of one’s parents and not delegate it to others, as we find in the Talmud concerning Avimi the son of Rabbi Avahu:

Kiddushin 31b

אמר רב אבהו כגון אבימי ברי קיים מצות כיבוד המשה בני סמכי הוה ליה לאבימי בחיי אביו וכי הוה אתא רבי אבהו קרי אבבא רהיט ואזיל ופתח ליה ואמר אין אין עד דמטאי התם. יומא חד אמר ליה אשקיין מיא אדאייתי ליה נמנם גחין קאי עליה עד דאיתער.

Rabbi Avahu said, “Avimi, my son, is an example of one who has fulfilled the mitzvah of honoring [one’s parents].” Avimi had five children who were ordained [received semicha] while his father was still alive. Yet, when Rabbi Avahu came [to visit] and called out at the door, Avimi himself hurried and went to open it for him saying, “Yes, yes!” [I am coming to open the door] until he reached there. One day [Rabbi Avahu] said, “Bring me a drink of

water.” He [Avimi] brought him [water and found him] sleeping. He stood over him [and waited] until he awoke.

However, when the burden of taking care of ones parents is too much for the person to handle on his own, the Rambam permits delegating this to others:

Rambam, Laws of Mamrim 6:10

מי שנטרפה דעתו של אביו או של אמו משתדל לנהוג עמהם כפי דעתם עד שירווחם עליהן, ואם אי אפשר לו לעמוד מפני שנשתמו ביותר יניחם וילך לו ויצוה אחרים להנהיגם כראוי להם.

When a person’s father or mother lose control of their mental faculties, their son should try to conduct his relationship with them according to their mental condition until Hashem has mercy upon them. If it is impossible for him to remain with them because they have become very deranged, he should leave them, depart, and charge others with caring for them in an appropriate manner.

This is the basis of the ruling in modern times that permits committing ones elderly parents to a nursing home, when caring for them would interfere with the children’s work and personal family life, even though the care will not be same as if it were administered by the children themselves. The following ruling is from Rabbi Shmuel Wosner (1913–2015):

Shut Shevet Halevi 9:197

מי שיש לו אב זקן בגדר עבר ובטל והוא אצל הבן, והבן מטפל בו

כל היום, ועי"ז בטל ממלאכתו (עיין שו"ע יו"ד סי' ר"מ ס"ה) ואשתו של בן אינה מסכמת לזה וגורם היזק גמור בשלום בית, והבן טוען שא"א לשלחו למושב זקנים שאין מטפלים בו טוב כמו שהוא יכול לטפל בו...הצדק עם האשה בזה...רשאי הבן להטיל על המושב זקנים, ואעפ"י שאולי הם לא יטפלו כמו הבן גם בנידון הרמב"ם והראב"ד פשוט שאחרים לא יעשו כמו הבן ממש, ואעפ"י ששם הבן לא הי' יכול לעמוד בהמצוה, וכאן בנ"ד הבן רוצה לעשות המצוה מכ"מ לאידך גיסא כיום שאפשר ע"י אחרים והוא משתדל בזה ע"י האחרים, ואם עושה בעצמו גורם רעה לביתו ולשלום בית יראה יותר דיעשה ע"י אחרים, מלבד שאם יש חשש שבבית מושב זקנים יגרמו ח"ו להאב נזק ממש או יקצרו ימיו.

In the situation of an elderly father who is no longer able to take care of himself and lives by the son, and the son takes care of him all day which causes him to lose out on work, and the son's wife is not in agreement about this which is damaging to their domestic harmony. The son claims that he cannot send him to a nursing home as they will not administer the same degree of care as he can...?

The truth is with the wife... The son is permitted to place him in the care of a nursing home even though they may not administer care as well as the son does. Even in the Rambam's scenario [ibid.], it is taken for granted that others will not take the same care as the son, and even though in that case, the son was not able to keep up the mitzvah, whereas in this case he wants to perform the mitzvah, nevertheless, because nowadays it is

possible to rely on others and he actively cares for them through others, and if he would do it on his own, it would be detrimental to his home and to his domestic harmony, it seems better that he does so through others, unless there is reason to believe that the nursing home will be damaging to the father, heaven forbid, or will shorten his life span...

Abusive Parents

Until recently, the question of whether one is obligated to respect abusive parents had not been treated in Halchah. While cases of abuse vary and should be treated on a case by case basis in close consultation with a mental health professional and a competent rov, there are some guiding principles that have been looked to as possible reasons to excuse a child with abusive parents from this mitzvah.

While the Shulchan Aruch writes that one is required to respect even parents who are resha'im, the Rema cites a dissenting view:

Rema, Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 140:18

אינו מחוייב לכבד אביו רשע, אא"כ עשה תשובה

One is not obligated to honor his father who is wicked, unless he performed teshuvah [i.e., he returned from his wicked ways].

Depending on the severity of abuse, this would likely excuse an abused child from the obligation to honor their abusive parent (so long as the parent has not changed their ways).

Some rabbis have ventured to say that there is a limit to the cost that one is required to spend on a mitzvah. They would argue that the emotional toll on a child to respect an abusive parent would be more than the Torah requires a person to spend on the performance of a mitzvah.

While reconciliation is often the best route, sometimes this is not possible, and it is advisable for the parent and child to part ways:

Sefer Chassidim 343

שני אחים או אב ובניו כשהם בקטטות ובכעס...כיון שמתקוטמים יחדיו מוטב שלא יהיו יחדיו מפני שמצער, ואל תאמר דוקא מפני שהאב מצטער...אלא אפי' הבן מצטער ע"י האב מוטב שיפרדו כיון שאינן יכולים לסבול יחד.

Two brothers or a father and a son when they quarrel with each other and are angry with each other...since they cannot get along, it is better that they should not be together since they cause distress to each other. And one shouldn't say that it is specifically because the father is distressed, for even if the son is distressed by the father, it is better that they separate, since they cannot tolerate each other.

Reward for Honoring Parents

The Torah promises great reward both in this world and the next for one who honors their parents:

Shabbos 127a

אלו דברים שאדם עושה אותם ואוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן

קיימת לו לעולם הבא, ואלו הן: כיבוד אב ואם...

These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in This World but whose principal remains intact for him in the World to Come: honoring one's father and mother...

The Rambam explains why this mitzvah provides reward both in this world and in the world to come:

Rambam, Commentary to the Mishnah, Peah 1:1

אם קיים האדם המצות המיוחדות לו בעצמו במה שבינו לבין בוראו יש לו על זה שכר יגמלהו ה' על כך לעולם הבא כמו שנבאר בפרק חלק. ואם קיים האדם המצות התלויות בתקינות יחסי בני אדם זה עם זה יש לו על זה שכר לעולם הבא על קיימו המצוה, וישיג תועלת בעולם הזה להתנהגותו התנהגות טובה עם בני אדם, לפי שאם הלך בדרך זו והלך זולתו בה יחנה גם הוא מאותה תועלת.

If a person fulfilled the mitzvot that are particular to the person, i.e., that which is between him and his Creator, he gets reward for that which Hashem will grant him in the world to come, as is explained in chapter Chelek (Sanhedrin Ch. 10). However, if a person fulfilled a mitzvah that is dependent on establishing good relationships between people, he receives reward in the world to come for fulfilling the mitzvah, and he will also gain in this world for his good conduct with people, for if he goes in such a path, and his friend also goes in such a path, he will also enjoy the same benefit.

The posuk itself promises a reward of longevity:

Shemos 20:12

כְּבֹד אֶת-אָבִיךָ, וְאֶת-אִמְךָ, לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ

Honor your father and your mother, in order that your days be lengthened

Rabbeinu Bachya (1255–1340) cites Rabbi Saadia Gaon (882–942) who explains why the reward for this mitzvah is longevity:

Rabbeinu Bachya, Shemos 20: 12

ומה שקבע הכתוב שכר הכבוד אריכות ימים, הגאון רב סעדיה ז"ל נתן טעם בזה כי מפני שלפעמים עתידים שיחיו האבות עם הבנים זמן ארוך, והאבות הם למשא כבוד על הבנים, והכבוד יכבד עליהם, לכך קבע עליהם שכר המצוה הזאת, למען יארכו ימיהם, כלומר עליך לכבדם ותחיה עמהם ואם אולי תצטער על חייהם דע שעל חייך אתה מצטער.

Rav Saadia Gaon explains that the reason the Torah promises longevity to those who honor their parents is that often, parents eventually live with their children for many years and become a burden on them, causing it to be difficult to honor them. Therefore, the Torah promises long life for keeping this mitzvah, i.e., by your honoring them, you will merit a long life. One who views his parents' longevity as an imposition on his life should realize that his own lifespan is really a function of how he cares for his parents! How you treat your parents

is how they will treat you.

There is a popular parable that illustrates this point about an elderly man who lived in his son's home. Due to his frail situation, the old man would shake a lot, and from time to time he would knock a piece of expensive china, causing it to break. Fed up with his father's clumsiness, the son gave his father a set of wooden dishes to eat from and at meal times, he would make him sit at his own private table in the corner, away from the rest of the family.

One day, the son noticed his young boy piecing together pieces of wood. Curious as to what he was doing, he asked his young son what this was about. To his shock, the son responded, "one day, daddy, you too will be old, so I am building wooden dishes now so you will have what to eat from."

The son understood the message and immediately returned his father to the table to eat from regular dishes like everyone else.

The moral of the story is that how we treat our parents, is how our children will learn to treat us when we grow old and depend on their care. Thus, the reward for respecting our parents now, is that our children will respect us, when the time comes. As the Ohr HaChaim (Rabbi Chaim ben Attar 1696–1743) points out from the Torah's unique choice of grammar:

Ohr HaChaim, Vayikra 19:3

טעם שאמר (ויקרא יט:ג) לשון יחיד וגמר אומר לשון רבים, (אִישׁ אָמַר וְאָבִיו תִּירָא) נתכוון לומר כי כשהבן יהיה ירא מאביו גורם גם כן שבנו

יהיה ירא ממנו... כשיראה הבן שאביו מזלזל בכבוד אביו יפקע כלילת מוראו גם כן ממנו, וכשאדם ירא מאביו וכו' הבן לוקח מוסר... ונמצא מקיים ב' מוראים, והוא אומרו "איש" לשון יחיד "תיראו" לשון רבים, כי במורא אחד יראים שנים.

The reason [the Torah] starts off in the singular and ends in the plural, ["a son (singular) [they] shall revere (plural - in Heb. "tira'u")...mother and father"] is because when a son reveres his father, he causes his own son to revere him, too... When a son sees his father disrespecting his father [i.e., the grandfather], he [the grandson] also has no respect for his father. And when one reveres his father, his son will learn to do the same to him. [Therefore, respecting one's father] leads to two people respecting their fathers. That's why [the Torah] starts off saying "a man" in the singular, and ends off with "[they] shall revere" in the plural, for by one person revering, two will come to revere.

Take-aways

- » One is required to honor their parents 1) To reciprocate the kindnesses that the parents performed with them when they were young. 2) Because the parents chose of their own free will to bring them into the world. And 3) because the chain of transmission of the Torah from Sinai is handed down through the parents, if one doesn't honor his parents, he will lose respect for the chain of tradition.
- » Honor entails providing one's parents with their basic necessities as well as treating them as dignitaries. Reverence entails not disagreeing with them or sitting in their appointed seat etc.. Honor includes action whereas reverence include non-actions or matters of the heart.
- » One is not required to pay for their parents necessities out of pocket, unless the parents do not have their own resources, in which case their financial responsibility is divided among the children based on their means.
- » The reward for honoring parents is both in this world (that one gets to live a long life, honored by his own children) and in the world to come.