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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Yitro

The Mitzvah that is the Backbone of Both the Spiritual and the Mundane

Our *parasha* states (20:12), "Honor your mother and father, so that you will have lengthy days on the land that Hashem, your G-d, has given you."

Questions:

- 1- The fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments is to "Honor your father and mother." We must understand this, for we are taught that the *luchot* were divided up into two groups of mitzvot. The first group, on the right tablet, were mitzvot between man and Hashem. The second group were between man and his fellow. Why is honoring one's father and mother included in the first group of five – it is seemingly a mitzvah between man and his fellow not between man and Hashem!
- 2- We must furthermore understand why Hashem created the world in such a way that man is both born and raised by a father and mother. For we find that the first man, Adam, was fashioned by Hashem, as it were. Why were not all humans created like this? We also find that our Sages teach us *Masechet Sota* (11b) that the children in Egypt in the time of Egyptian slavery, were miraculously saved and raised by Hashem. Why did the world not continue in such a manner?

How the World Relates to the Mitzvah of Honoring One's Parents

Sadly, we are witness in our times that the level of respect for parents has declined drastically. This is to the extent that it echoes the prophetic words of the *mishnah* at the end of *Masechet Sotah* (49b), "In the period of the *ikveta d'Mesicha* (literally, "the heel of Mashiach," meaning shortly before Mashiach's arrival) **the youth will humiliate the elderly, the elderly will stand before the youth, a son will disgrace his father, a daughter will rise against her mother and a daughter in law against her mother in law.** Man's enemies are the members of his household, the face of the generation resembles the face of a dog, a father is not embarrassed before his father. And what do we have to rely upon? On our Father in Heaven." We will soon see that this also has an influence on man's service of Hashem.

Three Partners in the Creation of Man

But we must know that there is no doubt that Hashem, who created the world with wisdom, is Almighty. Without a doubt, He could have fashioned each man like he did Adam *Harishon*, and He could have raised them like He did the Jews in Egypt. However, Hashem wants people to be born in the natural manner from a mother and father. For then man's parents will be at the center of the child's life, for he will realize that they brought him into the world, cared for him, raised him, supported him, protected



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and helped him, as well as educated him. This is the way Hashem created the world, and there is no other option. Therefore, any intelligent person will think about this and automatically feel gratitude towards his parents, for without them he would not exist. How hard they worked to support him! How many long nights they invested in raising him! How much struggle and patience was required to care for him! How much money was needed to dress and educate him! How much warmth and love they showered upon him to help him blossom and thrive! Therefore, one who does not express gratitude to his parents is lowly indeed, for he is denying the reason for his very existence. This commandment is intended to make man feel gratitude for his Creator and serves Him accordingly. This is as our Sages have stated (*Kiddushin* 30b), that there are three partners in creating man: Hashem, his father, and his mother. When man respects his father and mother, Hashem says that is as if He lived amongst them and have respected Him as well. The Gemara continues by teaching that Rav Nachman said that when someone causes anguish to his father and mother, Hashem says that it is good that He did not dwell amongst them, for if He would have, they would have caused Him pain as well, as it were. [Our Sages state similarly in *Niddah* 31.] The *Kli Yakar* (*Shemot* 20:12) explains the commandment to respect one's father and mother as follows: He writes that the Ten Commandments are divided up into two sets of five. The first set of five conclude with this commandment. This is interesting, he explains, because the first set of commandments consists of mitzvot between man and Hashem, and the second commandments are mitzvot between man and his fellow. Why then, is the mitzvah of *kibbud av ve'eim*, which appears to be a mitzvah between man and his fellow, included in the first set of commandments? He explains that this mitzvah definitely includes an aspect of man's relationship with Hashem, for as our Sages have taught us, there are three partners in the creation of man: Hashem, a father, and a mother. If one respects his parents on account of the fact that they were instrumental in giving him a physical body, which is mundane and temporal, and will ultimately disintegrate, how much more so, should man respect his Father in Heaven, who gave him a soul, which is the most outstanding feature of man and which is eternal. He then quotes the Gemara in *Kiddushin* that we mentioned above, which concludes that when man respects his parents it is as if Hashem has dwelled amongst them and that they have respected Him as well. The *Kli Yakar* asks where our Sages derived that by respecting parents it is as if Hashem has dwelled amongst them. He answers that this is certainly learned from the Ten Commandments. In the second group of five commandments, Hashem's Name does not appear, because these are commandments that pertain to man and his fellow. Therefore, why is Hashem's Name mentioned in the commandment of *kibbud av ve'im*, which is between man and his fellow? He answers that the fact that Hashem's Name is mention there teaches us that by respecting one's parents it is as if Hashem dwelt amongst them, and they respected Him too, as it were.

The Mitzvah of Honoring One's Parents is the Very Backbone of Man's Entire Life

We see therefore that the mitzvah of honoring one's parents is the key to acquiring the trait of expressing gratitude to Hashem, for without Him, man could not exist. Since human eyes are incapable



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of seeing Hashem and our Divine service is based on faith, Hashem created man through human reproduction and not by directly fashioning by him, like Adam was created. As a result, man will have feelings of gratitude ingrained in him. Therefore the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother had to be given so that man would recognize the good that his parents have showered upon him. He will then come to recognize the gratitude that he must feel for all that **Hashem** has bestowed upon him. Otherwise, how would he be able to recognize the good that Hashem has granted him? The same thing applies to the good bestowed upon him by his friend or wife. Therefore the mitzvah of honoring one's parents has been placed at the very center of the Ten Commandments, because it connects the mitzvot between man and Hashem to those between man and his fellow.

The Inherent Difficulty at Fulfilling *Kibbud Av V'eim*

Nevertheless, this is not an easy mitzvah to fulfill, to the extent that Rav Yochanan stated (*Kiddushin* 31b), "Praiseworthy is one who has never seen them [i.e., his parents]." The Gemara continues by stating that when Rav Yochanan's mother conceived him, his father passed away. Then when he was born, his mother passed away. Rashi explains Rav Yochanan's words that since it is impossible to fulfill this mitzvah to its fullest extent and he will be punished accordingly, it is therefore better for him to never have met his parents. It is for this reason that the *sefer Chashukei Chemed (Berachot 35b)* asks and answers the following question: The author was asked about an adopted child, who does not know who his parents are, but knows that they are kosher Jews and that he is fit to marry a Jew. He is presently living a happy life with his adoptive parents. When he turns twenty, and is now legally old enough to find out who his parents are, should he search them out by looking through government records? This way he could fulfill the mitzvah of honoring his parents? The author quoted Rav Shteinman *zt"l* as saying that even if meeting his true parents will not be too difficult for him to handle emotionally, nevertheless, he should not discover who his true parents are. He based this on Rav Yochanan's statement that praiseworthy is one who has never met his parents, for a child will be punished for not fulfilling this mitzvah properly. If so, why should this adopted son be wiser than Rav Yochanan? It is better for him to remain in the situation that he is presently in so as not to get punished.

What Does it Mean to Honor and Fear One's Parents?

Our Sages teach us what true *kibbud av ve'eim* really is. Rav Avahu said that his son Avimi properly fulfilled the mitzvah of *kibbud av*. Avimi had five sons who were *musmachim*, deemed fit to be rabbis, when Rav Avahu was still alive. But when Rav Avahu would call from the entrance of the house, Avimi would run to open the door for him saying, "Yes, yes.." the entire time. One day, his father said to him, "Give me water to drink." However, by the time Avimi had brought the water, his father had already fallen asleep. He bent down and stood over his father the entire time until he woke up. He therefore was awarded from Heaven with being able to expound on the chapter of *Tehillim* which begins with the words *Mizmor Le'Asaf*. Another example: Every time Rabbi Tarfon's mother wished to climb into bed, he would bend down and she would step on him and get into bed. He came to the *bet midrash* and was



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praised for his fulfillment of the mitzvah of honoring his parents. Other scholars in the *bet midrash* told him that he hadn't even achieved half of what it means to respect one's parents. For had his mother ever thrown his wallet filled with money into the sea – right in front of him – and he nevertheless did not shame her for it? When Rav Yosef would hear the footsteps of his mother, he would say that he must rise for the Divine Presence which is now coming. The Gemara furthermore states that fearing one's father as one is obligated to, means not standing in his place or sitting in his seat. He should also not contradict his words and not decide for his father that what he said is correct. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yorah Deah, Hilchot Kibbud Av vEim* 240:2) rules accordingly, and writes that the prohibition to confirm his father's words applies when he is standing before his father. He should not even say to him, "My father's words seem correct." He adds that you should not call him by his first name, nor when he is alive, nor when he has passed away; rather he should refer to him as "My father, my teacher."

Words of Mussar

We have learned about Hashem's wisdom in granting man the trait of gratitude, a result of being born from a father and mother. He has been imbued with the ability to value those who give to him. For this is the foundation upon which the world continues to exist, and is the key to his relationships between his parents, his wife and friends, and everyone else who gives to him. As a result, he will develop a feeling of gratitude towards Hashem who has given him his soul and has bestowed him with the ability to live. Man will therefore understand that he must thank Hashem for each and every breath he breathes. This will bring him to serve Hashem with joy. We see therefore that this mitzvah is the very backbone of sustaining a proper society and excelling in Divine service. Additionally, it is the foundation of our tradition passed down generation after generation, one that enables the continuum of the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot. This mitzvah was once performed in a most beautiful fashion, as our Sages have taught us, but obviously there has been a decline in each subsequent generation, especially considering the fact that this mitzvah is difficult to fulfill, as our Sages have taught us. Therefore, praiseworthy is he who properly honors and fears his parents as is dictated by *halacha*. By doing so he will merit long life, good health, wealth, honor, success and blessing, both in this world and the next.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rav Mordechai Malka