



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5785 Acharei Mot
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Hello, Welcome!

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide,
independent and inclusive adult education
program**

**focusing on understanding Jewish
relevancy to our lives by studying text
most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour
each week, friendships are forged between
mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the
rich
legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and
guidance
for many who have, until now, lacked
access.***

Thank you for joining us!

**Please encourage friends to join you in
participating so that we may grow
together as
a community.**

תשפ"ה – Kedoshim – Acharei Mot

This week, because of the way that the calendar works, we read a double portion, *Acharei Mot and Kedoshim* (last year, for example, they came out on separate weeks). The third verse in Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:3) tells us:

(ג) אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ. אֲנִי יְדֹוֹד אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

3) *Every man, your mother and father shall you **fear**, and my Shabbats you shall observe; I am Hashem your G-d.*

This verse is much less known than its famous cousin found in the Ten Commandments, כבד את אביך ואת אמך - “**Honor** your father and your mother.” In contrast, this verse instructs us to **fear** our parents. What is the difference?

Quoting the Talmud, Rashi explains.

איזהו מורא? לא ישב במקומו ולא ידבר במקומו ולא יסתור את דבריו.
ואיזהו כבוד? מאכיל ומשקה מלביש ומנעיל מכניס ומוציא

How does one exhibit “fear?” By not sitting in his parents’ seat, not interrupting them, and not contradicting what they say. How does one exhibit “honor?” By giving them to eat and drink, helping them dress and put on their shoes, and by helping them come in and go out.

Interestingly, this verse cites the mother first, while the verse in the Ten Commandments instructing us to *honor* our parents, has the father preceding the mother. Why the change?

Rashi again tells us what we need to know:

אמו ואביו תיראו - כאן הקדים אם לאב לפי שגלוי לפניו שהבן ירא את אביו
יותר מאמו ובכבוד הקדים אב לאם לפי שגלוי לפניו שהבן מכבד את אמו יותר
מאביו מפני שמשדלתו בדברים

The Torah here [in Leviticus] cited the mother before the father because Hashem knows that a child fears his father more than his mother; and in the verse about honor, the Torah cited the father first because Hashem knows that a son shows more honor to his mother than to his father because his mother is more loving and persuasive.

By interchanging them, the Torah teaches us that neither one takes precedence over the other, and that they need to be treated equally in both fear and honor.

An obvious question arises when reading the first verse: What is the connection between fearing one's parents and keeping the Shabbat? Why insert these two seemingly unrelated concepts in the same verse?

The Talmud derives an important lesson from this. The verse is saying: *"In spite of My commandment to fear your parents, you must still keep My Shabbat."* Hence, should your parent request you to violate the Shabbat, you must not listen; - you must still keep the Shabbat. This rule applies to *all* of the Torah's commandments: If a parent instructs a child not to keep any mitzvah, or to violate a prohibition, the child may not fulfill his parent's directive; he must instead fulfill the wish of Hashem and follow the Torah's law.

The verse's final phrase provides the logic for this result: *"I am Hashem your G-d."* Both you and your parents are obligated to listen to Me. Their parental authority does not override My commandment to you.

Imagine that you are taking a drive with your father. As you approach a stop sign and slow down, your father says to you, "Come on. You can go through the stop sign, son, no one is

coming.” You naturally listen to your father’s instructions, and, suddenly, flashing lights appear in your rear-view mirror. No cars were coming, but a police car was hidden behind some bushes at the corner. As the policeman approaches the car, you are unconcerned. Your excuse is ironclad.

The policeman says, “You just ran that stop sign.”

You answer, “I know officer, I was under a biblical obligation to do so!”

“Oh really?” says the officer, “How so?”

“My father told me to go through it. Have you heard of the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments? I was obligated to honor his request - the fifth commandment in the Bible!”

With that, the officer turns to your father in the seat next to you and asks, “Is that true?” Your father sheepishly says, “Yes it is, officer.”

Assuming the officer believes in the bible, will he let you off? What should he say to your father?

“When you come to a stop sign, you also have to stop. This is the government’s law that applies to every citizen, including you. By what authority did you tell your son to run the stop sign? It’s not your rule to break!”

In the same sense, Hashem gave the Torah’s laws to every Jew, and no one is authorized to instruct another Jew to break any of them, not even your father - it’s simply not his law to violate.

This raises a new question. Since the logic of this law is so clear, why did the Torah go to the trouble of teaching it to us by juxtaposing the fear of parents to the keeping of the Shabbat? The

Torah never includes extra words. Because we would have figured this out by ourselves, like the police officer, why expend the words to write it explicitly?

Perhaps the answer lies in the Torah's equating parents' honor with Hashem's honor.

The first instance of this is in the Ten Commandments, which divide naturally into two groups:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. I am Hashem <i>your</i> G-d | 6. Do not murder |
| 2. Do not have any other gods | 7. Do not commit adultery |
| 3. Do not swear falsely | 8. Do not steal |
| 4. Keep the Shabbat | 9. Do not bear false testimony |
| 5. Honor your father and mother | 10. Do not covet |

A careful review of the two tablets reveals that the first tablet lists the commandments that apply between man and Hashem, and the second tablet lists the commandments that pertain to man's relationship with his fellow man. No. 5, however, "Honor your father and mother," appears to be problematic. Why does that commandment appear on the tablet with the commandments between man and Hashem? Are parents not human beings with whom we have a relationship?

What the Torah is here teaching us is that Hashem places parental honor on par to His own honor.

In two other places we find a parent's honor being equal to Hashem's: (1) a person who curses his parent receives the death penalty just as one who curses Hashem, and (2) a person who physically strikes his parent and creates a wound, receives the death penalty. Of course, one cannot strike Hashem, but if a person wounds any other person, he must only pay damages. The death penalty is ordinarily only for murder. We see that parents are in a different category altogether.

What is the significance of this idea? In what way are parents "equal" to Hashem?

Our Sages teach a very fundamental, yet profound, principle that is very counterintuitive. It comes from the Zohar, the foremost book of Jewish mysticism, and it goes like this.

זוהר חלק ב דף קסא/ב

קודשא בריך הוא אסתכל באורייתא וברא עלמא

The Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world.

The Torah existed in Hashem's mind – so-to-speak-- before He created the universe. What did that Torah comprise? All the true and correct morals and values for mankind; matters that could be conceived of only by Hashem. (Man is incapable of creating morals for himself.) When Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Sinai, He conveyed to them these essential truths in the form of the positive and negative mitzvot. This is the Torah's essence and its purpose to man, comprising the divinely conceived morals and values of Hashem for man to learn and emulate through performing the mitzvot. The degree to which a man embodies the Torah's morals and values is the degree to which he is aligned with Hashem. The degree to which a person embodies Hashem's morals and values reflects how much "Godliness" he contains and, hence, is an accurate measure of his holiness.

For example, the Torah requires us to respect another's property ownership, which is embodied in the commandment: **Do not steal**. But for man to actually achieve that attribute of respect, there must be:

A. Items that can be stolen, and

B. A legal system that establishes clear laws of ownership and how that ownership is transferred from one person to another.

With this, upon exercising self-control and not taking something that belongs to someone else, a person acquires that quality of respect for another's property.

When Hashem looked into His Torah, so to speak, and saw the commandment, “Do not steal,” He had to create a world with objects that could be stolen. Otherwise, this value would remain untaught, and man would lack the ability to practice respect for someone else’s property.

Applying this concept to parental respect, since the Torah directs us to “Honor your father and your mother,” when Hashem created His world, He had to create a system where children come from parents. In other words, instead of “*because we have parents, we need to honor them,*” the Almighty’s system recognized that *since there needs to be a concept of honor for parents, we need to have parents!*

The concept of giving honor and respect to the ones who created you is a true Torah concept. It is proper and necessary to feel a deep debt of gratitude and a tremendous sense of awe and respect for the ones who have given you so much – life! This, moreover, is the entire basis for serving Hashem and keeping His mitzvot. He created us and gave us this life so that we can earn reward by serving Him. Being a servant of the amazing Creator of our universe is the greatest possible good that a person could hope to receive, for which one will be very well rewarded for his service in the world to come.

To help us acquire this value, Hashem created parents - *mini creators* – who, by having children, would teach them from when they were little, to show respect and awe for their creators, their parents. The home would be a stepping stone and a proving ground for inculcating into children the important value of feeling a deep debt of gratitude and a tremendous sense of awe and respect for the ones who gave them so much – life! The children will then apply to Hashem what they learned from their parents.

It is in this sense that parents are equated to Hashem. Children must relate to their parents - their creators, just as their parents must relate to Hashem – their Creators, and the ultimate Creator of all humanity. This is why honoring one's father and mother is on the *right* side of the Ten Commandments, accompanying the commandments between man and Hashem, his Creator.

The Talmud (Niddah 31a) reveals to us yet a deeper way in which parents are like Hashem:

תנו רבנן: שלשה שותפין יש באדם: הקדוש ברוך הוא ואביו ואמו. אביו מזריע
הלובן שממנו עצמות וגידים וצפרנים ומוח שבראשו ולובן שבעין אמו מזרעת אודם
שממנו עור ובשר ושערות ושחור שבעין, והקדוש ברוך הוא נותן בו רוח ונשמה
וקלסתר פנים וראיית העין ושמיעת האוזן ודבור פה והלך רגלים ובינה והשכל וכיון
שהגיע זמנו להפטר מן העולם הקדוש ברוך הוא נוטל חלקו וחלק אביו ואמו מניח
לפניהם

The Rabbis taught. There are three partners in the creation of every person. Hashem, his father, and his mother. The father and mother contribute the child's physical components, and Hashem provides the soul. When it comes time for a person to leave the world, Hashem takes back His portion – the soul, and leaves the parents with their part of the partnership, the body.

At first blush, this teaching seems to be metaphoric, but the commentary *Sefas Emes* (Parashat Noach 1884) explains that it is not.

Our Sages teach us that Hashem created man so that He could bestow love and kindness upon him. What is the greatest good that Hashem could possibly bestow upon a person? Since Hashem is the quintessence of all goodness, the greatest possible good that Hashem could possibly give a person is a relationship with Hashem Himself, the ultimate goodness. This purely spiritual relationship will be realized only

in the world to come, where a person's soul is in its pure spiritual state. The intensity of the pleasure that the soul will experience from this relationship with Hashem is beyond description. Although one creates a spiritual connection to Hashem in this world, because the soul resides in a physical body, it is unable to fully experience the pleasure of that relationship. In the world to come, however, the soul will be able to enjoy the full benefit of its spiritual relationship with Hashem created in this world.

How does one create that relationship with Hashem in this world? Through learning the Torah and performing Hashem's mitzvot. These are spiritual power pills that inject spirituality into a person. With the soul housed in a physical body, there is always a challenge to doing Hashem's will. Our physical component always seeks the easy way out, desiring only what is sweet and pleasurable at this moment. Just to perform a "simple" mitzvah requires us to overcome that innate tendency and exert effort to do Hashem's commandment. Hashem rewards that effort by infusing us with a dose of spirituality from the mitzvah performed. And that reward is commensurate to the amount of effort exerted.

Hashem wants to bestow His goodness upon as many people as possible. To this end, the Torah's first commandment is "Be fruitful and multiply." Hashem has a repository of souls waiting to be doled out, but He must have a receptacle, a human body for that soul, before it can enter this world. This is where Hashem, so to speak, really needs parents. If there are no children, no new souls can come down to this world. With Hashem's help, we find our suitable spouses, get married, and provide Hashem with a child into which He can place a soul. But, because Hashem cannot do it without us, parents are really full-fledged partners with Hashem in their children.

Parents can also be considered equal to Hashem in a deeper way.

Just as Hashem created this world and everything in it so that man can create a relationship with Him in the World to Come through the Torah and mitzvot that we do down here, so, too, parents should bring children into this world with the singular goal of giving them the opportunity to create their own relationship with Hashem through the lives they live in this world. With this altruistic goal, parents mirror Hashem and His purpose for creating us.

This is why Jewish education is so primary in every Jewish home. It offers the instructions to provide the child with the necessary tools to acquire his place in the world to come. He needs to learn how to learn Torah so he can fulfill the *mitzvah* of learning Torah. He needs to know how to pray and perform all the mitzvot so that when he becomes an adult, he will know how to use them to create his unique relationship with Hashem.

This is also why parental honor and fear is so important to the Torah. It establishes the proper perspective on the relationship between parents and their children. Parents are Hashem's surrogates to teach the next generation their purpose in this world. Parents are therefore entitled to awe and respect for the magnitude of what they have done - giving their child a life, and are doing for their children - giving them the tools they need to earn their place in the World to Come.

Sometimes, unfortunately, parents themselves don't appreciate the enormity of their responsibility to their creations. They think that their children are here to serve them instead of them being here to assist their children. They become personally upset when their children don't follow their instructions. Yet, when a parent understands that his child must respect him for his child's sake, not for the parent's personal honor, he would not become upset. Rather, he would say, "The Torah requires that you show respect to your parent and you are not following the

Torah's instructions! It's your problem, not mine." When a child sees that his parents are in it only for him, to see that he learns the skills needed for life, he won't resent them. On the contrary, he will have only the utmost respect for them and thank them his entire life for having prepared him for life so well.

With this we come to the answer to our initial question. Why did the Torah find it necessary to tell us that a parent's command doesn't supersede a commandment in the Torah? Seeing how much the Torah emphasizes honor and fear of one's parents, one might think that perhaps listening to a parental instruction, even when it contradicts a Torah law, may be an exception.

The flaw in this rationale is that, ultimately, the goal behind the entire system is to learn how to listen to our Great Father in heaven; His request must remain primary. By teaching our children that we must all listen to our Father in heaven no matter who is asking you to violate it, provides the strongest lesson of all.

This is the meaning of "I am Hashem" at the end of the verse. Hashem is saying that even though I have instructed you to give so much honor to your parents, I am still Hashem, the ultimate Father, and therefore, My honor comes first.

How far does fear of one's parents go?

The law in the *Shulchan Aruch – The Code of Jewish Law* (Yoreh Deah 240:3) is very clear.

(יב') עד היכן מוראם, היה הבן לבוש חמודות ויושב בראש הקהל, ובאו אביו ואמו ד וקרעו ה' } בגדיו והכוהו על ראשו וירקו בפניו, לא יכלים אותם אלא ישתוק ויירא מן מלך מלכי המלכים שציוהו בכך

If a son was dressed in royal clothing sitting at the head table of a communal gathering, and his father and mother came in and tore his

clothing off of him, hit him on the head and spit in his face, he may not embarrass them, rather he must be silent and fear Hashem, the King of all Kings Who has commanded him such.

How far does honor for one's parents go? Once again, the *Code of Jewish Law* (ibid law 18) teaches us.

יח' (כא') עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם, אפילו נטלו כיס של זהובים שלו והשליכו בפניו לים, לא יכלימם ולא יצער בפניהם ולא יבעוס כנגדם, אלא יקבל גזירת הכתוב וישתוק

Even if one's parent took a bag of his gold coins and cast them into the sea (where they are lost forever) he may not embarrass them and not be pained in front of them or get angry at them; rather, he should fulfill the law of the Torah and be silent.

What a tall order! Your parent embarrasses you in public, hits you, spits in your face and you are expected to take it in silence? Your parent deliberately throws your wallet with a thousand dollars in it into the sea never to be retrieved, and you are supposed to stand there calmly and not say a word? How could the Torah demand such self-control from us? How could one be expected to deal with something like that?

The answer is that when a person would appreciate the magnitude of the gift of life that his parents have given him, nothing they do could be reason enough to be upset with them. They have partnered with Hashem to give us life which provides us the opportunity to live a meaning life of Torah and mitzvot, which creates a relationship with Hashem, and ultimately earns us our place in the World to Come. There we will enjoy the benefits of the life we have lived in this world and allow Hashem to realize the purpose for which He created us. The debt of gratitude that we owe them for that is so overwhelmingly great that no amount of gratitude is sufficient to thank them, such that it dwarfs

anything negative they may have done to us. The more we appreciate life, the more we need to appreciate what our parents have done for us.

This is why the Talmud tells us (Kiddushin 31b):

רבי טרפון הוה ליה ההיא אמא דכל אימת דהות בעיא למיסק לפוריא גחין
וסליק לה וכל אימת דהות נחית נחתת עלויה אתא וקא משתבח בי מדרשא אמרי
ליה עדיין לא הגעת לחצי כיבוד כלום זרקה ארנקי בפניך לים ולא הכלמתה... אמר
רבי יוחנן אשרי מי שלא חמאן רבי יוחנן כי עברתו אמו מת אביו ילדתו מתה אמו וכן
אב"י

When Rabbi Tarfon's mother wanted to get into bed, he would bend over and let her use him as a step, and when she wanted to get out of bed, again he would bend over and let her step on him to make it easier for her. He was praising himself in the Bet Midrash for this excessive honor, but the Rabbis told him, "You haven't even gotten to half of what one must do for his parents. Has your mother ever thrown a wallet full of your money into the sea in front of you and you didn't embarrass her?" ... Rabbi Yochanan said, "Blessed is the one who never saw his parents!" (Since one can never properly fulfill the mitzvah of honoring one's parents and he will surely be punished for its absence, it's better not to have the challenge.) *When Rabbi Yochanan's mother became pregnant with him, his father passed away, and when she gave birth to him, his mother died. The same was true with Abaye.* We see that Rabbi Yochanan was pleased that he never had parents to honor, since he knew that he would not fulfill his mitzvah of honoring them properly.

We see from this how important honoring one's parents is. It would be appropriate for us to apply this to our parents and educate our children in this very important mitzvah, the Fifth Commandment.

