
~ HONORING PARENTS ~

The idea of honoring and respecting one's elders has been out of style in Western culture for the last several decades. In a culture which prizes youth, modernity and advancement above all else, it is not surprising to find that people do not hold the older generation in high esteem. However, the eternal laws of the Torah include the obligation to respect parents. The fact that this mitzvah is one of the Ten Commandments indicates how important this precept is. Why should this be? Honoring one's parents expresses gratitude for their assuming the responsibility of raising children and taking care of their essential needs. On a deeper level, honoring parents underscores the importance of each previous generation's role in transmitting the Jewish tradition. Finally, respecting one's parents enables us to acknowledge and appreciate that it is ultimately God who brought us into existence, and sustains and guides the world.

Some questions we will address in this class are:

- Why should I respect my parents?
- What type of behavior and attitude does the Torah ask of me vis-à-vis my parents?
- Do I always have to listen to my parents?
- What if I have real issues with my parents?

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SECTION I. THE MITZVAH OF KIBUD AV VE-EIM (HONORING PARENTS)

The mitzvah of honoring parents is placed prominently in the Torah as one of the Ten Commandments. In addition to the mitzvah to honor them, there is also a mitzvah to revere them and prohibitions against mistreating them.

PART A. THE OBLIGATION TO HONOR PARENTS

Many places in the Torah discuss honoring parents and treating them with respect.

1. Shemot (Exodus) 20: 12 – The Fifth Commandment (as written the first time).

“Honor your father and your mother; that your days may be lengthened upon the soil that God, your Master, gives you.”

”כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוֹן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה
 אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:”

2. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:16 – The Fifth Commandment (as mentioned in the second set of *luchot* [tablets]).**

“Honor your father and your mother, as God, your Master, has commanded you; so that your days will be lengthy and so that you will receive goodness upon the soil that God, your Lord, gives you.”

“כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְיֶךָ וְלִמְעַן יִטֵּב לָךְ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ.”

3. **Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:3 – Revering one's parents.**

“Each one of you shall revere his mother and father...”

“אִישׁ אִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ.”

Regarding honoring parents the Torah mentions the father before the mother – “Honor your father and mother,” whereas regarding revering parents, the mother is mentioned first, “Each one of you shall revere his mother and father.”

4. **Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 30b-31a – One must compensate for his natural tendencies to ensure that he honors and reveres both of his parents.**

It was taught that Rabbi (Yehuda) said: It is revealed and known to Him Whose decree brought the world into existence, that a son honors his mother more than his father, because she sways him with her words; therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, placed the honor of the father before that of the mother. It is revealed and known to Him Whose decree brought the world into existence, that a son reveres his father more than his mother, because he teaches him Torah. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, mentioned the fear [reverence] of the mother before that of the father.

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

A person naturally honors his mother more than his father, and naturally has more reverence of his father than of his mother. The Torah wants to teach us to honor and revere *both* parents equally, even when it does not come naturally.

Additionally, the Torah says that one must neither hit (Shemot 21:15), curse (Shemot 21: 17), nor dishonor (Devarim 27: 16) one's parents.

PART B. HIGH STANDARDS FOR HONORING PARENTS

Since honoring parents is so important, the Torah places very high standards for the fulfillment of this mitzvah. Although they may seem unattainable, these expectations are in place to impress upon us the importance of this mitzvah.

1. Kiddushin 30b – The Torah compares the honor due to parents to the honor due to God.

The Sages teach: It is written, *Honor your father and your mother*, and it is also written (Proverbs 3:9), *Honor God with your resources*. The Torah equates the honor due to parents to that due to God Himself.

תנו רבנן נאמר כבוד את אביך ואת אמך ונאמר כבוד את ה' מהו נאמר (משלי ג:ט) - השווה הכתוב כבוד אב ואם לכבוד המקום.

To what extent do we need to exert ourselves to honor our parents?

2. Eved Hamelech, Yitro – Visualize God coming into your home – and treat parents the same way!

Even were one to honor his father and mother as he would a king and queen, he would still not fulfill his obligation [of honoring them], since the Torah compares their honor to the honor due to God Himself. Therefore one should imagine how he would feel if God were to show up at his doorstep – with what trepidation would he receive Him! The child should honor his parents with that same attitude.

הנה כאשר יכבד האדם את אביו ואת אמו כמו שהיה מכבד מלך ומלכה עוד לא יצא בזה ידי כבוד כי הלא השווה הכתוב כבודם לכבוד המקום, ולכן יצייר האדם בדעתו אילו היה מקבל פני השי"ת בביתו באיזה יראת הכבוד היה עומד וכך יכבד אביו ואמו.

3. Yerushalmi Peah 3b – The extent one needs to go to when honoring parents.

Rabbi Tarfon's mother went to her courtyard to take a walk on Shabbat [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 sages 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 approach one half of the honor that is stipulated in the Torah."

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 עבד לך? ותניית להון עובדא. אמרו לה, אפילו עושה כן אלף אלפים עדיין לחצי כבוד שאמרה התורה לא הגיע.

4. Kiddushin 31b – One should tend personally to parental needs, and do so with the utmost care and sensitivity.

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 [as rabbis] 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

אמר רב אבהו כגון אבימי ברי קיים מצות כיבוד חמשה 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 אשקין מיא אדאייתי ליה נמנם גחין קאי עליה עד דאיתער.

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.

What bracha is recited before performing the mitzvah of *kibud av v'em*?

5. **Sdei Chemed, Volume 6, Berachot 1:16 – No blessing is recited for fulfilling this mitzvah, because one never knows if he has fulfilled it properly.**

Why do we not recite a blessing before performing the mitzvah of honoring parents [as we do before other mitzvot]? One reason is that the mitzvah of honoring parents has such high standards that it is exceedingly difficult to properly fulfill one's obligation. One might think that he has honored his parents enough and in fact he has not even approached half his duty! Therefore, one does not say a blessing, for it might be said in vain...for not every person merits fulfilling this commandment properly.

ומה שאין מברכין על מצות כיבוד אב ואם, בס' שמע יעקב נתן טעם לשבח והכי אמר דמפני חומר שבו לא קבעו בו ברכה כי הן האדם יראה לעינים שקיים מצות כבודם ולפי האמת לא הגיע אפילו לחצי שיעור... וכיון שכן אם יברך אין זה מברך אלא מנאץ לכן לא תיקנו בקיומה ברכה... כי לא כל אדם זוכה לבא אל תכליתה.

PART C. FROM THE PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

We have seen so far how a child should relate to his parents, and to what extent he must show them honor. Since the laws of honoring parents may be abused by a parent, our Sages advised parents not to be too demanding of their children with regard to their own honor.

1. **Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:19 – Parents are obligated not to be demanding when it comes to their honor.**

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 forego [his honor] and close his eyes to their actions...

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

Nevertheless, parents should teach their children about the importance of *kibud av v'em*, but should not demand honor from them.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ⌘ The mitzvah to honor one's parents is listed in the Ten Commandments highlighting its central importance in Judaism.
- ⌘ There is a separate, related mitzvah to revere one's parents as well. In addition, the Torah prohibits hitting, cursing or dishonoring parents.

- ∞ The Torah sets very high standards for honoring parents, to the extent that it may seem impossible to fulfill the mitzvah in its entirety. However, the ideal fulfillment of this mitzvah should not discourage us; rather, it should impress upon us its importance and prod us to do our utmost to accomplish as much as we can.
- ∞ Although a child has an obligation to honor his or her parents, the parents must not be demanding of their honor.

SECTION II. WHY SHOULD I RESPECT THEM?

In an age when treating parents with respect is out of style, understanding the reasons for the obligation to honor parents can help us appreciate this mitzvah. The basic concept is that by honoring our parents, we express gratitude for what they have done for us. But this is only the surface of the mitzvah; there are much deeper reasons for honoring parents as well.

PART A. GRATITUDE

The most basic reason for honoring parents is to show gratitude to them for all they have done for us.

1. Sefer HaChinuch 33 – The root of honoring parents is gratitude.

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 God and human beings. 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.

מושרשי מצוה זו שראוי 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.

2. Sefer Chareidim Ch. 1:37 – We owe our parents a debt of gratitude.

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

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

Although we can all come up with a list of things for which we are grateful to our parents, it may not be easy for us to express that gratitude.

3. **Rabbi Yissachar Frand, Rabbi Frand on the Parsha, Ki Teitzei – Showing gratitude towards parents goes against the human ego.**

Honoring parents...goes against human nature. It requires us to acknowledge all they've done for us and show gratitude. It requires us to admit that we needed them, that we could not have done it ourselves. This is a difficult thing for the human ego. The ego would have us view ourselves as independent, self-sufficient and invincible. We can bring ourselves to thank strangers who do small things for us now and then, because this does not really affect our egotistical self-image. But when it comes to our parents, if we admit they did anything, we also have to admit they did everything for us. Our egos do not allow us to say, "I owe you everything." This then is the "most difficult of the difficult" mitzvot.

PART B. DEVELOPING AN AWARENESS OF GOD

The Ten Commandments were given to the Jewish people inscribed on two tablets, five commandments on each. The first five are mitzvot regarding one's obligations to God, whereas the second five are mitzvot concerning one's duty towards individuals. Why, then, is honoring parents listed among the first five? Would it not be more appropriate to include it in the commandments which deal with relating to other people?

The answer is that by honoring our parents we come to honor God, too. Through acquiring the sentiment of expressing gratitude to our parents, we come to recognize and appreciate God for all that He does for us. God gave us the mitzvah of honoring our parents as a stepping stone towards honoring Him.

1. **Kiddushin 30b – By honoring our parents we honor God, the Third Partner in our creation.**

The Sages teach: There are three partners in the creation of each human being: God, the father and the mother. When one honors his father and mother, God says, "I consider it as if I live among this family and they show Me honor."

תנו רבנן שלשה שותפין יש באדם: הקב"ה ואביו ואמו.
בזמן שאדם מכבד את אביו ואת אמו אמר הקב"ה
מעלה אני עליהם כאילו דרתי ביניהם וכבדוני.

The son of a noted mathematician was a yeshiva high-school student who excelled in his studies. Like his father, he was bright and articulate, but his primary passion was Torah study, and he wanted to devote himself entirely to learning Torah after his graduation. His parents, however, wanted him to go to college and prepare for a professional career...

The father came to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and said, "I am a mathematician, and I would like my son to enter the same field. I know that you would rather that he continue his Torah studies, but the rabbis teach (Kiddushin 30b), 'There are three partners in a person: God, his father and his mother.' You represent God's point of view – that my son should remain with his Torah studies, but my wife and I don't feel that way. We want him to go to college, and we are a majority of two to one. Doesn't the Torah say (Shemot 23:2), 'follow the majority'?"

Reb Moshe smiled at the father and said, "Your arithmetic is incorrect. Let us think of the partnership in your son as nine shares. God has three-ninths, and you and your wife have three-ninths each (nine-ninths equals one whole unit). But God is a part of each of you as well, so you can speak for only two-thirds of your own self – the other third belongs to God.

"Therefore," explained Reb Moshe, "three-ninths of your son, which is God's share, votes for him to remain in learning. One-third of both you and your wife – the part which is God's – also wants him to learn. If you add it all together, you have five-ninths in favor and only four-ninths against. Thus, the majority rules, and he should continue in yeshiva." (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Along the Maggid's Journey, pp. 65-66.)

2. Kli Yakar, Shemot 20:12 – Why honoring parents is included in the first five commandments.

“Honor your father and your mother” – This mitzvah concludes the first five commandments, which discuss [our obligations to] honor God. It is for this reason that in these first five commandments it says “God, your Lord,” whereas there is no mention of God in the last five commandments, which discuss obligations between individuals. Although honoring one’s father and mother is essentially an obligation between people, it is also related to God since there are three partners in [the creation of] a person: God, the father and the mother. If I respect my father and mother who are the ones who created my physical body – which will eventually wither and die – how much more I should honor my Father in Heaven, who granted me with the superior component, my eternal soul!

כבוד את אביך ואת אמך – במצוה זו חתם חמש דברות ראשונות המדברים בכבוד המקום ברוך הוא כי מטעם זה נאמר בכולם “ה’ א-לקיך” ולא הזכיר השם בכל ה’ דברות אחרונות המדברים בדברים שבין אדם לחבירו, ומצות כבוד אב ואם אע”פ שהוא בין אדם לחבירו מכל מקום מצוה זו נוגעת גם בכבוד המקום ברוך הוא לפי ששלשה שותפים באדם, הקב”ה ואביו ואמו. ואם תכבד אב ואם בעבור שמהם נוצר החומר והגוף הכלה והבלה קל וחומר בן בנו של קל וחומר שתכבד את אביך שבשמים אשר נתן בך הנשמה החלק המעולה הקיים לנצח.

3. Sefer HaChinuch, ibid. – Honoring our parents enables us to honor God.

After an individual has successfully integrated these [feelings of gratitude and appreciation for everything his parents have done for him] he will be able to ascend to a higher level – that of appreciating what God has done for him. God, after all, is man’s ultimate Source, as well as that of all of one’s forefathers all the way back to Adam. Additionally, God brought him out of the womb and into this world, provided his needs throughout his life, gave him a working body, and gave him an intellectual, knowledgeable and insightful soul. Without this intelligent soul he would be like a horse or a donkey, with no understanding. One should contemplate how indebted he is to God and how great is his obligation to make sure to serve Him properly.

וכשיקבע זאת המדה בנפשו יעלה ממנה להכיר טובות הקל ברוך הוא שהוא סיבתו וסיבת כל אבותיו עד אדם הראשון ושהוציאו לאור העולם וסיפק צרכו כל ימיו והעמידו על מתכונתו ושלמות אבריו ונתן בו נפש יודעת ומשכלת, שאלולי הנפש שחננו האל יהיה כסוס כפרד אין הבין, ויעריך במחשבתו כמה וכמה ראוי להזהר בעבודתו ברוך הוא.

4. Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael, Chapter 41 – By honoring our parents we acknowledge that God runs every detail in this world.

Even after God 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 God. One might think that existence in general must have been pre-ordained, but not the individual existence of each person...

ואחר שציונו שנדע שהוא ית’ פעל העולם ואינו מקרה, עדיין יש לחשוב שאף שאין ראוי שיהיה המציאות הכללי במקרה, אבל מציאות הפרטים יחשבו שהם במקרה...

By commanding us to honor parents, God 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 God Himself, for by honoring them he has demonstrated his awareness that God was involved in his own creation.

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.

PART C. KEEPING THE CHAIN OF TRADITION INTACT

Judaism is premised upon the unbroken chain that stretches all the way back to the national revelation that took place at Sinai 3,300 years ago. This chain can only remain intact if we maintain an attitude of respect and reverence for its human links.

1. Abarbanel, Shemot 20:12 – A prerequisite to accepting traditions from our ancestors is honoring our parents, the bearers of those traditions.

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.]

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 וקניך ויאמרו לך".

2. Sefer Keren LeDavid, Yitro – Our faith is based on the transmission of our ancestors; disrespect for parents is disrespect for the tradition they bequeath to us.

The Sages have taught that the honor due to parents is compared to that due to God Himself. One explanation of why the Torah is so demanding of honoring parents is because we are descendents of generations believing in God. We received our faith from our parents and ancestors who transmitted to us the miracles and wonders that God performed for us during the Exodus from Egypt, 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?

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.

3. **Meshech Chochma, Vayikra 19:3 – Honoring one's parents is a preparation for honoring God.**

The reason that honoring one's parents is called (Yevamot 6a) a "prerequisite for a mitzvah" [although it is a mitzvah in and of itself] is because included in honoring one's parents are things which are relevant to [our responsibilities to] God. The foundation of our tradition from Har Sinai (Mount 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 nation of] Israel. Hence, the honor of God which is inherent in honoring one's parents is considered a "prerequisite for a mitzvah."

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, ומסרה 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.

We see vividly how this concept is reflected in the following story:

On a flight back to the United States from Israel, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky was accompanied by his son Rabbi Avraham Kamenetsky and by one of his granddaughters. Sitting in the next seat to Reb Yaakov was one of the heads of the Histadrut (the Israeli labor federation). The two discussed many issues, among them difficult passages in Tanach, throughout the flight. All the while Reb Yaakov's son and granddaughter came regularly to see if he needed anything. Reb Yaakov's seat-mate couldn't contain his amazement. "Rabbi," he said, "I rarely see my grandchildren, and certainly do not enjoy that type of relationship with them; I don't think I ever would receive such loving treatment from my children and grandchildren. Tell me, Rabbi, what is the secret of your close connection with your family?"

Reb Yaakov replied, "For those who believe in Darwin and his theory of random evolution, every successive generation is more refined and developed than its predecessors. Why, then, should the young honor the old? However, in our tradition, every earlier generation is closer to the Sinai experience and the source of our specialness as a people. My children and grandchildren look up to me because it is through me that they have a connection to our people." (Rabbi Moshe Lieber, The Fifth Commandment, pg. 25)

PART D. THE REWARD

As stated in the Ten Commandments, God promises that the reward for honoring one's parents is longevity. Personal benefit is always a good motivation.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 127a – The reward for honoring parents is in this world and the next.**

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...

אלו דברים שאדם עושה אותם ואוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא, ואלו הן: כיבוד אב ואם...

2. **Rabbeinu Bachya, Shemot 20: 12 – The time "lost" on fulfilling this mitzvah will be compensated.**

Rav Saadia Gaon explains that the reason the

ומה שקבע הכתוב שכר הכבוד אריכות ימים, הגאון רב

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!

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 יאריכון ימיהם, כלומר עליך לכבדם ותחיה עמם ואם אולי תצטער על חייהם דע שעל חייך אתה מצטער.

In Section I we learned that one of the ways we honor our parents is by revering them. How does this affect the family dynamics?

3. **Ohr HaChaim, Vayikra 19:3 – The way you treat your parents is the way your children will treat you.**

The reason [the Torah] starts off in the singular and ends in the plural, [**a son** (singular) **shall revere** (plural)...**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 [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 "a **man**" in the singular, and ends off with "**shall revere**" in the plural, for by one person revering, two will come to revere.

טעם שאמר (ויקרא יט:ג) לשון יחיד וגמר אומר לשון רבים, (איש אמו ואביו תיראו) 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.

PART E. WHAT IF I FEEL MY PARENTS HAVE WRONGED ME?

We are in a generation where many children have "issues" with their parents, and find it very difficult to honor them. Whereas ideally one should honor parents from a feeling of gratitude, the Torah requires that we honor parents even when they may not deserve our respect.

1. **Rabbi Moshe Lieber, The Fifth Commandment, ArtScroll Publications, pg. 113 – Even if children grew up in challenging circumstances, the parents must be honored.**

Children must honor and revere parents even if the parents, for whatever reason, did not tend to their needs as they were growing up. Even if the children grew up in an orphanage, in foster care or were adopted, they must fulfill their obligations toward their parents. Likewise, if one's parents were divorced, and he had limited or no connection to one of his parents, he is nonetheless fully obligated to honor that parent.

According to some commentators, the wording of the commandment and the context in which it was given proves this point to us. The Torah addresses this issue in the second mention of the Ten Commandments in

Devarim when it tells us to honor our father and mother “as God your Lord has commanded you.” What did the Torah mean by adding this phrase?

2. **Meshech Chochma, Devarim 5: 16 – One is commanded to honor parents even when they have not taken care of the children’s basic needs.**

“Honor your father and your mother as God your Lord has commanded you” – even under circumstances that your father and mother abandoned you and did not raise you, you should still honor them “as God your Lord has commanded you.” In the desert, where raising children did not take much effort – the manna fell from the sky, water was supplied from the well, meat from the quail and the clouds ironed their clothing – even so, God commanded you to honor your father and mother – for all generations.

Amongst the Jews there is another basis for respecting parents, for they raise their children to achieve “true” success by transmitting to them the mitzvot and the Jewish tradition from generation to generation... Therefore [the Torah] says that even if one’s father did not transmit to him the correct traditions, he should still honor him “as God your Lord has commanded you” – for you [who were present at Mount Sinai] are in a generation where the children also heard directly from God and do not require their parents’ tradition, as you heard the Oral Law directly from Moshe. Yet despite this “God your Lord has commanded you” to honor your father and mother.

כבד את אביך ואת אמך כאשר צוך ה' א-לקיך ... אף באופן שאביך ואמך עזבוך ולא גדלוך גם כן תכבדם “כאשר צוך ה' א-לקיך” – במדבר, ששם לא היה טורח גדול על האבות בגידול בניהם כי מן היה יורד מן השמים, ומים מבאר, ובשר משליו, והענן היה מוזהב מלבושיהם. ובכל זאת צוך ה' לכבד אביך ואמך – כן תעשה לדור אחרון.

דבישראל נוסף על כבוד האבות שהם מוליכים בניהם להצלחה האמיתית והם מוסרים המצוות השמיעות והקבלה מדור לדור... ולזה אמר שאף אם אין האב מוריש לו הדיעות הצודקות, גם כן תכבדנו “כאשר צוך ה' א-לקיך” – שאתה בדור שהבנים גם כן שמעו מפי הגבורה ואינם צריכים למסורת האבות, וכל פירושי התורה שבעל פה שמעו מפי משה, ואעפ”כ “צוך ה' א-לקיך” לכבד אביך ואמך.

Even if all our parents did for us was to give us life, that alone would be sufficient reason to honor them.

Imagine that your parents surprise you on your 20th birthday with a brand new car! You run out in excitement, but you stop in your tracks when you see it. It doesn’t have wheels! You are furious and spend the next weeks sitting in the house pouting. After all, what good is a car without wheels?

What would be a more appropriate response?

Go out, earn some money, and buy the wheels!

In life, we are often too quick to blame our parents for our problems and shortcomings. But we are acting like the person who gets the car without the wheels. Did our parents make mistakes raising us? Of course they did! Everyone makes mistakes.

Our challenge in life is to accept what they gave us – the good and the bad – and make our maximum effort in life with what we have.

Their mistakes do not eliminate our obligation to give them honor. Again, they gave us life. (From Lori Palatnik, "Honoring Parents," www.aish.com)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ≈ Our parents virtually gave us everything we have in our lives. Showing gratitude to them for this is the least we can do.
- ≈ Honoring parents strengthens our relationship with God and leads to honoring Him. He really gave, and gives, us everything, and it is to Him that we owe our very existence.
- ≈ Knowledge of God is partly based on the transmission of the Jewish tradition from parent to child since the Exodus from Egypt. Keeping this chain intact depends on the attitude and reverence we have for our human links.
- ≈ Taking care of parents can be time consuming. Therefore, the Torah promises that this "lost" time will be made up.
- ≈ The best teachers teach by example. The way we treat our parents is the way our children will treat us.
- ≈ And even if our parent didn't do the best job they could have, still, they gave us our life! For that alone should we be grateful.

SECTION III. HOW TO HONOR PARENTS

In Section I, we learned that we have proactive mitzvot to honor and fear our parents, as well as prohibitions against striking, cursing and dishonoring our parents. The prohibitions seem fairly straightforward. However, in what specific ways are we to exhibit honor and fear for our parents?

We will learn here about the nature and extent of the obligation of *Kibud Av*, honoring parents. The obligation to honor parents has many different facets – tending to their physical needs, pleasing them through our words and actions, and infusing our deeds with a genuine feeling of love.

PART A. HONOR

An important part of the Torah's definition of honor is to provide material benefit to parents by fulfilling basic needs like feeding and dressing.

1. Kiddushin 31b – Honor means showing respect by tending to a parent's physical needs.

The Rabbis taught: What is [meant] by honoring [one's parents]? Honor means serving food and drink, helping them get dressed, and welcoming them when they enter and escorting them when they leave the home.

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

2. **Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:5 – A child's obligation to honor his or her parents need not incur personal financial loss.**

The son provides food and drink from the resources of the father and mother (i.e. he is not required to pay for serving his parents). However, he is obligated to honor his parents through his physical presence even if by doing so he will miss work... But if the son himself does not have [enough food for one day], he is not obligated to miss work and end up a beggar.

זה שמאכילו ומשקהו משל אב ואם... אבל חייב לכבדו בגופו אע"פ שמתוך כך בטל ממלאכתו... אבל אי לית ליה לא מחייב לבטל ממלאכתו ולחזור על הפתחים.

3. **Rabeinu Yonah, Iggeret Hateshuvah, 3:70 – The focus of honoring parents is to cause them satisfaction.**

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

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

PART B. REVERENCE

The Torah's concept of reverence implies looking up to parents and treating them as authority figures.

1. **Kiddushin, ibid. – Reverence means demonstrating awareness that one's parent is not his equal.**

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

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

PART C. RESPECT

External actions are not enough; we need to develop feelings of genuine respect as well.

1. **Sefer Chareidim, Ch. 1:35 – The Torah is not interested in our simply going through the motions.**

"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 God says so." Rather, he must develop an attitude wherein he sees them as truly great and honorable people, and this is the main

כבד את אביך ואת אמך מצינו כבוד בלב... ואם הכבוד בדברים ובמעשה בלבד ולא בלב הרי משוה 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.

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.

2. **Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz, Sichot Mussar, p. 158 – It is incumbent upon a child to find areas in which a parent excels.**

True fulfillment of honoring parents is only possible if the child feels a real sense of respect and admiration toward his parent. It is therefore incumbent upon one to search and find areas or character traits in which his parent excels. If one does not cultivate a deep feeling of esteem for his parent, even if he goes through all of the external motions of acting respectfully, he has not fulfilled the Torah's goal at all.

וכן מקובלני שאין מצות כיבוד אב [ואם] מתקיימת כהלכתה אלא אם כן מעריך הן את אביו ומעריצו מאד, וחייב הן למצוא באביו תכונות ומעלות שבהן הוא מצטיין יותר מכל אחד זולתו... כי אם לא יעריכו בלבו ואינו מחשיבו במעמקי נפשו, כי אז אפילו הוא מאכילו ומשקהו וקם לפניו ורץ לפניו, הרי"ז לא קיים מצות כיבוד אב [ואם] כל עיקר.

3. **Ibid, p. 357 – True honor is comprised of deep feelings of admiration and should not be just a performance.**

His whole life, my father, of blessed memory, used to search for unique character traits in his own father, trying to find areas in which his father was truly "one in a generation." For a long time I could not figure out why my father felt this was necessary, until I understood what he was doing: The focal point of honoring parents – and of honoring other human beings in general – is giving true honor. True honor means that one feels respect and admiration; otherwise, acting respectfully is but a performance in which he has not entirely fulfilled his obligation of Kibud Av. In order to gain respect for one's parent, it is necessary to invest thought in figuring out what is particularly special about him.

נוהג היה אאמו"ר זצ"ל כל ימיו להתבונן ולמצוא מעלה מיוחדת באביו שהיה מצוין בה יותר מכל אדם, עד שמצא שהיה חד בדרא במעלה ההיא. ומעולם תמהתי למה היה צריך אאמו"ר זצ"ל לזה. עד שעמדתי על טעמו של דבר והוא שעיקר מצות כיבוד אב [ואם] וכן כבוד הבריות בכלל, הוא לכבדו כבוד אמיתי, ולכן לא יתכן לכבד את אביו כבוד אמת אם לא יהא אביו נכבד בעיניו. וכל זמן שאין אביו נכבד בעיניו, כי אז אין כל הכבוד שמכבדו אלא מן השפה ולחוץ. ואינו יוצא בזה ידי חובת מצות כיבוד אב בשלימות (אף שגם בזה הוא חייב) על כן חייב הן לבקש, ולחפש ולמצוא מעלות מיוחדות ונכבדות באביו, ועל ידי כך יהיה אביו נכבד ב עיניו.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Sefer Chareidim (9:35) teaches that a child should never degrade parents, even in one's heart, although one may feel "justified."

PART D. LOVE

1. **Sefer Chareidim 9:37 – It is not enough to respect one's parents; one must love them as well.**

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

לשון הזוהר פרשת כי תצא: בגברא דאשתדל בתר אבוא ואמיה דרחים לון יתיר מגרמיה ונפשיה רוחיה ונשמתייה וכל עלמא דהוה ליה חשוב לאי למעבד ביה רעותא דאבוייה ואמיה ולמפלח לון ביה, עכ"ל. למדנו שקבלה בידם שבכלל כבודם האהבה.

depiction teaches us that our Sages understood that the obligation to honor one's parents includes loving them.

2. **Ibid. – How do we know that honor includes love?**

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.

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.

3. **Kidushin 31a, Rashi and Tosafot – True fulfillment of honoring parents should be a fusion of the right actions with the right attitudes.**

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.

Tosafot: The Jerusalem Talmud illustrates this with an example. It once happened [regarding] someone who regularly served his father a fine type of fowl. One time 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 keep quiet."

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 גרסין מעשה בשניהם. 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 כ לבים...

PART E. POSTHUMOUS HONOR

The mitzvah to honor one's parents does not end when they die. Even after their death, Judaism teaches there are ways to honor parents.

1. **Peleh Yoetz 1:20, "Kibud Av Va'em" – Being a source of merit for them after their death.**

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.

ועיקר הכבוד הוא שיהא מכבדו במוותו וכל אשר בכחו למעבד ליה ניהא נפשא יעשה מדי יום יום לא ישכח.

The *Kaddish* (Sanctification Prayer recited by a mourner in synagogue) is a declaration of one's fervent wish to see God's Name become known and revered by all of humanity. Since the parents are responsible for their child's existence, anything he does to sanctify God's Name, such as reciting the *Kaddish*, is partly attributable to them.

2. *Derech Pikudecha, Mitzvah 33 – Saying Kaddish is a way to honor parents after they die.*

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...

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

The following story illustrates how meaningful *Kaddish* is to a parent:

One cold wintry day, the Rosh Yeshivah of Telz, Cleveland, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, was lining up at the airline checkout counter of Cleveland's airport, about to embark on a trip to New York. One of his close students had enclosed nine Cleveland-New York airline tickets inside the invitation to his wedding. Rabbi Mordechai Gifter and eight of his students ascended the aircraft. After packing away their hand luggage in the overhead compartments, they settled back in their seats, readying themselves for two hours of flying time. They could already see themselves joyfully wishing the groom "Mazal Tov" and dancing at his simchah (joyous occasion). But God had other plans.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking," a voice blasted over the loudspeaker. "Due to a fierce blizzard in New York, we shall not be able to land at Kennedy Airport. Snow on the runway is knee-deep. All departing aircraft have been grounded, and incoming aircraft have been rerouted elsewhere. Ground controls have advised my co-pilot and me to head towards Washington National Airport." And so it happened that Rabbi Gifter and eight of his students found themselves spending the long afternoon hours in the Washington Airport, while many miles away the wedding of their dear friend and student was being celebrated without them. The murky gray of the weather outside slowly turned to inky black as afternoon slipped into evening. It was time for Ma'ariv, the evening prayers. Searching for a private corner where they could daven (pray), the group came across an airport cleaner mopping the floor.

*"Excuse me," one of the students politely asked, "do you know of an empty room where we can say our evening prayers?" From the man's reaction, it seemed that he had never met observant Jews in his life. His mop clattered to the floor in alarm and he stared at them open-mouthed as if they had fallen from the moon. One student stepped forward. "A place where we could pray," he explained, enunciating each word loudly and miming a man praying. That did the trick. The cleaner nodded slowly and directed them to a storage room where they could daven undisturbed. The group commenced their prayers. Instead of leaving, the cleaner stood silently at the door, watching them intently, a dazed expression on his face. After they had finished, they were astonished to hear him ask, "Why don't you say *Kaddish*?" "We need a minyan for *Kaddish* - that is, ten adult males," one of the boys explained, "and we're missing one man to complete a minyan."*

*To their complete surprise, the cleaner responded, "I am a Jew. I will join your group to complete the minyan. Please," he begged, "let me say the *Kaddish*."*

*Rabbi Gifter and his students willingly agreed. The lanky airport worker, sporting a green staff apron, abandoned his mop and pail and self-consciously walked to the center of the room. Haltingly, he began reciting *Kaddish*, stumbling over the unfamiliar Aramaic words. Realizing that his knowledge of the text was virtually non-existent, the group patiently helped him along, word after word, until he had pronounced each difficult word in full.*

After he had finished, the worker took a deep breath and said softly, "As you can see, I wasn't brought up as a practicing Jew, and I barely know anything about Judaism. I had a terrible fight with my father about ten years before his passing. After that, all contact between us was severed. I did not even attend his funeral. Last night he appeared to

me in a dream and said, 'I know you're angry at me - you didn't even come to my funeral - but still, you are my only son. You must say Kaddish for my soul with a minyan, a quorum of ten Jewish men!'

"How can I say Kaddish?" I cried out, afraid he would disappear before he had a chance to advise me, 'I barely know how to say the words! And how will I find a minyan?' 'I will arrange it for you,' he reassured me, and then I woke up. Now here you are, exactly nine of you," continued the worker, his voice full of wonder. "Heaven-sent - literally - so that I can say Kaddish for the benefit of my father's departed soul!"

Rabbi Gifter then told him their side of the story - how they had come into the picture at that point. "See how God runs the world!" Rabbi Gifter marveled. "See how He orchestrated our meeting together! Nine invitations to a wedding, a raging snowstorm in New York, the airplane's rerouting to Washington National Airport, missing the wedding - all this happened so that you should be able to say Kaddish for your father!"

The amazing chain of events had such a profound impact on the airport employee that it did not take much persuading on the part of Rabbi Gifter to encourage him to continue saying Kaddish with a minyan. And that precious mitzvah was the starting point of this man's return to his Jewish roots. (*Airport Encounter* by Esther Stern, from *Just One Word*, Feldheim Publishers)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ≈ Showing honor means serving our parents food and drink, helping them get dressed, welcoming and escorting them into and from the home.
- ≈ Reverence means demonstrating one's awareness that his parent is not his equal, such as not sitting in his seat or contradicting his words.
- ≈ We should develop an attitude in which we see our parents as truly great people. The focus of honoring parents is to bring them satisfaction.
- ≈ By seeking out our parent's good qualities, we can strengthen our respect and love for them.
- ≈ Even after a parent's death, one should do whatever actions possible that will serve as a source of merit for the deceased, such as saying Kaddish.

SECTION IV. MUST I ALWAYS LISTEN TO MOM AND DAD?

As we saw before, our parents deserve our honor and reverence just for being our parents, regardless of how good of a job we think they did. However, there are times when one may ignore parental wishes, and it may even be forbidden to listen to them. In such cases care must be taken to still honor one's parents in all other ways, despite the confrontation. Therefore, before we investigate these exceptions to the rule, we offer this caveat:

1. **Rabbi Moshe Lieber, *The Fifth Commandment*, p. 128 – Always consult a Rabbi before making life decisions that ignore parental directives.**

Although there are cases in which children are halachically within their rights to ignore parental directives, care must be taken to weigh the issues carefully before deciding practically on a course of action. If disobeying parents will result in arguments or ill will between parents and child, it may be preferable that the child obey the parents.

Neither parents nor children should ever use the Halachah as a coercive tool to compel others to yield to their wishes. Thus, one should never rule independently on such questions. Competent halachic counsel must be sought out, in order to accurately and objectively assess the situation before coming to any halachic conclusions. Both parents and children must provide the Rabbi with an accurate, candid picture of their respective opinions and emotions.

In general, the Torah's principle of *chayecha kodmin*, your own life comes first, is applicable to the mitzvah of Kibud Av. That is, when it comes to major life decisions and one's own spiritual growth, a person must make those decisions for himself regardless of parental disapproval. As such we find that the Torah allows one to temporarily disregard parental advice when it come to questions of marriage, learning Torah, and living in Israel.

PART A. PARENTS VS. THE TORAH

First of all, parents have no right to ask a child to break any of the Torah commands, since they too are obligated to honor God. Therefore, children should not listen to parents who tell them to transgress something from the Torah or otherwise try to impede their practice of Judaism.

1. Sifra, Kedoshim 1: 5 – The obligation to honor parents does not excuse one from obeying the laws of the Torah.

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 Sabbaths you shall guard, I am the Lord your God," – you are all obligated to honor Me (i.e. the obligation to obey God outweighs that of honoring parents).

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

2. Rambam, Hilchot Mamrim 6: 12 – The above applies even to Rabbinic commandments such as lighting Chanukah candles.

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

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

3. Rabbi Moshe Lieber, *The Fifth Commandment*, pp. 123-124 – Customs and Halachic stringencies.

A parent may not insist that the child not maintain a custom that is mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) or the classic *Poskim* (halachic authorities). As long as the custom has firm halachic basis and is considered normative in the *Shulchan Aruch* and classic *Poskim*, the child need not comply with the parent's demand. (In the name of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv) If the parent's demand is based on concern for the child's health, the child should refrain from assuming the custom.

4. **Pitchei Teshuva, Yoreh Deah 240: 22 – Praying in a different Beit Knesset.**

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

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

PART B. TORAH STUDY

If one feels that a certain course of action will help to maximize his spiritual growth and acquisition of Torah wisdom, one may take that course even at the expense of not being able to honor one's parents. Our forefather Yaakov set the precedent for such behavior when he left his parents house to go and study Torah.

1. **Megillah 16b – Torah study overrides honoring parents.**

Torah study is greater than the mitzvah of honoring parents, for [although] Yaakov Avinu (Jacob our father) [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.

גדול תלמוד תורה יותר מכיבוד אב ואם שכל אותן
שנים שהיה יעקב אבינו בבית עבר לא נענש.

Nevertheless, one whose studies do not preclude Kibud Av must temporarily interrupt his studies to tend to his parents (Shulchan Aruch, YD 244:11).

PART C. MARRIAGE

While it is a good idea to choose a mate that meets with your parents' approval, nevertheless Judaism recognizes that ultimately the choice is up to you – no matter what your parents think.

1. **Rema, Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240: 25 – Marrying the girl of your heart.**

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.

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

2. **Sdei Chemed, Ma'arechet Caf 147 – ... as long as she is a nice Jewish girl.**

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.

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.

If, all things being equal, the marriage will cause shame or other emotional turmoil for the parents, a competent rabbi should be consulted.

PART D. ISRAEL

Living in Israel is another personal life choice with spiritual ramifications, for which a person may disregard parental wishes.

1. Rabbi Moshe Lieber, *The Fifth Commandment*, p. 131 – Living in Israel.

According to many *Poskim* (halachic authorities), the mitzvah to dwell in Israel, like any mitzvah that cannot be performed on one's behalf by others, overrides the obligation to honor parents. Hence, one can move to Israel over parental objection...Other *Poskim* disagree. A competent halachic authority should be consulted for a ruling on these questions.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ⌘ Although honoring parents is a very important mitzvah, it does not override any of the other commandments, be they Torah-based mitzvot, Rabbinic rulings or accepted customs.
- ⌘ In general, parents do not have the right to dictate one's life decisions, whether about marrying someone, moving to Israel or studying Torah. Since any parent/child conflict must be handled with care, a halachic authority should always be consulted before any such decisions are made.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHY SHOULD I RESPECT MY PARENTS?

First of all, it's a mitzvah, and quite a prominent one at that. It is one of the Ten Commandments. There are many reasons behind this mitzvah. The first, most basic reason is that we need to show gratitude to our parents for all that they have done for us. The simple fact that they brought us into the world makes them worthy of our gratitude.

Showing honor to parents is a form of showing honor to God as well. In respecting where we have come from, we can build a closer relationship with Him.

The Torah promises long life to one who honors his parents. Additionally, the good example we set in honoring our parents will pay off when our own children follow our example.

WHAT TYPE OF BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE DOES THE TORAH ASK OF ME VIS-À-VIS MY PARENTS?

The behavior the Torah expects is that of showing honor and having reverence. Showing honor means serving our parents food and drink, helping them get dressed, welcoming and escorting them into and from the home. Reverence means demonstrating one's awareness that his parent is not his equal, such as not sitting in his seat or contradicting his words.

Even after a parent's death, one should do whatever one can to serve as a source of merit for them such as saying Kaddish.

Additionally, the Torah wants us to develop an attitude in which we see our parents as truly great people and love them.

DO I ALWAYS HAVE TO LISTEN TO MY PARENTS?

We should try as much as possible to listen to our parents, respecting their wishes and doing what they say. But there are certain limitations. Their honor does not trump that of God's. Therefore, if a parent tells a child to transgress the Torah or in any way weaken his religious observance, the parent is not to be heeded. Additionally, honoring one's parents does not need to come at the expense of giving up one's spiritual life. For that reason, specifically when it comes to issues of learning Torah, getting married, and living in Israel, a child has the right to make his own decisions, even when they contradict his parents' wishes.

WHAT IF I HAVE REAL ISSUES WITH MY PARENTS?

The mitzvah to honor parents is not conditional on them being "good" parents or having done a "good job" in raising you. The very context in which the mitzvah was given – the miraculous existence in the Sinai desert, where much parental responsibility was removed – highlights the fact that the honor due them is simply by virtue of them being your biological progenitors.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Kiddushin 30b – 32a; Meiri, Kiddushin 31b; Tosafot, Kiddushin 31a s.v. “Uva’at”; Yam Shel Shlomo, Kiddushin 1:64

Yerushalmi Peah 1:1

Rabbi Moshe Lieber, The Fifth Commandment, Mesorah publications, 1998.

Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, Jewish Outreach; Halachic Perspectives, especially the Appendix.

Dibrot Moshe, Kiddushin 50:17