

# **The Most Difficult of All Mitzvot: Honor your Father and your Mother**

**PARENT - CHILD DYNAMICS:  
The RABBIS and their Mothers**

**Compiled by Noam Sachs Zion**

(based on Gerald Blidstein, *Honor They Father and Thy Mother*)

**האתגרים שבכיבוד הורים בעייתיים:**

**חכמים ואמותיהם**

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# I. The Essence of Parent-Child Responsibilities: Natural Law

## A. Nature, Nativity and Common Flesh

Lavan to Yaacov: “My bone and my flesh are you” (Gen. 29:14).

יג ויהי כששמע לבן את-שמע | יעקב בן-אחיתו וירץ לקראתו ויחבק-לו וינשק-לו ויביאהו אל-ביתו ויספר ללבן את כל-  
הדברים האלה: יד ויאמר לו לבן אף עצמי ובשרי אמה וישב עמו חדש ימים:

Adam to his wife: “Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2: 23-24),  
(Rashi comments that husband and wife become one flesh only by virtue of producing a common child of their shared flesh)

כג ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה-זאת: כד על-בן יעזב-איש את-  
אביו ואת-אמו וידבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד:

## B. Moral Responsibility that Flows from Choice

Sir **William Blackstone** Commentaries on English Law (1765-1769):

“By the act of generation ..They seem to have voluntarily bound themselves to endeavor .. that the life they have bestowed shall be supported and preserved. And thus the children have perfect right of maintenance from their parents” (Blackstone Legal Commentaries, 1783, England).

“The parent being the cause of the child’s existing in a helpless condition would be indirectly the cause of the suffering and death that would result if neglected” (Henry Sidgwick).

**Samuel Pufendorff** (1660-70s) argues that by natural law child has consented to this contract by hypothetical consent:

“The sovereignty of the parents seems .. to be built on the presumed consent of the children, and consequently on a tacit pact.. It being fairly assumed that had the child at his coming into the world been furnished with the use of reason and made capable of understanding that his life could not be preserved without the kind provision of his parents joined with their command over him he would gladly have yielded obedience on so commodious terms being rationally disposed.”

(Pufendorff 1672 VI 2 #4)

## C. Debts for Benefits Received: Children to Parents

**Philo: A Debt of Gratitude to Benefactors**

Who could be more truly called benefactors than parents in relation to their children? First, they have

brought them out of nonexistence; then, again, they have held them entitled to nurture and later to education of body and soul, so that they may have not only life, but a good life. They have benefitted the body by means of the gymnasium and the training there given . . . they have done the same for the soul by means of letters and arithmetic and geometry and music and philosophy.

With this example before them may not human beings who take no thought for their parents deservedly hide their faces for shame and revile themselves for their neglect of those whose welfare should necessarily have been their sole or their primary care, and that not so much as givers but as **repayers of a due? For children have nothing of their own which does not come from their parents**, either bestowed from their own resources or acquired by means which originate from them. (Philo, *Special Laws* II 229 – 231)

The **Mishnah** taught that a son owed his father service because "he brought him into this world."

Later the amoraim noted that:

"It is stated . . . [Eduyyot 2:9j in the Mishnah: "A father endows his son with the blessings of beauty, strength, riches, wisdom, and length of years. . . ." . . . and just as the father endows the son with five things, so too is the son obliged in five things: "to feed him and give him drink, to clothe him, put on his shoes for him, and lead him. " (TJ Kiddushin 1:7, 61a)

**R. Abun** said, An act which resembles the payment of a debts merits the promise,

*"Honor your father and your mother .. so that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you"* (Exodus 20:12).(TJ Kiddushin 1:7, 61a)

#### **William Blackstone:**

"They who protected the weakness of our infancy are entitled to our protection in the infirmity of their age. They who by sustenance and education have enabled their offspring to prosper ought in return to be supported by that offspring in case they stand in need of assistance. Upon this principle proceed all the duties of children to their parents." (Wm. Blackstone, 1783 I 16).

**Hobbes:** "It ought to obey him by whom it is preserved." (Hobbes, 1651, Chap. 20).

**Sifre** on Dt. 32:6:

*Do you thus requite the Lord, O dull and witless people?*

*Is not God your Father who created you, Fashioned you and made you endure!*

(Deuteronomy 32:6)

It is similar to one who stands and insults his father. He was told: "Fool! Whom do you insult? Your father?! How much did he labor with you! How much work did he put into you! If you have not honored him in the past, you certainly ought to honor him now, lest he make another his heir."

So did Moses say to Israel: "Do you not remember the miracles and wonders God performed for you in Egypt? Imagine the good to be yours in the world to come."

## D. Altruistic Love without Contractual Obligations or Debts of Gratitude

**Rabbenu Bahya ibn Pakuda** (11<sup>th</sup> C. Spain, *Hovot ha-Levavot* III Introduction)

. . . It is known that we ought to acknowledge gratefully a kindness done us in proportion to the doer's intention of aiding us. . . . If some good happens to us through the act of someone who had no intention of benefitting us, we owe him no thanks. . . . It is known that **the motives of a parent are purely egocentric' for the child is truly a limb of his parent.** . . . Do you not see that the parent is more solicitous of the child's welfare—that he be fed and clothed than of his own? That he tries to prevent any hurt to his child? That he will labor to exhaustion to guarantee the peace and security of his child? All this because of the instinctive feelings of parental love and mercy implanted in man.

Nevertheless, both Torah and reason oblige man to serve, honor, and revere his parents . . . though the parent is forced to do his acts of kindness by nature itself; the kindness is truly God's, and the parent is His agent.

**Georg Hegel** says that contractual relations in family life are “shameful” and considerations of self-interest undermines familial love. Even if marriage may begin with “a contract of reciprocal use,” its whole point is “to transcend the standpoint of contract” and to lead partners to think in terms of “love, trust and common sharing of their entire existence” (Hegel 1821 #163).

**Peter Laslett** writes:

“A child believes unquestioningly that he has a right to cherishing, welfare, gratification from his parents, entirely gratuitously, without having to do anything for it, without having to pay. This is in fact the outstanding characteristic of the parent-child relationship, for both father and mother lavish gratification on their children without expecting reward.” (Laslett 1970, 74)

**Onora O'Neill** (1982) complains:

“The discussion of the moral basis of life with young children [and family life more generally] is oddly distorted by . . . focusing mainly on the rights of dependent children and the corresponding duties of others. These are the terms in which the breakdown of family life must be sorted out: when something goes awry, we need to clarify against whom it is that a dependent child may have legally or morally enforceable claims for various sorts of service and care. But when things are going well, the adversarial framework of discussions of rights and duties fails to bring out the distinctive moral features of intimately shared lives in which the interests and concerns of each become part of the interests and concerns of others.”

**Robert Goodin** explains:

“Family life consists not in bargaining for reciprocal benefits but rather in bestowing gratuitous ones....If, as ordinarily happens, the parental sacrifices lead to developing bonds of love, affection, and friendship with their children, it is likely that their children will also later make some sacrifice for them. But that reciprocity is incidental, not essential, to the relationship.” (Robert Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable*, 90)

Contractual models of the family are predicated on notions of exchange: the duties of family life

are thought to be reciprocal because each party has insisted upon getting a good return on his own contributions. Actually, of course, family members (like friends) "are motivated by love rather than the prospect of repayment." Anyone who cynically looks upon his own contributions to the family as "investments," motivated merely by the expected returns, is thereby deemed to have perverted or betrayed the relationship. Perhaps, in some sense, love is exchanged for love. If so, it can be exchanged only for love."

## II. THE DIVINE PARENT ANALOGY AND THE ORIGINS OF PARENT-CHILD OBLIGATIONS

### THE BIBLICAL TEN COMMANDMENTS

- "כִּבֵּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ, וְאֶת-אִמְךָ לְמַעַן, יָאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ, עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ" (שמות כ' 11).
- "כִּבֵּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמְךָ, כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ, וְלִמְעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ, עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ" (דברים ה' 15).
- "אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ, וְאֶת-שְׁבֻתַּתִּי תִשְׁמְרוּ: ֹאֲנִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם" (ויקרא י"ט 3).

**Honor your father and your mother**, that you may live a long life on the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

The Lord God spoke to Moshe, saying :

You shall be Holy for I, the Lord Your God am Holy

**You shall each revere one's mother and one's father**, but also keep my Shabbat,

I am the Lord your God.

Do not turn to idols.....

You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully with one another.

You shall not swear falsely by my name.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart.

**Reprove your kinsman.**

**Love your neighbor as yourself,**

I am the Lord your God.

(Leviticus 19: 1-18)

רמב"ם יד החזקה - הלכות ממרים פרק ו, הלכות א'-

כבוד אב ואם מצות עשה גדולה וכן מורא אב ואם שקל אותן הכתוב בכבודו ובמוראו כתוב "כבד את אביך ואת

אמך" וכתוב "כבד את ה' מהונך". ובאביו ואמו כתוב "איש אמו ואביו תיראו" וכתוב "את ה' אלהיך תירא"

- כדרך שצוה על כבוד שמו הגדול ומוראו כך צוה על כבודם ומוראם.

## Parents and the Divine Creator

ה: שַׁחַת לוֹ לֹא בָנָיו מוֹמְמִים דּוֹר עֲקָשׁ וּפְתַלְתַּל: וְ הַלִּיָּהוּהַ תִּגְמְלוּ-זֹאת עִם נֶבֶל וְלֹא חָכְם הֵלֹוא-הוּא אָבִיךָ קָנָה הוּא עֲשָׂה וְיִכְנָנֶה

Do you thus requite the Lord, O dull and witless people?

Is not God your Father who created you, Fashioned you and made you endure! (Deuteronomy 32:6)

רמב"ן שמות פרק כ פסוק יא

כבד את אביך - הנה השלים כל מה שאנו חייבין בדברי הבורא בעצמו ובכבודו, וחזר לצוות אותנו בעניני הנבראים, והתחיל מן האב שהוא לתולדותיו כענין בורא משתתף ביצירה, כי השם אבינו הראשון, והמוליד אבינו האחרון, ולכך אמר במשנה תורה (דברים ה טו) **כאשר צויתך בכבודי כן אנכי מצוך בכבוד המשתתף עמי ביצירתך**. ולא פירש הכתוב הכבוד, שהוא נלמד מן הכבוד הנאמר למעלה באב הראשון יתברך, שיודה בו שהוא אביו, ולא יכפור בו לאמר על אדם אחר שהוא אביו, ולא יעבדנו כבן לירושתו, או לענין אחר שיצפה ממנו, ולא ישא שם אביו וישבע בחיי אביו לשוא ולשקר. ויכנסו בכלל הכבוד דברים אחרים, כי בכל כבודו נצטוינו, ומפורשים הם בדברי רבותינו (קדושין לא ב), וכבר אמרו (שם ל ב) שהוקש כבודו לכבוד המקום:

**Nahmanides** (Ramban) on location of Fifth Commandment:

[With the fourth command] God has completed the description of our obligation to the Creator Himself. . . . He now continues by commanding us concerning the created things; and he begins with the father, because **the father is like a creator to his progeny**, a participant [as it were] in the making, for God is our first father, while our natural father is our last father. . (Commentary on Ex. 20:12-13) . . .

**Philo** (*On the Decalogue* #106-107, 120; *Special Laws* II #225)::

This commandment [of filial piety] He placed on the border-line between the two groups of five. . . . The reason I consider is this: we see that parents by their nature stand on the border-line between the mortal and immortal sides of existence, the mortal because of their kinship with men and other animals through the perishableness of the body; the immortal because the act of generation assimilates them to God.

Some bolder spirits, glorifying the name of parenthood, say that a father and a mother are in fact gods revealed to sight who copy the Uncreated in His work as the Framer of life. He, they say, is the God or Maker of the world, they of those only whom they have begotten, and how can reverence be rendered to the invisible God by those who show irreverence to the gods who are near at hand and seen by the eye. Parents, in my opinion, are to their children what- God is to the world, since just as He achieved existence for the non-existent, so they in imitation of His power, so far as they are capable, immortalize the race."

**Maimonides, 12th century, Egypt**

*The Book of Judges - Laws of Rebels* 6:1-2

The honoring of father and mother is a weighty positive command; so too, is reverence for them. The Bible attaches to the duty of honoring and revering parents an important equal to that which it attaches to the duty of honoring and revering God.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל' ע"ב - ל"א"ב

תנו רבנן: נאמר "כבד את אביך ואת אמך", ונאמר: "כבד את ה' מהונך" - השווה הכתוב כבוד אב ואם לכבוד המקום;

נאמר: "איש אמו ואביו תיראו", ונאמר: "את ה' אלהיך תירא ואותו תעבוד" - השווה הכתוב מוראת אב ואם למוראת

המקום;

נאמר: "מקלל אביו ואמו מות יומת", ונאמר: "איש איש כי יקלל אלהיו ונשא חטאו" - השווה הכתוב ברכת אב ואם לברכת

המקום; אבל בהכאה ודאי אי אפשר, וכן בדין ששלשתן שותפין בו.

תנו רבנן: **שלשה שותפין הן באדם** - הקדוש ברוך הוא ואביו ואמו;

בזמן שאדם מכבד את אביו ואת אמו, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא מעלה אני עליהם כאילו דרתי ביניהם וכבדוני.

תניא רבי אומר: גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שבן מכבד את אמו יותר מאביו, מפני שמשדלתו בדברים; לפיכך הקדים הקדוש ברוך הוא כיבוד אב לכיבוד אם.

וגלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שהבן מתיירא מאביו יותר מאמו, מפני שמלמדו תורה; לפיכך הקדים הקדוש ברוך הוא מורא האם למורא האב.

תני תנא קמיה דרב נחמן: בזמן שאדם מצער את אביו ואת אמו, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא יפה עשיתי שלא דרתי ביניהם, שאלמלי דרתי ביניהם ציערוני.

אמר ר' יצחק כל העובר עבירה בסתר כאילו דוחק רגלי שכינה, שנאמר: "כה אמר ה' השמים כסאי והארץ הדום רגלי"; אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: אסור לאדם שיהלך ארבע אמות בקומה זקופה, שנא': "מלא כל הארץ כבודו". רב הונא בריה דרב יהושע לא מסגי ארבע אמות בגילוי הראש; אמר שכינה למעלה מראשי".

## A Three Way Partnership in Parenting

### Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30b-31a:

"Our Rabbis taught: It is said *Honor your father and thy mother*<sup>1</sup>; and it is also said, *Honor the Lord with your substance*<sup>2</sup>; thus the Tanakh assimilates the honor due to parents to that of the Omnipresent.

It is said, *You shall fear every man his mother, and his father*<sup>3</sup>; and it is also said, *The Lord your God you shall fear, and him You shall serve*<sup>4</sup>; thus the Tanakh assimilates the fear of parents to the fear of God.

It is said, *And he that curses his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death*<sup>5</sup>, and it is also said *Whosoever curses his God shall bear his sin*<sup>6</sup>; thus the Tanakh assimilates the blessing<sup>7</sup> of parents to that of the Omnipresent. But in respect of striking, it is certainly impossible<sup>8</sup>.

All this is but logical<sup>9</sup>, since the three<sup>10</sup> are partners in the child.

Our Rabbis taught: There are three partners in man, the Holy One, blessed be He, the father, and the mother.

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<sup>1</sup> Ex. XX 12.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. III, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Lev. XIX, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. VI, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ex. XXI, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Lev. XXIV, 15.

<sup>7</sup> A euphemism for cursing.

<sup>8</sup> To assimilate them, for the Almighty cannot be struck.

<sup>9</sup> That parents should be likened to the Almighty.

<sup>10</sup> God, father and mother.

When a man honors his father and his mother, the Holy One, blessed be He, says, I ascribe (merit) to them as though I had dwelt among them and they had honored Me’.

A tanna recited before R. Nahman: When a man vexes his father and his mother, the Holy One, blessed be He, says, ‘I did right in not dwelling among them for had I dwelt among them, they would have vexed Me’.

R Isaac said: He who transgresses in secret is as though he pressed the feet of the *Shechinah* for it is written, *Thus says the Lord, The Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool*<sup>11</sup>. R. Joshua son of Levi said: One may not walk four cubits with haughty mien, for it is said, *the whole earth is full of His glory*<sup>12</sup>. R. Huna son of R. Joshua would not walk four cubits bareheaded, saying, the *Shechinah* is above my head.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"ב

רב יוסף: כי הוה שמע קל כרעא דאמיה, אמר איקום מקמי שכינה דאתיא".

When **R. Joseph** heard his mother's footsteps he would say "I will arise before the approaching *Shechinah* (Divine Presence)".

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<sup>11</sup> Isa. LXVI, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Isa. VI, 3.



### III. The Parental Obligations: Biblical and Rabbinic

#### Genesis XVII 9-13

**ט** וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָהָם, וְאַתָּה אֶת-בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמַר--אֶתָּה וְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרָיִךְ, לְדֹרֹתֶם. **י** זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ, בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם, וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ, אַחֲרָיִךְ: הַמּוֹל לָכֶם, כָּל-זָכָר. **יא** וְנִמְלַתֶם, אֶת בֶּשֶׂר עַרְלַתְכֶם; וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית, בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם. **יב** וּבֶן-שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים, יְמוֹל לָכֶם כָּל-זָכָר--לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: יֶלֶד בַּיִת--וּמִקְנֵת-כֶּסֶף מִכַּל בֵּן-נֹכַר, אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזַּרְעֲךָ הוּא. **יג** הַמּוֹל יְמוֹל יֶלֶד בֵּיתְךָ, וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף; וְהָיְתָה בְּרִיתִי בְּבֶשֶׂרְכֶם, לְבְרִית עוֹלָם.

*“9 And God said unto Abraham: 'And as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. 10 This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant between Me and you. 12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner, that is not of your seed. 13 He that is born in your house, and he that is bought with your money, must needs be circumcised; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant”.*

#### Deuteronomy VI 4-7

**ד** שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד. **ה** וְאֵהָבֶתָּ, אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ. **ו** וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם--עַל-לִבְבְּךָ. **ז** וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ, וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם, בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.

*4 “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 And you shalt love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; 7 and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shalt talk of them when thou sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you arise”*

#### Deuteronomy XI 18-19

**יח** וְשִׁמַּתֶם אֶת-דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהֵי, עַל-לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל-נַפְשְׁכֶם; וְקִשְׁרַתֶם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יְדְּכֶם, וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם. **יט** וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם, לְדַבֵּר בָם, בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.

*“18 Therefore shall you shall lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind*

them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for signs between your eyes. **19** And you shall teach them your children, talking of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up”

## **SEVEN DUTIES OF PARENTS TO THE NEXT GENERATION**

### Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 29a

“Our Rabbis taught: The father is bound in respect to his son to (1) circumcise him, (2) redeem him, (3) teach him Torah, (4) take a wife for him, and (5) teach him a craft.

R. Judah says: Whoever doesn’t teach his son a craft, teaches him to rob.

And some say [Rabbi Akiba], (6) even to teach him to swim.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says, (7) even to teach him *yishuv hamedina* = statecraft to govern or settle a new *polis* (Mekhilta Masechet Pascha Section 18 on Ex. 13:8 – *you shall teach your child*)

### תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף כט/א

"תנו רבנן האב חייב בבנו למולו ולפדותו וללמדו תורה ולהשיאו אשה וללמדו אומנות וי"א אף להשיטו במים רבי יהודה אומר כל שאינו מלמד את בנו אומנות מלמדו ליסטות".

## **PARENTS AS TEACHERS**

### **My Father taught me the 12 Commandments**

**By Yehuda Amichai**

My father was a god and did not know it. He gave me  
The ten commandments neither in thunder nor in fury; neither in fire nor in cloud  
But rather in gentleness and love. And he added caresses and kind words  
And he added “I beg you,” and “please.” And he sang “*Shamor/keep*” and “*Zachor/remember*” [the Shabbat]

In a single melody and he pleaded and cried quietly between one utterance and the next,

Do not take the name of God in vain, do not take it, not in vain,

I beg you, do not bear false witness against your neighbor. And he hugged me tightly

And whispered in my ear

Do not steal. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. And he put the palms of his

Open hands

On my head with the Yom Kippur blessing. Honor, love, in order that your days might

Be long

On the earth. And my father’s voice was white like the hair on his head.

Later on he turned his face to me one last time

Like on the day when he died in my arms and said, “I want to add

Two to the ten commandments:

The eleventh commandment—“Thou shalt not change.”  
And the twelfth commandment—“Thou must surely change.”  
So said my father and then he turned from me and walked off  
Disappearing into his strange distances.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Steve Sager translations of Yehuda Amichai’s *Patuach Sagur Patuach*, p.58, #4, untitled in the original

## IV. Responsibility and Conflict: Ethical and Halakhic Dilemmas of Honoring and Respecting One's Parent

### A. TALMUDIC THOUGHTS: THE HARDEST MITZVAH

1. **R. Simeon b. Yohai** said: ..... the most difficult of all mitzvot is "Honor your father and your mother....."

(*Tanhuma, Ekev, 2*)

מדרש תנחומא (בובר) פרשת עקב סימן ג

תני ר' שמעון בן יוחאי - שתי מצוות גילה הקב"ה מתן שכרה, אלו הן קלה שבקלות חמורה שבחמורות, קלה שבקלות שלח תשלח את האם ואת הבנים תקח לך למען ייטב לך והארכת ימים (דברים כב ז), חמורה שבחמורות כבד את אביך ואת אמך וגו' למען יארכיך ימיך וגו' (שם/דברים/ה טז),

2. **Mishnah**: He who performs *a single mitzvah* receives much good, his life is lengthened, and he inherits the land..... R. Jose b. Bon said: "This refers to one who selected one mitzvah and never violated it all his life". Which mitzvah is this? Mar Ukba said: "Honoring your parents."

(*Talmud, Kiddushin 1:9*)

3. **R. Yohanan** said: "Blessed is he who never set eyes on his parents".

**Rashi** explained: "It is impossible to honor them adequately, yet one is punished for failure to do so." When R. Yohanan was conceived, his father died; when he was born, his mother died.

(*T.B. Kiddushin 31b*)

. אמר רבי יוחנן: אשרי מי שלא חמאן. רבי יוחנן, כי עברתו אמו מת אביו, ילדתו - מתה אמו וכן אביי. קידושין דף לא.ב.

4. **R. Ze'era** was wont to say, regretfully: "Would that I had a mother and father (alive) so that I might honor them and inherit Paradise". After he heard two stories about Rabbi Tarfon and R. Ishmael and their mothers, he said: "Thank God that I have neither mother nor father - I could not do as R. Tarfon did, nor could I accept what R. Ishmael accepted. (Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin 20b) (*T.Y. Kiddushin 1:7*)

#### 5. **R. Sa'adiah Gaon, 9<sup>th</sup> century, Babylonia**

..... The reward for filial piety is "*length of days*"..... because it is destined to occur that **the parents will sometimes live for a long time with their sons, and become a heavy burden upon the sons, who weary of this "honor"**. Therefore, the reward specified for this mitzvah is "so that your days be long". In other words, you must honor your parents and *live with them* and if you occasionally regret their longevity, know that you regret your own life"

6. **R. Isaiah Horowitz** (*Shnei Luhot HaBrit* 303a) the 16th-century mystic comments on Joseph's willingness to abide by Jacob's wish that he search out his brothers though he knew that they hated him to the death, and concludes that Joseph had to obey Jacob because "**a man must sacrifice his life to do the will of his father.**"

## B. Moralist MUSINGS: THE YOKE OF NACHAS?

1. The dying **Tobit** instructs his son:  
... Do not despise your mother, but honor her all the days of your life; do good to her and do not sadden her. Remember my son that she experienced many dangers on your behalf while you were in her womb.”  
(Tobit 4:3-4)

### 2. Rabbi Kalonymus, medieval Germany

My son, I give you one command, which I declare you must fulfill with great and powerful zeal. Honor your honored mother with the greatest honor, submit to her with the greatest submission and revere her greatly. Do not reject her commands or do something of which she disapproves, in either important or unimportant matters. For truly no one loves you more faithfully than she does. All the more should you behave this way, since the Torah commands you in the honor of your mother and her reverence.

○ קאלונימוס (מובא אצל שמחה אסף, "לתולדות החינוך בישראל")

### 3. R. Jonah Gerondi, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Spanish talmudist and moralist

Know that the entire world was created for the glory of God.... Now if one wishes to honor God... let him honor his father and mother. The Rabbis said: "When a man honors his father and mother, I count it as though I lived among them and they honored Me".

Now the essence of the honor of parents is to give them pleasure, whether in words or in deeds. And he who pains them by his speech bears an insupportable sin..... (Iggeret ha-Teshuva)

○ אגרת התשובה "לר' יונה גירונדי

### 4. Book of Jubilees 34 (200 BCE): Yom Kippur - The Fast for Paining our Parents

It is the lie to their father for which the Children of Israel must atone with a scapegoat on Yom Kippur because the brothers cruelly misled their father by slaughtering a goat on Joseph's tunic so as to make it look like Joseph's blood and by shredding the tunic with a blade to make it appear that a wild animal had torn him apart:

12. And the sons of Jacob slaughtered a kid [goat], and dipped the coat of Joseph in the blood, and sent (it) to Jacob their father on the tenth of the seventh month [the date of Yom Kippur].

13. And he mourned all that night, for they had brought it to him in the evening, and he became feverish with mourning for his death, and he said: "An evil beast has devoured Joseph"; and all the members of his house [mourned with him that day, and they] were grieving and mourning with him all that day. 14. And his sons and his daughter rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted for his son. 15. And on that day Bilhah heard that Joseph had perished, and she died mourning him, .. and Dinah also, his daughter, died after Joseph had perished. And there came these three mournings upon Israel in one month. 16. And they buried Bilhah over against the tomb of Rachel, and Dinah also, his daughter, they buried there. 17. And he mourned for Joseph one year, and did not cease, for he said "Let me go down to the grave mourning for my son."

18. For this reason it is ordained for the children of Israel that they should afflict themselves on the tenth of the seventh month-- on the day that the news which made him weep for Joseph came to Jacob his father--that they should make atonement for themselves thereon with a young goat [the scapegoat] on the tenth of the seventh month.( Book of Jubilees 34)

### 5. The Pain of Raising Children - *Ogmat Nefesh*

William Shakespeare's *King Lear*: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."

## C. THE CODE OF LAW: RESPECT YOUR PARENTS -

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"ב

"תנו רבנן: איזהו מורא, ואיזהו כיבוד? מורא - לא עומד במקומו, ולא יושב במקומו, ולא סותר את דבריו, ולא מכריעו. כיבוד - מאכיל ומשקה, מלביש ומכסה, מכניס ומוציא".

רמב"ם יד החזקה - הלכות ממרים פרק ו, הלכה ג'

**אי זהו מורא** ואי זהו כבוד מורא לא עומד במקומו ולא יושב במקומו ולא סותר את דבריו ולא מכריע את דבריו ולא יקרא לו בשמו לא בחייו ולא במותו אלא אומר אבא מרי היה שם אביו או שם רבו כשם אחרים משנה את שמו יראה לי שאין נוהר בכך אלא בשם שהוא פלא שאין הכל דשין בו אבל השמות שקוראים בהן את העם כגון אברהם יצחק ויעקב משה וכיוצא בהן בכל לשון ובכל זמן קורא בהן לאחרים שלא בפניו ואין בכך כלום.

**אי זהו כבוד** מאכיל ומשקה מלביש ומכסה משל האב ואם אין ממון לאב ויש ממון לבן כופין אותו וזן אביו ואמו כפי מה שהוא יכול ומוציא ומכניס ומשמשו בשאר הדברים שהשמים משמשים בהן את הרב ועומד מפניו כדרך שהוא עומד מפני רבו :

**Maimonides, 12th century, Egypt** *The Book of Judges - Laws of Rebels* 6:1-2

**What does reverence imply?** Reverence requires that the son should not stand in the place in which his father usually stands, or sit in his place, or contradict his words, or decide against his opinion, or call him, living or dead, by his name. When referring to his father, he should say "my Father, my teacher".

**What does honoring parents imply?** It means providing them with food and drink, clothing and covering, the expense to be borne by the father. If a parent is poor and the child is in a position to take care of his parents, he is compelled to do so. He must support his parents in accordance with his means, conduct his parent in and out and perform such personal services as disciples perform for their teacher. The child rises before the parents as one rises before one's teacher.

**Religious Nobility** [*Edelkeit*, Ben Torah] by Susannah Heschel  
(Hadassah Magazine, June-July 2002, page 17)

All of us struggle with the problem of how to transmit our commitment to Judaism to the next generation.

My father, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, used to say,

"I have a daughter. I love her dearly. And I would like her to obey the commandments of the Torah. I would like her to revere me as her father. And I ask myself the question again and again, What is there about me that would be worthy of her reverence? Unless I live a life that would deserve her reverence, I would make it impossible for her to live a life of Judaism."

. My father's father died when he was 9, yet while my father was deprived of a father, he spoke of being surrounded by Jews who inspired his reverence [*morah*] and emulation, people of spiritual nobility.

"In my childhood and in my youth I was the recipient of many blessings, I lived in the presence of quite a number of extraordinary persons I could revere. And just as I lived as a child in their

presence, their presence continues to live in me as an adult."

Like my father, I was privileged to have been exposed to people of religious nobility: my father, my uncle and a few other people, some of whom I met only very briefly. Each left me with a sense of awe that a human being is capable of such extraordinary spiritual refinement.

Jewish texts tell us that human beings are made in the image of God and it is our duty to imitate God in our lives. What does this mean? To be a reminder of God, my father wrote, means that our imperative is to live our lives in such a way that if someone looks at us, they are reminded of God. Such are the people of spiritual nobility who surrounded my father.

Such was his life, too. The opposite of good is not evil, he wrote, the opposite of good is indifference. When he looked at human beings, even the most dissolute, he saw the Divine image. For him, it was impossible to be indifferent to the suffering in our society caused by social inequality and the civilian tragedies incurred by war. I saw him in pain, sleepless and agonizing over the miseries of human beings.

## D. What is *Morah* ? The Debate

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף לא עמוד ב

ת"ר: איזהו מורא, ואיזהו כיבוד? מורא - לא עומד במקומו, ולא יושב במקומו, ולא סותר את דבריו, ולא מכריעו;

רש"י מסכת קידושין דף לא עמוד ב

לא עומד במקומו - במקום המיוחד לאביו לעמוד שם בסוד זקנים עם חבריו בעצה.  
ולא מכריעו - אם היה אביו וחכם אחר חלוקין בדבר הלכה לא יאמר נראים דברי פלוני.

בית הבחירה למאירי מסכת קידושין דף לא עמוד ב

מורא אינו עומד בפניו ר"ל עד שיתן לו רשות לעמוד ולא יושב במקומו ולא יסתור את דבריו ופירשו בו דוקא בפניו וכן אם אביו חולק עם אחרים לא מכריעו בפניו

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה הלכות כבוד אב ואם סימן רמ סעיף ב

איזה מורא, לא יעמוד במקומו המיוחד לו לעמוד שם בסוד זקנים עם חבריו, או מקום המיוחד לו להתפלל;  
ולא יושב במקום המיוחד לו להסב בביתו; ולא סותר את דבריו ולא מכריע את דבריו בפניו  
אפילו לומר נראין דברי אבא; ולא יקראנו בשמו, לא בחייו ולא במותו, אלא אומר: אבא מארי.

"Do not stand in his place"

"

- **Rashi:** his father's special place of authority among his cohort of wise men (*sod zekenim*) determining strategy (*eitza*)
- **Rabbi Meir Halevi** – Ramah: his special seat when reclining at home.

"Do not contradict/undermine (*soter*) his words (pronouncements)" –

"Do not decide who is right in his words (arguments)"

- **Rashi:** Do overrule him when there is a dispute about halakha between your father and another

scholar, nor shall you take sides against him saying: "I agree with the other scholar."

- **Rabbi Meir Halevi – Ramah:** [You may not even say "I agree" not even to concur with one's father's words lest it appear as if he was deciding whether his father was right.

- **Rav Yosef Karo** says: The son may not disagree with his father even in private when face to face with his father. [But by implication one may disagree when father is not present.]

But the **Siftei Kohen** says: It seems to me that even when not in one's father's presence one may not undermine his words. (Sh. Arukh YD 240:2)

ערוך השולחן יורה דעה הלכות כבוד אב ואם סימן רמ סעיף יב  
ואיך אפשר לומר שאין לחלוק בדינים? על אביו הלא תורת ד' היא והיא תורת אמת ואין מחניפין בה ואפילו בפניו יכול  
הבן לפלפל עם האב ולהקשות ולתרוץ ולהעמיד ההלכה על מכונה והרבה בגמ' שהבן הקשה לאביו ותרץ לו וכך דרכה  
של תורה

- **Rabbi Y'hiel Mikhel Epstein** (Arukh HaShlukhan YD 240: 12-13):

How could it possibly be that one is not to argue and disagree with one's father legal rulings?! Isn't the Torah God's, the Torah of truth, in which there is no place for hypocritical praise. So face to face a son may argue (*pilpul*) and raise difficulties (*kushiot*) and resolve questions (*terirutz*) and to establish the halakha on solid foundations. In the Gemara we find many cases of sons disputing with their fathers and that is the Way of Torah."

**Parent Educators and Children Disciples as the Warriors of Torah in Hate and in Love:**

#### קידושין דף ל.ב.

ואומר: (תהלים קכז) כחצים ביד גבור כן בני הנעורים, ואומר: (תהלים קכ) חצי גבור שנונים, ואומר:  
(תהלים מה) חציך שנונים עמים תחתיד יפלו, ואומר: (תהלים קכז) אשרי הגבר אשר מלא את אשפתו  
מהם לא יבושו כי ידברו את אויבים בשער.

מאי את אויבים בשער? אמר רבי חייא בר אבא: אפי"י האב ובנו, הרב ותלמידו, שעוסקין בתורה בשער  
אחד נעשים אויבים זה את זה, ואינם זזים משם עד שנעשים אוהבים זה את זה, שנאמר: (במדבר כא) את  
זהב בסופה, אל תקרי בסופה אלא בסופה

Rabbi Hiya bar Abba said: A parent and child, a rabbi and disciple, when involved in studying the same topic in Torah may become like enemies battling one another. However they persist on this point and do not disengage until they again become loving friends to one another. That is how we might understand the connection between the obscure verses in Psalms?? "They will not be ashamed to speak as enemies in the gate of the city" and in Numbers 21:14 "In the end they will love."(TB Kiddushin 30a)



## TO RESPECT: HOW FAR IS TOO FAR? The Parent as King of Kings versus the Honor of Growing Child

### *Patria Potestas: The Roman Patriarchy: A Model to Emulate?*

When R. **Dimi** came, he said : He (Dama son of Nethinah) was once wearing a gold embroidered silken cloak and sitting among Roman nobles, when his mother came, tore it off from him, struck him on the head, and spat in his face, yet he did not shame her. (Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin 20a)<sup>14</sup>

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"א

"רב דימי אמר: פעם אחת היה (דמא בן נתינה) לבוש סירקון של זהב, והיה יושב בין גדולי רומי, ובאתה אמו וקרעתו ממנו, וטפחה לו על ראשו וירקה לו בפניו - ולא הכלימה".

### The Divine King of Kings as Model of Patriarchy

**רמב"ם הלכות ממרים פרק ו הלכה ז**

עד היכן הוא כיבוד אב ואם, אפילו נטלו כיס של זהובים שלו והשליכו בפניו לים לא יכלימם ולא יצער בפניהם ולא יכעוס כנגדם אלא יקבל גזירת הכתוב וישתוק,

ועד היכן מוראן אפילו היה לובש בגדים חמודות ויושב בראש בפני הקהל ובא אביו ואמו וקרעו בגדיו והכוהו בראשו וירקו בפניו לא יכלימם אלא ישתוק ויירא ויפחד ממלך מלכי המלכים שצוהו בכך, שאילו מלך בשר ודם גזר עליו דבר שהוא מצער יתר מזה לא היה יכול לפרסם בדבר, קל וחומר למי שאמר והיה העולם כרצונו.

### Maimonides, 12th century, Egypt

*The Book of Judges - Laws of Rebels 6*

#### To what lengths should the duty of revering them go?

Even if he is attired in costly garments, presiding over the congregation, and his parents come and rend his garments, strike him on the head, and spit in his face, he must not shame them. It behooves him **to remain silent, to fear and revere the King, King of kings**, who has thus decreed. For if a mortal king were to issue against him a decree, even more exasperating in character, he would be powerless to rebel against it, all the more so if the author of the decree is He who spoke and the world came into being in accordance with His will.

#### To what lengths should the duty of honoring parents go?

Even were they to take a purse of his, full of gold, and cast it in his presence into the sea, he must not shame them, manifest grief in their presence, or display any anger, but accept the divine decree without demur.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"א

שאלו את ר"א: עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם?

אמר להם: כדי שיטול ארנקי ויזרקנו לים בפניו, ואינו מכלימו

<sup>14</sup> "An [adult] son at his father's table [on seder night] is obligated to recline" (TB Pesachim on mishna 10:1) because as Rashbam notes: the son is not so subordinate to his father, even though a disciple may not recline before his master nor may a wife recline before her husband – unless she is considered an important woman in her own right.

## Restraining Parental Prerogative: In the Name of Human Dignity or Political Pragmatism?

רמב"ם הלכות ממרים פרק ו הלכה ח

אף על פי שבכך נצטוינו אסור לאדם להכביד עולו על בניו ולדקדק בכבודו עמהם שלא יביאם לידי מכשול, אלא ימחול ויתעלם שהאב שמחל על כבודו כבודו מחול.

Although children are commanded to go the above mentioned lengths, **the parent is forbidden to impose too heavy a yoke upon them**, to be too exacting with them in matters pertaining to his honor, lest he cause them to stumble. The parent should forgive them and shut his eyes; for a father has the right to forego the honor due him.

רמב"ם הלכות ממרים פרק ו הלכה ט

והמכה בנו גדול מנדין אותו שהרי ו הוא עובר על ולפני עור לא תתן מכשול.

If a parent beats a grown-up child, he is placed under the ban, because he transgresses the negative command *do not put a stumbling block before the blind* (Leviticus 19:14)

## Parents and Political Authority: The Politics of Patriarchy and Religion

**Deuteronomy: The Wisdom of the Ancestors:** "Ask your father, and he will tell you" (Dt. 32:7)

**Leo Strauss:** "The first man who uttered a word like 'father' . . . was the first political philosopher." (*What is Political Philosophy?* 12-13)

### **Plato:**

"When the right regulation of private households within a society is neglected, it is idle to expect the foundations of public law to be secure." (Laws 790b)

### **The Mishnah:**

These are the deeds whose fruits are enjoyed in this world while the principal remains for their doer in the world to come: honoring one's father and mother." (Mishna Peah 1:1)

### **Maimonides** comments:

. . . All the mitzvot fall, at the outset, into one of two categories; some mitzvot center on the individual and on his relation with God, such as the commands to wear *tzizit* and *tefillin*, to observe the Sabbath, and to avoid idolatry. Other mitzvot have as their aim **the establishment of proper relations between men**, such as the bans on robbery, fraud, hatred, vengeance, the command to love one another and . . . to honor one's parents and one's teachers, for they are the authors of all that is. . . . If one has fulfilled those **mitzvot that aid in the establishment of stable social relationships**, he is rewarded in the world to come for his fulfilling a mitzvah, and benefits in this world for his proper behavior with his fellow men, since if he pursues this path and his neighbor behaves similarly; he too will share in the (common) good." (Laws of Meilah 8:8)

### **Maimonides:**

"He who strikes his father or whose mother is killed on account of his great audacity, and because he undermines the constitution of the family, which is the foundation of the state." (*The Guide III*; see placement of Laws of Honoring Parents in Laws of Rebels in Book of Judges)

### **Confucius**

Master Yu said: Those who in private life behave well toward their parents and elder brothers, in public life seldom show a disposition to resist the authority of their superiors. And as for such men starting a revolution, no instance of it has ever occurred. (*Analects of Confucius*, I, 2)

### **Plato**

Can you deny . . . that you were our child and servant, both you and your ancestors? And if this is so, do you imagine that what is right for us is equally right for you? . . . . **You did not have equality of rights with your father . . . to enable you to retaliate. . . . You were not allowed to answer back. .**

. . Do you expect to have such a license against your country and its laws? . . . . do you not realize that you are even more bound to respect and placate the anger of your country than your father's anger? That if you cannot persuade your country, you must do whatever it orders?  
(Plato, *Crito*, 50e-51c)

### **Religion, Tradition and Parental Authority**

**R. Levi ben Gershom (Ralbag)** (14th century) states:

. . . This [respect for parents] will ensure that succeeding generations will accept the teachings of their elders, generation after generation, and they will all, therefore, be strong in their observance of the Torah of the Lord. . . . Also, this will bring the home to its proper perfection, which is the first step toward **the perfection of the state**. And this perfection of the state encourages the agreement among men, so that the young accept the teachings of their masters this will be a factor in **the continued loyalty of Israel to the Torah** of the Lord, generation after generation. (Commentary on "Honor your Father" - Ex.20)

**R. Isaac Abarbanel** (15th century):

The purpose of this mitzvah is to raise the importance of the traditions possessed by parents in men's eyes, so that they believe in them and rely upon them. And since the thrust of this command is to create belief in the tradition of earlier generations, without which the Torah could not exist, therefore this command is found among the five divine commands on the first tablet.  
(Commentary on "Honor your Father" - Ex.20)

## **THE CHILD'S LIFE DECISIONS AND PARENTAL PREFERENCES: DILEMMAS AND RESPONSA**

### **10. Rabenu Asher , 14<sup>th</sup> C. Spain (as reported by his son Rabbi Yaacov) - On Controlling one's Child's Friends**

(Question) You have asked about a father who forbade his son to speak to a certain Jew, or to pardon him... until a specified date. The son wishes to become reconciled with the individual, but hesitates because of his father's command....

(Response) Know that it is forbidden to hate any Jew, unless he is seen violating the law. The father who commanded his son to hate a man does not have the right to command him to violate the words of the Torah, which says, "I am the Lord" - reverence of Me precedes reverence for your parent". Furthermore, the father is thus violating the law himself and not behaving in this matter as a member of the Jewish people ought to, and he need not be honored in this matter.

### **11. R. Meir of Rothenberg, 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany**

#### **On Going to Israel without Parental Approval**

You have asked : "Can a father prevent his son from going to the land of Israel, since we rule that it is a *mitzvah* to go up to the land, and it is stated, "I am the Lord", that wherever a parental request conflicts with a *mitzvah* the parent is not to be obeyed, for the honor of God takes precedence over the honoring of parents....." [But a son who vowed to study in the Land of Israel was told to cancel both vow and voyage when it was discovered that his real purpose was to abandon his widowed mother].

### **12. R. Israel Isserlein, 15<sup>th</sup> century Germany**

#### **On Choosing your Teacher**

A student wished to leave his home to study Torah with a certain teacher under whose guidance he was sure he would make great progress; and his father objects strongly, saying, "I know, my son, that if you go you shall cause me great distress, for I shall constantly worry about you, lest you have been imprisoned or become the subject of false accusations, as is common in that place....."

R. Isserlein rules that the son need not heed his father's declaration.

### **13. R. Israel Isserlein**

#### **On Choosing your Shul**

"If one wishes to worship in a synagogue where the congregants pray with greater *kavvanah* (devotion) and his mother objects, he need not obey her".

### **14. R. Elijah Caspali of Crete**

#### **On Choosing a Spouse**

A father in the Greek town of Patras forbade his son to marry the woman whom "his soul desired". Does the son's filial responsibility demand compliance? R. Elijah Caspali of Crete ruled it did not:

Though the command of filial honor and reverence is inexpressibly great.... Nonetheless it appears in my humble opinion that if the girl about whom you ask is a proper wife for the aforementioned Reuben - that is, there is in her or in her family no blemish - then the command of filial honor and reverence is irrelevant and the son is not to abandon her so as to fulfill his father's command.

For it is nearly certain that this father virtually commands his son to violate the Torah ..... For we see (in the Talmud) that a man ought not to marry a woman who does not please him.

So that when the father commands his son not to marry this woman, it is as though he commands him to violate the Torah; and it is well known that the son is not to obey his father in such cases....

Now, if we were to decide that a son is obliged to obey his parents and marry though his heart is not in the match, we should cause the growth of hatred and strife in the home, which is not the way of our holy Torah. Most certainly in this case, where he loves her. Indeed, we can cite in this situation: "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it...*" (*Song of Songs 8:7*). Were he to marry another whom he does not desire, his entire life would be painful and bitter.

Moreover, **we may also argue that the Torah obliges the son to filial honor and reverence only in matters that affect the parent's physical well-being and support..... but in matters that do not affect the parent in these areas, we may say that the Torah does not oblige the son to be obedient.** Therefore, the son is not obliged by the rubrics of reverence and honor to accept his father's command in the matter of marriage.

All this is according to the letter of the law (*shurat ha-din*). However, so far as behavior beyond the letter of the law (*lifnim mishurat ha-din*) is concerned, the son should not do anything - whether important or not - without the agreement of his parents.

And it is proper for the son to subdue his own desires as much as possible so as to fulfill the desires of his parents....But if he sees that it is impossible for him to do so, let him do as seems good and proper to him in the matter of his own marriage; for God considers marriage to depend upon the will of the son, as I have explained.

## E. The "Wicked Parent" and the Irresponsible Parent: The End of the Offspring's Responsibility?

### Is Parental Authority Conditional?

**Epictetus**, *Enchiridion* #30:

"Duties are universally measured by relations. Is a man a father? The precept is to take care of him, to yield to him in all things, to submit when he is reproachful, when he inflicts blows. But suppose that he is a bad father. Were you then by nature made a kin to a good father? No, but to a father."

**John Locke** says: "These obligations to parents and the degree of what is required of children may be varied by the different care and kindness, trouble and expense, which is often employed upon one child more than another." (John Locke, 1690 #70).

**Sir William Blackstone** disagrees: "The law does not hold the tie of nature to be dissolved by any misbehavior of the parent; and therefore a child .. is equally compellable, if of sufficient ability, to maintain and provide for a wicked and unnatural progenitor, as for one who has shown the greater tenderness and parental piety." (Blackstone 1783 I 16). ("Without me they would not have existed at all" - Sidgwick 1874).

**רמב"ם** הלכות ממרים פרק ו הלכה יא

הממזר חייב בכבוד אביו ומוראו אע"פ שהוא פטור על מכתו וקללתו עד שיעשה תשובה,  
אפילו היה אביו רשע ובעל עבירות מכבדו ומתירא ממנו,

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה הלכות כבוד אב ואם סימן רמ סעיף יח

ממזר חייב בכבוד אביו ובמוראו. אפילו היה אביו רשע ובעל עבירות, מכבדו ומתירא ממנו.

הגה: וי"א דאינו מחוייב לכבד אביו רשע, אא"כ עשה תשובה  
(טור ומרדכי פ' כיצד ובהגהות מיימוני פ"ו דהלכות ממרים).

Maimonides: Rebels 6:

A **bastard** is bound to honor and reverence his father, although he is not culpable if he strikes or curses him, unless the latter has repented.

Even if one's father is a wicked man, a habitual transgressor, it is the duty of the son to honor and reverence him.

R. Joseph Karo (reproduces the view of Alfasi and Maimonides and Sefer Hinuch):

Code: A bastard is obliged to honor and fear his father; even if his father is an evil-doer and a violator of the law he must honor him and stand in awe of him.

(Shulhan Arukh 240:18)

R. Moses Isserles (apparently reproduces that of Rashi and R. Tam and Rabbenu Asher):  
Gloss: And some say that one is not obliged to honor one's wicked father unless he repents.  
(Shulhan Arukh 240:18)

### .EXODUS 22: 27

**You shall not revile the judges, nor curse the ruler of your people.**

כז כֹּזְמֵי אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִקְלַל וְנָשִׂיא בְעַמְּךָ לֹא תֹאָר:

### EXODUS .21

15 And he who strikes his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.

16 And he who steals a man, and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

17 And he who curses his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

טו וּמַכָּה אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ מוֹת יוּמָת: יז וּמְקַלֵּל אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ מוֹת יוּמָת:

“Come and hear: If one was going forth to be executed, and his son came and smote and cursed him, he is liable; if a stranger did this, he is exempt. . . .

A tanna of the school of R. Ishmael taught: "For no offense may a son be appointed an agent to smite or curse his father, exempting if the father is a *mesit* [he who incites people to worship idols]." (TB Sanhedrin 85a-b)

ספר החינוך מצוה מח שלא להכות אב ואם

שלא יכה הבן האב והאם. ואפילו אם הם יכו אותו הכאה רבה בכל זמן שלא ישאו נפשם להמיתו, שנאמר [שמות כ"א, ט"ו] ומכה אביו ואמו מות יומת .

משרשי המצוה, ליסר הנבלים והמוסרים שהרימו יד במי שהביאם לעולם ברצון האל ועשה להם כמה טובות, ומלך במשפט יעמיד ארץ .

דיני המצוה, ודין גר שהורתו שלא בקדושה שאין חייב בשניהם, ודין גר - שאסור לו להכות אביו גוי דרבנן, ודין מי שהיו אביו ואמו רשעים גמורים מפורסמים - שפטור על הכאתו עד שיעשו תשובה, אבל אסור הוא מכל מקום אפילו קודם תשובה, ולכל אין נעשה הבן שליח בית דין ליסר אביו חוץ ממסית.

### Sefer Hinuch #48 Negative Mitzvot

“A son is not to strike his father or mother even if they give him a great beating as long as they are not moved to kill him, as its says: *One who beats his father and mother shall be put to death*” (Ex. 21:15).

The convert is prohibited from beating his non-Jewish father by Rabbinic enactment.

If one's father and mother are completely and publicly wicked, then they are exempt from the punishment of those who beat their parents until the parents do teshuvah, however they are anyway prohibited from beating them even before they do teshuvah.

Thus a son may not be appointed by the court to flog his father unless he is a *mesit* leading people to idolatry.

## F. The Art of Rebuking One's Parents

### In a Conflict of Authority, God versus Parent, where does the Child stand?

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin, 32a

"Said Samuel to Rab Judah: Keen scholar!<sup>15</sup> Speak not thus to your father.

For it was taught: If one's father is transgressing a precept of the Torah, he must not say to him, 'Father, you transgressed a Biblical precept', but 'Father, it is thus written in the Torah'. 'It is thus written in the Torah' – but he surely grieves him.<sup>16</sup> But he must say to him, 'Father, such and such a verse is written in the Torah'.<sup>17</sup>

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"ב ע"א  
"א"ל שמואל לרב יהודה: שיננא, לא תימא ליה לאבוך הכי,  
דתניא: הרי שהיה אביו עובר על דברי תורה, אל יאמר לו אבא עברת על דברי תורה,  
אלא אומר לו: אבא כך כתוב בתורה, כך כתוב בתורה –  
צעורי קא מצער ליה!  
אלא אומר לו: אבא מקרא כתוב בתורה כך".

רמב"ם הלכות ממרים פרק ו הלכה יב  
ראהו עובר על דברי תורה לא יאמר לו אבא עברת על דברי תורה אלא יאמר לו אבא כתוב בתורה כך וכך  
כאילו הוא שואל ממנו ולא כמזהירו.

Maimonides, Rebels, VI, 11-12

If the son sees his father violate a commandment, he should not say to him, 'Father, you have disregarded a precept of the Torah'. He should say to him, 'Thus and thus is written in the Torah', speaking to him as though he were consulting him, instead of admonishing him'.

If his father orders him to transgress a positive or a negative command set forth in the Bible or even a command which is of rabbinical origin, the son must disregard the order, for it is said: "*Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and Ye shall keep my Sabbaths*" (Lev. XIX, 3), that is, all of you are bound to honor Me.

<sup>15</sup> Others translate: man of long teeth.

<sup>16</sup> For it is the same as telling him that he is transgressing.

<sup>17</sup> Not directly stating the law, but leaving it for his father to understand. This does not shame him.



רמב"ם יד החזקה - הלכות ממרים פרק ו, הלכות י"א – י"ב

(יא) ... ראהו עובר על דברי תורה לא יאמר לו אבא עברת על דברי תורה אלא יאמר לו אבא כתוב בתורה כך וכך כאילו הוא שואל ממנו ולא כמזהירו:

(יב) מי שאמר לו אביו לעבור על דברי תורה בין שאמר לו לעבור על מצות לא תעשה או לבטל מצות עשה אפילו של דבריהם הרי זה לא ישמע לו שנאמר איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתותי תשמורו כולכם חייבין בכבודי:

### **In Conflict between Mother and Father's Wishes, Orders, Needs: Who takes precedence?**

קידושין דף לא.ב.

אמר ליה רב יעקב בר אבוה לאביי: כגון אנא דעד דאתינא מבי רב, אבא מדלי לי כסא ואמא מזגה לי, היכי איעביד? א"ל: מאמך קביל ומאבוך לא תקבל, דכיון דבר תורה הוא חלשה דעתיה.

R. Jacob b. Abbahu asked Abaye: 'I, for instance, for whom my father pours out a cup [of wine] and my mother mixes it on my returning from the school, what am I to do — ? Accept it from your mother, he replied: 'but not from your father; for since he is a scholar, he may feel affronted.'<sup>18</sup>

### **Rebuking One's Parents<sup>19</sup> and Refusing to Support their Corrupt Habits**

#### **A Drunken Father: The First Holocaust Survivor**

Genesis 10: 18- 25

יח ויהיו בני-נח היצאים מן-התבה שם ונקם ונקם הוא אבי כנען: יט ושלשה אלה בני-נח ומאלה נפצה כל-הארץ: כ ויחל נח איש האדמה וישע כרם: כא וישת מן-היין וישכר ויתגל בתוך אהלה: כב וירא הם אבי כנען את ערות אביו ויגד לשני-אחיו בחוץ: כג ויקח שם ונקם את-השמלה וישימו על-שכם שניהם וילכו אחרנית ויכסו את ערות אביהם ופניהם אחרנית וערות אביהם לא ראו: כד וייקץ נח מייגו וידע את אשר-עשה לו בנו הקטן: כה ויאמר ארור כנען עבד עבדים יהיה לאחיו:

ויקרא רבה (וילנא) פרשת שמיני פרשה יב סימן א

<sup>18</sup> Soncino commentary: Am I to permit it, or do I fail in the honour due to them?

Though he loves you and does it willingly, he may feel that his son should not permit a scholar to perform these services for him.

<sup>19</sup> The Zohar (I 164b Vilna) understands Rachel premature death as a punishment for the distress she caused her father by depriving him of his idols, "though her intentions were for the best."

In contradistinction to the famous midrash on Abraham's childhood demolition of his father's idol shop and even though idol worship makes her father wicked and might exempt her from honoring him.

ר' יצחק בר רדיפ' בשם ר' אמי: אמר סוף שהוא מוכר את כלי ביתו ושותה בהן יין  
א"ר אחא: מעשה באחד שהיה מוכר כלי ביתו ושותה בהן יין אמרין בניי' לית הדין אבונן שביק לן כלום אשקיניה  
ושכרוניה ואפקוניה ויתבוניה בחד בית עלם,  
עברין שפיין בתרע בית עלם, שמעון אנגרייא במדינתא פרקין טעוניהון בגו בית עלם ואזלון למחמי קלא במדינתה.  
איתער משנתיה חמא זיקא יהביא לעיל מן רישי' שרא יתיה ויהביתיה בפומיהן  
לבתר שלשה יומין אמרין בנייא לית אנן אזלינן וחזינן מה ההוא אבונן עביד. אזלין ואשכחוניה והא זיקא יהיב בפומיה  
אמרין אוף הכא לא שבק לך ברייך הואיל ויהב לך לית אנן ידעין מה נעבד לך?  
עבדון ביניהון תקנה כל חד וחד הוה משקה ליה חד יומא.

A man was so given to drink that he would sell his household effects to support his habit. His sons, disgusted with this squandering of their eventual patrimony, abducted their father and left him in a cemetery. Simultaneously, some wine merchants, fearing government confiscation of their merchandise, deposited full wine-skins in the same place. The father delightedly discovered the treasure and daily became drunk.

Sometime later the sons returned, only to discover their father drinking away to his heart's content. "Inasmuch as God Himself supplies you with drink, we must behave accordingly," they said; and so "they resolved that each son should supply his father with drink one day (a week)."

(Leviticus Rabbah 12:1)

**G. Freedom and Authority:  
LIFE DECISIONS AND PARENTAL PREFERENCES:  
DILEMMAS AND RESPONSA of an Adult Child's Autonomy**

**The Conflict between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

"*You shall each revere his father and his mother, and keep My sabbaths: I the Lord am your God*" (Leviticus 19:3) and "*You shall each revere . . .*":

Perhaps I might think that one is obliged to obey even if one's father or mother desired that one violate a commandment therefore the Torah says, ". . . *and keep My sabbaths . . .* : you are all required to honor Me." (Sifra Kedoshim 1 #10)

**Rabenu Asher , 14<sup>th</sup> C. Spain (as reported by his son Rabbi Yaacov) - On Controlling one's Child's Friends**

(Question) You have asked about a father who forbade his son to speak to a certain Jew, or to pardon him... until a specified date. The son wishes to become reconciled with the individual, but hesitates because of his father's command....

(Response) Know that it is forbidden to hate any Jew, unless he is seen violating the law. The father who commanded his son to hate a man does not have the right to command him to violate the words of the Torah, which says, "I am the Lord" - reverence of Me precedes reverence for your parent".

Furthermore, the father is thus violating the law himself and not behaving in this matter as a member of the Jewish people ought to, and he need not be honored in this matter.

(Rabbi Yaacov Baal HaTurim YD 240)

טור יורה דעה הלכות כבוד אב ואם סימן רמ

אמר לו אביו לעבור על דברי תורה בין שאומר לעבור על מצוה לא תעשה או שאומר לו לבטל מצוה עשה אפי' מצוה של דבריהם - לא ישמע לו.

וכתב א"א הרא"ש ז"ל בתשובה: האב שצוה לבנו שלא ידבר עם פלוני שלא ימחול לו על מה שיעשה לו עד זמן קצוב והבן היה רוצה להתפייס עמו אלא שחושש לצואת אביו - אין לו לחוש לצוואתו שאסור לשנוא לשום אדם אם לא שיראהו עובר עבירה והאב שצוהו לו לשנוא לאו כל כמיניה להעבירו על דברי תורה

**R. Meir of Rothenberg, 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany - On Going to Israel without Parental Approval**

You have asked : "Can a father prevent his son from going to the land of Israel, since we rule that it is a *mitzvah* to go up to the land, and it is stated, "I am the Lord", that wherever a parental request conflicts with a *mitzvah* the parent is not to be obeyed, for the honor of God takes precedence over the honoring of parents....." [But a son who vowed to study in the Land of Israel was told to cancel both vow and voyage when it was discovered that his real purpose was to abandon his widowed mother].

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה הלכות כבוד אב ואם סימן רמ סעיף כה

תלמיד שרוצה ללכת למקום אחר, שהוא בוטח שיראה סימן ברכה בתלמודו לפני הרב ששם, ואביו מוחה בו לפי שדואג שבאותה העיר העובדי כוכבים מעלילים -- אינו צריך לשמוע לאביו בזה.

הגה: וכן אם האב מוחה בבן לישא איזו אשה שיחפוץ בה הבן, א"צ לשמוע אל האב (מהרי"ק שורש קס"ז)

**R. Israel Isserlein, (15<sup>th</sup> century Germany): On Choosing your Teacher**

A student wished to leave his home to study Torah with a certain teacher under whose guidance he was sure he would make great progress; and his father objects strongly, saying, "I know, my son, that if you go you shall cause me great distress, for I shall constantly worry about you, lest you have been imprisoned or become the subject of false accusations, as is common in that place - R. Isserlein rules that the son need not heed his father's declaration. (see Sh. Arukh YD 240:25)

**R. Israel Isserlein: On Choosing your Shul**

"If one wishes to worship in a synagogue where the congregants pray with greater *kavvanah* (devotion) and his mother objects, he need not obey her".

**Marriage to a Spouse of Your or your Parents' Choice**

בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשת תולדות פרשה סז סימן יב

וישמע יעקב אל אביו ואל אמו - הה"ד (משלי כא) כל דרך איש ישר בעיניו,  
כל דרך איש ישר בעיניו זה - שמשון (שופטים יד) ויאמר שמשון אל אביו- אותה קח לי כי היא ישרה בעיני,  
(משלי יב) ושומע לעצה חכם זה יעקב, - וישמע יעקב אל אביו ואל אמו וילך.

"*The way of a fool is straight in his own eyes; But he that is wise hearkens to counsel*" (Proverbs 12:15). "*The way of a fool*" - this is Samson, who said, "*Get her for me, for she is good in my eyes*" (Judges 14:3). "*But he that is wise*" - this is Jacob, as it is said, "*He listened to his father and mother.*" (Genesis Rabbah 67:12)<sup>20</sup>

**Sefer Hassidim #564:**

"If the mother or father sees that the daughters of the land are evil, and the son wishes to marry one of them, and the father commands him to desist, the son sins if he proceeds to marry, for Jacob obeyed Isaac and Rebecca."

**R. Solomon ben Aderet (13th-century Spain):**

Praise be to the Almighty that in these areas the generation is moral and the daughters of Israel are chaste, so as not to take for husbands those whom they might fancy without the assent of their father during his lifetime; that is not the manner of the daughters of the land. Whoever heard of such a thing?" (Responsa of Rashba Vol. I 1219)

**R. Solomon ben Aderet:**

"In all the communities between Narbonne, Arles, Avignon, and Alez, the *takkanot kahal* required the assent of the father or (if fatherless the mother and brother of the maiden for a betrothal to take place."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> But the story of R. Akiba and his wife Rachel models personal choice over parental control.

<sup>21</sup> R. Moshe Mintz (15th-century Germany): "It is not the way of the land for a son to marry a woman without his father's agreement." (Responsa 98)

The Synod of Ferrara, Italy (1554): Any man who married a woman without the presence of ten witnesses and the consent of her parents was to be placed under *herem*.

## R. Elijah Capsali of Crete: On Choosing a Spouse – The Romantic Urge

A father in the Greek town of Patras forbade his son to marry the woman whom "his soul desired". Does the son's filial responsibility demand compliance? R. Elijah Caspali of Crete ruled it did not:

Though the command of filial honor and reverence is inexpressibly great... Nonetheless it appears in my humble opinion that if the girl about whom you ask is a proper wife for the aforementioned Reuben - that is, there is in her or in her family no blemish - then the command of filial honor and reverence is irrelevant and the son is not to abandon her so as to fulfill his father's command.

For it is nearly certain that this father virtually commands his son to violate the Torah ..... For we see (in the Talmud) that a man ought not to marry a woman who does not please him.

So that when the father commands his son not to marry this woman, it is as though he commands him to violate the Torah; and it is well known that the son is not to obey his father in such cases....

Now, if we were to decide that a son is obliged to obey his parents and marry though his heart is not in the match, we should cause the growth of hatred and strife in the home, which is not the way of our holy Torah. Most certainly in this case, where he loves her. Indeed, we can cite in this situation: "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it...*" (*Song of Songs 8:7*). Were he to marry another whom he does not desire, his entire life would be painful and bitter.

Moreover, **we may also argue that the Torah obliges the son to filial honor and reverence only in matters that affect the parent's physical well-being and support.... but in matters that do not affect the parent in these areas, we may say that the Torah does not oblige the son to be obedient.** Therefore, the son is not obliged by the rubrics of reverence and honor to accept his father's command in the matter of marriage.

All this is according to the letter of the law (*shurat ha-din*). However, so far as behavior beyond the letter of the law (*lifnim mishurat ha-din*) is concerned, the son should not do anything - whether important or not - without the agreement of his parents.

And it is proper for the son to subdue his own desires as much as possible so as to fulfill the desires of his parents<sup>22</sup>...But if he sees that it is impossible for him to do so, let him do as seems good and proper to him in the matter of his own marriage; for God considers marriage to depend upon the will of the son, as I have explained.

## Re-Covenanting Relationships: Robert Goodin

Family and friendship ought to be seen in terms of **covenanting relationships** as opposed to contractual ones. "Contracts are signed to be expediently discharged, covenants have a gratuitous, growing edge to them that nourishes rather than limits relationships .. Tit for tat characterizes a commercial transaction, but it does not exhaustively define the vitality of that relationship in which one must serve and draw upon the deeper reserves of another." (May 1975)

Robert Goodin adds:

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<sup>22</sup> R. Elijah Capsali is hardly intent upon undermining the institution of filial reverence and he is the only author to write an entire volume on the topic of filial responsibility - *Me'ah She'arim*, Indeed, he tells us of his admiration for a custom he saw in Padua, where "every Sabbath and festival, after the evening prayer, the sons come to their fathers to prostrate themselves, bow down on their knees, and kiss their palms. . . . From the time I observed this custom I said, 'This must be an old tradition of the pious.' . . . I also said . . . I shall follow this practice myself. And so I did. . . . And if God should grant me sons, I would instruct them in this same custom." (Gerald Blidstein, *Honor Thy Father and Mother*, 91, citing H. Ben-Sasson, 286)

“The basic trick in **covenanting relationships** seems to be giving a bit more than you get in order to ensure the continuation of a relationship. Far from being one-off trades, these exchanges create, reinforce, and sustain certain sorts of relationships between the parties. What must be emphasized, however, is that, at least where family and friends are concerned, these are not just trading relationships that are sustained. The relationships also have an affective component: you care about family and friends in ways you do not about your greengrocer. Within families and friendships, people come to define their own projects, lives, and selves in terms of the others'. This goes well beyond the minimum sort of trust needed to sustain a long-term trading relationship.”

## V. Honoring Parents:

### Its Limits, its Burdens and its Dilemmas

#### A. Honoring as an Expression of a Caring Relationship or a Service Obligation?

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת פאה משנה א' הלכה א'

"יש שהוא מאכיל את אביו פטומות - ויורש גיהנם, ויש שהוא כודנו ברחיים - ויורש גן עדן; כיצד מאכיל את אביו פטומות ויורש גיהנם? חד בר נש הוה מייכיל את אביו תרנגולים פטומים;

**Abimi, son of R. Abbahu** recited: An [adult] child may give his parent the fanciest pheasants as food, yet (this) drives the child from the world; whereas another may make one's parent grind in a mill and (this) brings him to the world to come.

#### **Honoring your Parents: The Payback: A Wooden Bowl**

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and a four-year old grandson.

The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together at the table.

But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth. The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about Grandfather", said the son. "I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating and food on the floor".

So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl. When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometimes he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food.

The four-year-old watched it all in silence.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?" Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food when I grow up." The four-year-old smiled and went back to work. The words so struck the parents that they were speechless. Then tears started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled.

## B. What is *Kibbud*? Financial Obligations to Aging Parents

### Support for Parents: Who Pays? Debate between Bar Yochai and the Babylonian Talmud

חידושי הריטב"א מסכת קידושין דף לא עמוד ב

בירושלמי (ה"ז) תני רבי שמעון בן יוחאי - הבן מחזר על הפתחים חייב לזון את אבותיו מצינו שהקפיד הכתוב על כבוד אב ואם יותר מכבודו בכבודו הוא אומר כבוד את ה' מהונך - אם יש לך ממון - כבוד, ואם לאו - פטור ובכבוד אב ואם נאמר כבוד את אביך ואת אמך - בין יש לך בין אין לך,

Simon b. Yohai taught: "Great is the honor one must accord one's parents for God elevates it even beyond the honor one must accord Him. Here it says, '*Honor your father and your mother*'; there it says, '*Honor the Lord with your substance, and with the first-fruits of thy increase*' (Proverbs 3:9). How do you honor Him? With the wealth in your possession - you give the gleanings to the poor and tithes and terumah and hallah, you build a sukkah, make a lulav, a shofar, tzizit, and tefillin, you feed the hungry, and give drink to the thirsty. **If you have the means, you are obliged** to do all this - if you do not have the means, you are not.

But with '*Honor your father and your mother*' it is not so: **whether you have the means or you do not, '*Honor your father and mother*,' even if you must become a beggar at the door.**"

"Honor your father and your mother": Perhaps this means with words alone? We are taught: "*Honor the Lord with your substance*" - in food and drink, and with clean garments.

It is stated: "*Honor your father and your mother.*" And it is also stated: "*Honor the Lord with your substance.*" **Just as one demands economic sacrifice, so does the other demand economic sacrifice.** (Mekhilta Yitro Bahodesh 8)

#### **Honor at whose expense?** (Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin 1:7)

What is honor? He must give him food and drink, clothe and shoe him, lead him in and lead him out.

**At whose expense?** Hunna b. Hiyya said, "At the expense of the older man (the parent)." Others wished to say, "At his own expense."

BUT: Did not R. Abahu say in the name of R. Jose b. Hanina, "Even if one is told by his father, '*Throw this wallet into the sea,*' he must obey him?"

That refers to a case where he has another wallet, and is giving his father pleasure. . . .

BUT: The statement of Hunna b. Hiyya conflicts with the teaching of R. Simeon b. Yohai

R. Yannai and R. Jonathan were sitting. A man came up and kissed the feet of R. Jonathan.



R. Yannai asked, "What did you do for this man that he repays you so?"  
 R. Jonathan answered, "Once this man came to me and complained about his son, that he does not support him. I told him, 'Go gather the congregation in the synagogue and publicly shame him.'"  
 R. Yannai asked, "And why did you not compel the son to support his father?"  
 R. Jonathan responded, "Can one compel that?"  
 R. Yannai answered, "You don't know that?"  
 R. Jonathan then began to teach as a fixed rule, "**One may compel a son to support his father.**" . . .  
 R. Jose said, "Would that I were as certain of all my traditions as I am of that one that 'one may compel a son to support his father.'" <sup>23</sup>

קידושין דף לב.א

משל מי? רב יהודה אמר: משל בן, רב נתן בר אושעיא אמר: משל אב.  
 אורו ליה רבנן לרב ירמיה, כמ"ד משל אב.  
 מיתבי נאמר: (שמות כ) כבד את אביך ואת אמך, ונאמר: (משלי ג) כבד את ה' מהונך, מה להלך בחסרון כיס, אף כאן בחסרון כיס ואי אמרת משל אב, מאי נפקא ליה מיניה? לביטול מלאכה.

מר רבי יהודה: תבא מאירה למי שמאכיל את אביו מעשר עני

ת"ש, שאלו את ר"א: עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם?  
 אמר להם: כדי שיטול ארנקי ויזרקנו לים בפניו, ואינו מכלימו  
 ואי אמרת משל אב, מאי נפקא לי' מיניה? בראוי ליורשו

### **Honor at whose expense?** (The Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 32a)

What is reverence and what is **honor**? . . .

**At whose expense** [is the son to feed and clothe his father]?

R. Judah said, "At the son's expense." R. Nathan b. 'Oshaya said, "At the ~ father's expense."

The sages taught R. Jeremiah . . . that the decision follows the one who said, "At the father's expense."

BUT: It was asked: "(We have learnt:) It is stated, '*Honor your father and your mother*,' and it is stated, '*Honor the Lord with your substance*'; just as the latter demands economic sacrifice, so does the former demand economic sacrifice. And if the father is honored at his own expense, what economic sacrifice is asked of the son?" That he must lose working time. . . .

### **Moral Advice in the Name of PARENTAL FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE:** Ben Sirah

"Beware lest a son, woman, comrade or friend rule over your life... Do not give your substance to another, lest you have to entreat him. For it is better that your sons beg of you, than you look to them for sustenance" (Ben-Sirah 33:22-26).

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<sup>23</sup> Gerald Blidstein: "The discussion in the Palestinian Talmud concluded that filial piety includes financial responsibility, while that in the Babylonian Talmud concluded it does not. Why did the amoraic period, at least in Babylon, and to a certain degree in Palestine as well, see a rejection of the clearly articulated tannaitic emphasis on filial responsibility for parental well-being, and a return to a singular stress on filial service as the total definition of filial honor? I am unable to isolate the economic or social data that would answer this question in historical terms." (Honor Thy Father, 64);

## C. TO HONOR: HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

### Financial Losses versus Honoring Parents: "Lost Time" and Lost Money

#### Case #1

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"א

"בעו מיניה מרב עולא - עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם? אמר להם: צאו וראו מה עשה עובד כוכבים אחד באשקלון ודמא בן נתניה שמו; פעם אחת בקשו חכמים פרקמטיא בששים ריבוא שכר, והיה מפתח מונח תחת מראשותיו של אביו, ולא ציערו.

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: שאלו את ר' אליעזר עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם? אמר להם: צאו וראו מה עשה עובד כוכבים אחד לאביו באשקלון ודמא בן נתניה שמו; בקשו ממנו חכמים אבנים לאפוד בששים ריבוא שכר, ורב כהנא מתני בשמונים ריבוא, והיה מפתח מונח תחת מראשותיו של אביו, ולא ציערו!  
לשנה האחרת נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא שכרו, שנולדה לו פרה אדומה בעדרו; נכנסו חכמי ישראל אצלו, אמר להם: "יודע אני בכם שאם אני מבקש מכם כל ממון שבעולם אתם נותנין לי, אלא אין אני מבקש מכם אלא אותו ממון שהפסדתי בשביל כבוד אבא".

#### Dama son of Netinah treatment of his Father (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin, 31a-31b)

"It was propounded of R. Ulla: How far does the honor of parents [extend]? – He replied, Go forth and see what a certain heathen, Dama son of Netinah by name, did in Askelon. The Sages once desired merchandise from him, in which there was 600,000 [gold dinarii] profit, but the key was lying under his father's head, and so he did not trouble him<sup>24</sup>.

R. Judah said in Samuel's name: R. Eliezer was asked, how far does the honor of parents [extend]? – said he, Go forth and see what a certain heathen, Dama son of Netinah by name, did in Askelon. The Sages sought jewels for the Ephod ('Urim Ve Tumim'), at a profit of 600,000 [gold dinarii] – R. Kahana taught: at a profit of 800,000 – but as the key was lying under his father's pillow, he did not trouble him. The following year the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him his reward. A red heifer was born to him in his herd (Num. XIX). When the Sages of Israel went to him

<sup>24</sup> To wake him to take the key. The Jerusalem Talmud adds that his father's feet were lying on the chest containing the merchandise and so he could not break it

[to buy it], he said to them, 'I know you, that [even] if I asked you for all the money in the world you would pay me. But I ask of you only the money which I lost through my father's honor'.

## Case #2:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"א  
שאלו את ר"א: עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם?  
אמר להם: כדי שיטול ארנקי ויזרקנו לים בפניו, ואינו מכלימו

Come and learn: They asked R. Eliezer, "How far must one go in honoring one's father and mother?" .He answered, "So that he throws a wallet into the sea before your very eyes and you do not shame him. And if you say that the father is honored at his own expense [and the wallet, perforce, is the father's own], what difference does it make to the son?

**Because the son will inherit the father** [and so feels the loss as his own]." (TB Kiddushin 31a)

## Maimonides Laws of Rebels 6

### To what lengths should the duty of honoring parents go?

Even were they to take a purse of his, full of gold, and cast it in his presence into the sea, he must not shame them, manifest grief in their presence, or display any anger, but accept the divine decree without demur.

**J.B. Soloveitchik in *Family Redeemed, Human Self-Denial  
and Honoring/Revering One's Parents (149-152)***

As the term of our inquiry we seek the definition of *mora* experience, whereby we may differentiate between this term and *kibbud*. The question is a simple one. What more can the Torah demand from the child than a union in love with his parent, equal care and devotion?

I believe that a passage in the Maimonidean Code contains the clue to the understanding of the experience.

“To what lengths should the duty of *kibbud av*, of honoring the parents, extend? Even were they to take a purse of his, full of gold, and cast it in his presence into the sea, he must not shame them, manifest grief in their presence, or display any anger, but rather must accept the Divine decree without demur.

To what lengths should the duty of *mora*, of revering them, extend? Even if he is attired in costly garments, presiding over a congregation, and his parents come and rend his garments, strike him on the head, and spit in his face, he must not shame them. It behooves him to remain silent, to fear and revere the King, King of Kings, who has thus decreed” (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Mamrim* [Laws of Rebels] 6:7).

The phrase used by Maimonides is identical in both cases: "To what lengths should the duty extend?" However, Maimonides discriminates between these two cases; the first one he classifies under the category of *kibbud*, the second under that of *mora*. Both cases call for great willpower, self-control and emotional restraint. It is not easy to let senile parents destroy property or to acquiesce to their heaping abuse on themselves and their children. To behave with stoic calmness and casual indifference is very difficult. Both episodes attest to a powerful moral character, and to the mastery one exercises over his emotions.

Yet if one should ask me which of these two events was more indicative of the moral strength of the person involved in those unpleasant experiences, I would say the second one. It is much easier for one to witness a senseless waste of money than to suffer humiliation and be reviled in the presence of people whose respect he is most eager to command and whose contempt and disdain he fears. This heroic deed transcends by far the limits set by the norm of "*love your neighbor like yourself*," One would never subject himself to public contumely and ridicule, though he may waste his money and throw a handful of golden coins into the street in order to enjoy the excitement of the crowd throwing itself on the gold and to enjoy the peculiar reputation of being extravagant and exotic.

In a word, the first episode demonstrates equality; the parent should be treated with the same magnanimity and liberality as one is accustomed to accord to himself. If there is a possibility that one may under certain circumstances resort to similar erratic tactics, then he is enjoined to tolerate such strange conduct on the part of his parents. However, if he would never knowingly behave in a like fashion even under the stress of the most unfriendly events, then the toleration of such whimsical conduct cannot be based upon the norm of *kibbud*. The latter demands equal love but not preferential treatment; it says that one must practice indulgence of parents' strangest whims as long as such whims might make him act in a strange fashion.

The norm of *kibbud* never recommended unlimited tolerance toward a parent who exceeds all bounds of normal behavior. To display patience and perseverance toward a parent who has completely lost his control mechanism for discriminating between right and wrong, decent and indecent, the Torah had to introduce the norm of *mora*. The latter advances a new element: sacrifice. The ideal of self-denial for the sake of the parent has emerged with the norm of *mora*. I must place myself in his service unreservedly. My commitment to him is unqualified, my duty supreme.... In contradistinction to *kibbud*, *mora* is alien to the class of feelings which accompany one's contacts with his fellow man. It is essentially a category borrowed from our religious life where finite beings encounter infinity (Rudolph Otto's *mysterium tremendum – yraat rommemut* – an awareness of the great mystery).

## D. AGING PARENTS and ADULT CHILDREN: A SPECIAL HONOR OR A SPECIAL BURDEN?

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת פאה משנה א' הלכה א'

חד זמן אמר ליה אביו: "ברי, אילין - מנן לך?" אמר ליה: "סבא סבא אכול ואדיש, דכלבין אכלין ואדשין" - ונמצא מאכיל את אביו פטומין ויורש גיהנם.

כיצד כודנו בריחיים - ויורש גן עדן? חד בר נש איטחין בריחיים, אתית מצוות' לטיחנייא א"ל: אבא, עול טחון תחתי, אין מטת מבזייא - טב לי אנא ולא את, אין מטת מילקי - טב לי אנא ולא את, נמצא כודנו בריחייא ויורש גן עדן."

**R. Abbahu** said: "My son Abimi has fulfilled the precept of honor."

Even though Abimi had five older sons in his father's lifetime, yet when R. Abbahu came and called out at the door, Abimi himself speedily went and opened it for him, crying "Yes, yes", until he reached it. One day Abbahu asked Abimi, "Give me a drink of water". By the time Abimi returned with the water his elderly father had fallen asleep. Thereupon Abimi bent and stood over his father until he awoke.

18. תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"ב

19. "אמר רבי 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: "אשקיין מיא", אדאייתי ליה נמנם, גחין קאי עליה עד דאיתער; איסתייעא מילתיה, ודרש אבימי מזמור לאסוף".

.20

**R. Tarfon** had a mother for whom, whenever she wished to mount into bed, he would bend down to let her ascend, (using his back as a step) (and when she wished to descend, she stepped down upon him). He went and boasted thereof in the Beit Midrash. The other Rabbi said to him "You have not yet reached half the honor (due). (Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin 20a)

תוספות מסכת קידושין דף לא עמוד ב

פעם אחת אמיה דר' טרפון אבדה פזמקי דידה בחצירה ויצאתה ממטתה לבקשו ושם ר' טרפון ידו תחת רגליה על הקרקע שלא תטנף רגליה והיתה דורסת על ידיו

When **R. Joseph** heard his mother's footsteps he would say "I will arise before the approaching *Shechinah* (Divine Presence)".

**R. Johanan** said: Happy is he who has not seen his parents in his lifetime. R. Johanan's father died when his mother conceived and his mother died when she bore him. (*Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 30*)

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"ב

"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?  
 רב יוסף: כי הוה שמע קל כרעא דאמיה, אמר איקום מקמי שכינה דאתיא".

Once **R. Tarfon**'s mother lost her sandal somewhere in the courtyard and so she left her bed to find it. R. Tarfon placed his hand on the ground beneath her feet so that her feet would not get filthy. So she trampled on his hands.

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת פאה פרק א' הלכה א'

"אמו של ר' ישמעאל באה וקיבלת עלוי לרבתינו, אמרה להן: גיערו בישמעאל בני, שאינו נוהג בי בכבוד; באותה שעה נתכרכמו פניהם של רבותינו, אמרו איפשר ר' ישמעאל לא נהרג בכבוד אבותיו?  
 אמרו לה: מה עביד לך?  
 אמרה: כד דו נפק מבית וועדה אנא בעי משנז ריגלוי ומישתי מיהן ולא שביק לי;  
 אמרו לו: הואיל והוא רצונה הוא כבודה".

Every time **R. Ishmael** came to enter the Beit Midrash (house of study) his mother would bathe his feet and then drink the water. When R. Ishmael realized what she was doing, he refused to let her do it. Ultimately she went to Rabbinical court to lodge a complaint about R. Ishmael her son who does not fulfill the mitzvah of honoring his parents. The rabbis were shocked and they questioned R. Ismael. He explained the situation but they ordered him to let her do as she wished, for in this case **her desire (will) defines what is the legal definition of honoring one's parents.**

*(Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin)*

"More than the calf wishes to suckle, the cow desires to nurse."

## Respect for One's Sons

**בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשת ויצא פרישה עד סימן יג**

ויאמר יעקב אל אחיו: לקטו אבנים, כמה אחין היו לו? חד ולווי קבריהת אלא אלו בניו שהוא קורא אותן בלשון הקודש "אחיו",  
 א"ר הונא: גבורים כיוצא בו צדיקים כיוצא בו, א"ר יודן: לבש אדם לבושו של אביו הרי הוא כיוצא בו.

"And Jacob said to his brothers," *Gather stones*" (Genesis 31:46): How many brothers did Jacob have? But one, and that one wished him dead and buried! Rather, he called his sons "brothers" in Hebrew. Said R. Hunya: "They were mighty as he was, and as righteous."  
 Said R. Yudan, "When a man can wear the clothes of his father, he is as his father."  
 (Genesis Rabbah 74:13)

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת ברכות פרק ב דף ה טור ג/ה"ז

כהנא אתא לגבי רבי יוחנן א"ל: בר נש דאימיה מבסרא ליה ואיתתיה דאבוהי מוקרא ליה להן ייזיל ליה?

א"ל ייזיל להן דמוקרין ליה. נחת ליה כהנא מן הן.  
אמרין ליה לר' יוחנן: הא נחית כהנא לבבל. אמר מה הוה מיזל ליה דלא מיסב רשותא?  
אמרין ליה ההיא מילתא דאמר לך היא הוה נטילת רשות דידיה.

[R. Kahana, an emigre to Palestine from Babylon, received a hostile reception from the Palestinian students and used the following parable before R. Yohanan]:

"If a man's mother insults him, and his father's wife honors him, to which should he go?" "Let him go where he is honored." R. Kahana left Palestine. (TJ Berakhot 2:8; 5c)

## E. THE DILEMMA OF SENDING ONE'S PARENT TO A HOME FOR THE AGED

### - IS THE BURDEN ON THE CHILD EVER TOO MUCH?

שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשת תרומה פרשה לד סימן ג

אתם בנים ואני אביכם שנאמר (דברים יד) *בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם*, ואני אביכם שנאמר (ירמיה לא) *כי הייתי לישראל לאב*, כבוד לבנים כשהן אצל אביהם וכבוד לאב כשהוא אצל בניו, וכן הוא אומר (משלי יז) *עטרת זקנים בני בנים*. , עשו בית לאב שיבא וישרה אצל בניו לכך נאמר ועשו לי מקדש.

“You are my sons, and I am your father. . . . It is an honor for sons to dwell with their father, and it is an honor for the father to dwell with his sons. . . . Make, therefore, a house for the father in which he can dwell with his sons.” (Exodus Rabbah 34 at end).

### Abandoning a Parent in Old Age when Parent becomes Insane or Abusive or Just "a Pain" or An Embarrassment

**R. Assi** had an aged mother. She said to him "I want ornaments". So he made them for her. She said "I want a husband". He looked for a match for her. "But I want a husband as handsome as you". Thereupon he left her and fled to Israel. On hearing she was following him, he went to R. Johanan and asked him "May I leave the land of Israel?" "It is forbidden", he replied. "But what if it is to meet my mother?" "I don't know". In the meantime he learned her coffin was coming. (TB Kiddushin 30)

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל"א ע"ב

"רב אסי: הוה ליה ההיא אמא זקינה, אמרה לי: בעינא תכשיטין, עבד לה; בעינא גברא נייעין לך, בעינא גברא דשפיר כותך, שבקה ואזל לארעא דישראל; שמע דקא אזלה אבתריה, אתא לקמיה דרבי יוחנן, אמר לי: מהו לצאת מארץ לחוצה לארץ? א"ל: אסור! לקראת אמא מהו? א"ל: איני יודע; אדהכי והכי שמע לארונא דקאתי, אמר: אי ידעי לא נפקי".

### Maimonides, 12<sup>th</sup> century Egypt

*Maimonides initiated the separate categorization of the mentally incompetent parent.*

"If one's father or mother should become mentally disordered, one should try to treat them as their mental state demands, until they are pitied by God. But if he finds he cannot endure the situation because of their extreme madness, let him leave and go away, appointing others to care for them properly."



(\*) מי שנטרפה דעתו של אביו או של אמו משתדל לנהוג עמהם כפי דעתם עד שירוחם עליהן ואם אי אפשר לו לעמוד מפני שנשתטו ביותר יניחם וילך לו ויצוה אחרים להנהיגם כראוי להם.

השגת הרמב"ם ד - מי שנטרפה דעתו של אביו וכו' יניחם וילך לו ויצוה אחרים להנהיגם כראוי ■ אין זו הוראה נכונה אם הוא ילך ויניח לו למי יצוה לשמרו

רדב"ז הלכות ממרים פרק ו הלכה י

ולא ידעתי למה כתב הרמב"ם ד: "אין זו הוראה נכונה"? כיון דרב אסי עבד עובדא בנפשיה ואיך הניחה והלך לו אלא ודאי צוה את אחרים לפרנסה וזו תקנתה שיש לה על הבן געגועין ולא מיכספא מיניה משא"כ באחרים ולא מצי לגעור בה ואחרים גוערים בה ואפשר ע"י הכאה תחזור משטותה ומעשים בכל יום בכיוצא בזה והבן אי אפשר לו לעשות דבר מזה:

But **Rabbi David of Provence** responded: "This is an incorrect teaching. If he leaves, whom will he assign to supervise the well-being of his parents?"

Rabbi David ben Zimra:

I do not know how **Rabbi David of Provence** could say: "This is an incorrect teaching."

For Rabbi Assi did it himself [setting a precedent] and how can you say he abandoned her alone?

Certainly he ordered others to care for her financial needs and these other can help fix (cure) her by rebuking her, even by striking her physically if necessary to bring her back from her insanity. These are things that happen all the time, But the son may not (or cannot) treat his mother that way.

### **Ben-Sirah 3:12**

"My son, be strong in the honor of your father, and do not leave him all the days of your life. And even if he loses sense, let him do all that he wishes and do not sharme him all the days of his life,"

### **Seder Eliyyahu Chapter 25 (27)**

"Even if our father's spittle is running down his beard-, obey him promptly."

[Note spittle is sign of being mentally incompetent as with David pretending to be insane before the Philistine King (II Samuel 21:14)]

**R. Simeon ben Halafta** said, "It is the way of the world that when a man is in his prime, his sons are subordinate to him, but when he ages, he becomes subordinate to them. But here, even in Jacob's old age and after his death, his sons are subordinate to him, as it is written, *The sons who came to Egypt with Jacob.*(Ex. 1:1)

Another interpretation: Though all his sons were mature men, engaged in raising their own children, they did not attend to their own affairs until they first attended to the affairs of their father, and so it says, "with Jacob," and then concludes, "*every man came with his household.*" (Midrash HaGadol on Ex. 1:1)

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION: DISTANCE OR DISPUTE?**

**Sefer Hassidim**, 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany holds:

It is best that a father and a son separate if they quarrel with each other, for much pain is caused; and I do not mean only the pain of the father or teacher, but even the pain of the son.

**R. Eliezer Pappo** wrote:

And inasmuch as the Sages have said that a man should not be near his master if he cannot accept his authority, we may infer if a man cannot honor his parents as they should be honored then..... it is best that he no longer share his father's board, provided his father agrees to this. It is also best that a man - if he can, send his children from his table, lest he be guilty of placing a stumbling block before them.... And thus there shall be peace in the home.

○ פלא יועץ" לרבי אליעזר פאפו

## Appendices:

### **Honoring Your Parents with Your Life: The Remnant of the Ten Commandments – Viktor Frankl**

Shortly before the United States entered World War II I received an invitation from the American Embassy in Vienna to go there to pick up my visa for immigration to this country. At that time I was living in Vienna alone with my old parents. They, of course, did not expect me to do anything but pick up the visa and then hurry to this country. But at the last moment I began to hesitate because I asked myself, "Should I really? Can I do it at all?" For it suddenly came to mind what was in store for my parents, that is to say, that within a couple of weeks, as the situation was at that time, they would be sent to a concentration camp, or rather, an extermination camp. And should I really just leave them to their fate in Vienna? Until then I had been able to protect them from this fate because I was head of the Department of Neurology at the Jewish Hospital. But if I left the situation would immediately change.

While I was pondering what my true responsibility was, I felt that this was that type of situation in which you wish for what is usually called a hint from Heaven. Then I went home and when I did so, I noticed a piece of marble stone lying on a table. I inquired of my father how it came to be there, and he said, "Oh, Viktor, I picked it up this morning at the site where the synagogue stood." (It had been burned down by the National Socialists.) "And why did you take it with you?" I asked him. "Because it is a part of the two tables containing the Ten Commandments." And he showed me, on the marble stone, a Hebrew letter engraved and gilded. "And I can tell you even more," he continued, "if you are interested; this Hebrew letter serves as the abbreviation of only one of the Ten Commandments." Eagerly I asked him, "Which one?" And his answer was: "*Honor father and mother and you will dwell in the land.*" On the spot I decided to stay in the country, together with my parents, and let the visa lapse."

Viktor Frankl, psychiatrist, inmate of Dachau and Auschwitz, *The Will to Meaning*, p. 58-59

### **A Terrible Dilemma: Ethiopian Jews and “Honor Your Father and Your Mother”**

Micha Feldmann, *On Eagles Wings*, 123- 124, 149-150

There are many cases of youngsters who arrived during or before Operation Moses (1983-84) who come to my office and tell me, with tears in their eyes, that they are abandoning their studies in order to work and earn some money to send to their parents in the villages of northern Ethiopia. When they arrived in Israel a year ago, these kids were debilitated from hunger. When they arrived at the Youth Aliyah boarding schools, it seemed they had reached a haven to rest and feel safe. At long last, they would have regular meals, excellent medical care and the most important thing of all for them: a proper place in which to learn. For most of them, it was their first opportunity to study in a school.

In my visits to the boarding schools, especially in the absorption centers for youth in the north of the country, it is difficult for me to identify these children with those skeletons we received a year ago. Their clothes are clean, their faces are healthy, but their eyes - alas, their eyes are still so sad. And the eyes tell the true story. Two years ago they set out on their weary trek. Their parents said to them, "Go to Sudan. From there you'll reach Jerusalem. And soon, we, too, will arrive."

And now, a year after the rescue and perhaps two years since they left their villages, many of the kids cannot concentrate on learning. A few days ago, a boy came to my office and showed me a letter from his father. The father wrote, "My dear son, you know how happy we are that you have reached Jerusalem, but sadly, our situation here is very difficult. This is the second year that there is almost no rain and so we are

on the verge of starvation." Then, toward the end of the letter, the father writes, "Our neighbor, Avraham, received a letter yesterday from his son in Jerusalem and there was fifty dollars in it. Have you forgotten us? Are we not your parents?"

A youth of about fifteen who receives a letter like this one is devastated. Such a boy cannot go on sitting in the classroom. He forsakes the Garden of Eden that he has at long last reached and is

transformed from a student in school into a porter in the wholesale market or a laborer in agriculture, working from morning to night, so that he, too, can send a little money to his parents.

I was visited in my office by a girl who is studying in the boarding school at Givat Washington near Ashdod. With sobs racking her whole body, she showed me a letter she received from her parents, after she had sent her family a photograph of herself on the boarding school's lawn. And what does her father write? Not words of encouragement to pursue her studies, but rather, "I see that you have settled down well there in Jerusalem, you already have a car and a beautiful home. Have you forgotten us, your parents in the village in Ethiopia?"

This girl, too, like other youngsters, told me that she intends to leave the boarding school, even though she knows that by doing so, she is, in fact, throwing away the key to advancement in life.

If I did not know the Ethiopian culture, I would be angry at parents who are capable of writing such letters to their children. **If it were me, I would starve rather than write letters like that to my own children. In our culture, the child is positioned at the center. But in the Ethiopian culture, the central figure is the elder, the shmagelie. He is society's and the family's focus of concern. The child has to worry about his parents, and not the other way around.**

I understood these youngsters' distress, but I could not agree to their giving up their studies. So I went to Ami Bergman of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and together we set up a sophisticated system to assist Jewish families in Ethiopia.

MONDAY, MARHESHVAN 8, 5747], NOVEMBER 10, 1986

To Micha,

Dear Micha, how are you?

Micha, you know all the problems of the Ethiopian immigrants, meaning that you are very close to them and you know all our problems, each of us one by one, since one has no parents and another one has no father and another has no mother, and yet another misses his brothers and sisters. All this happened because the families, or the parents and the brothers and sisters, were left during Operation Moses two years ago and more. And then lucky ones succeeded, and I also, as a child, succeeded in arriving here. On the other hand, my parents did not manage to make aliyah to the Holy Land, Eretz Yisrael, and so I too am one of the children without parents and without brothers and without sisters, and I am alone here.

And so I am now asking too, as a pupil who is learning in the Land of Israel while his parents are in the diaspora, and then you will help me with help for my parents, because my parents have no one helping them. And also, I, as a child who is studying here, cannot help them and I will also not be able to help them because I am studying. And if you help them, I will feel that I can study while they are not here in Israel, because **they brought me up and they are flesh of my flesh, and they fed me and gave me water in the evening when I was thirsty and hungry and did in every way what was possible to do for raising a child, and on the other hand, I, the son, did not succeed in recompensing my parents**, because I am an immigrant here and need to learn the language and also to know my new land, Eretz Yisrael. Because of this, I cannot help, and also, from the aspect of knowledge, I am little and will not be able to help them, and I ask you again to give me help for my parents who are still overseas in Ethiopia. (Thank you).

The person asking help: Shimshon Kebede

### **Bintel Brief**

Worthy Editor,

I am a married man, and I live with my wife and two children in a city not too far from New York. We lived peacefully and happily, but now our house has turned into a Gehenna. Hear the reason: When the World War ended, my sister wrote me from New York that I should bring our mother over from the old country. I thought it would be better for her not to come to America, because I had been sending her enough money to live on. But my sister bombarded me with letters and assured me that she would keep Mother with her and that I should just bring her here. I listened to my sister, spent over five hundred dollars, and brought Mother to New York. We were overjoyed when she came, and after that I often sent money to my sister for keeping Mother with her.

Time passed, and suddenly I got a letter from my mother, saying that I should have pity on her and take her to my house, because her daughter didn't want to keep her any more and she was out on the street. Well, I took her to my home, but it's no good, because my wife doesn't want her in the house either. Now I want to place my mother in a Home, but she doesn't want to go. She would rather see me leave my wife and children because of her. If not, she says, I should give her five hundred dollars, and she'll go back to Europe. She doesn't want to go to her old home, but to another town, since she's ashamed to tell people that she couldn't stay with her children.

I am not a rich man, but I would give her the five hundred dollars already, so that she could go home. But how can I let such an old woman go back to Poland? And what will she do there all alone? I have two other sisters there, but Mother never got along with them either and can't stay with them.

What shall I do? My wife is very loyal and I love her and my children. I love my mother too and my heart aches for her. I beg you to give me some advice and answer quickly:

Respectfully, C.N.

### **ANSWER:**

The best thing for you would be to rent a room somewhere for your mother and support her there. Such a capricious woman can get along better with strangers than with her own family. But if she insists on going back to Poland, you must first write to your sisters who live there to hear their opinion about it. It is possible she would actually feel better there. Meanwhile you should get a room for her so that she does not have to remain with you." (1924, *Bintel Brief* letters for Advice directed to the *Vorwarts* Yiddish newspaper in NYC)

Appendix: **Following in Our Fathers Footsteps - Rebbe Kalonymos Kalman Halevi Epstein,**  
(student of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk *Ma'or Vashemesh, Shemot, Pararshat VaEira*)

This was the holy path of Abraham our father, may he rest in peace. He did not want to worship in the rote way instructed in the practice of people who had learned from other people [tradition]. And thus to learn from Terach his father to worship idolatry (*avodah zara*). Rather, he only wanted to comprehend reality through his own effort and his own reason. Thus, at first he thought that the sun ruled the world, but when he saw that it set each day, and rose the next day from the east like the day before, he understood that the sun, too, must have a ruler and a master. And, similarly, the moon and the stars and the other planets - until he understood, from the root of his own wisdom, the reality of his God, may he be blessed, the one who rules over and creates everything.

And so, Isaac, our father, saw that his father Abraham did not want to practice the rote way instructed in the practice of people who had learned from other people [tradition]. He walked on the holy path until he comprehended the reality of his God, may he be blessed.

And so, Jacob did not want to learn from his fathers, doing as they did, without comprehending through his own reason.

This is why there are several names for the Holy Blessed One, because each and every person must call God by a different name - attained through their own effort (*avodah*), the holy worship (*avodah*), and their own comprehension.

## Appendix: My Father's Dying Wish: Not to Say Kaddish

Alexander Ziskind Rabinowitz (Azar) – Zionist Hebrew writer (1854-1945), one of founders of Tel Aviv, friend of Shmuel Agnon, Haim Brenner and Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (Alexander Rabinowitz, *Selected Writings*, Vol I)



*When it comes time to memorialize my father, I am overwhelmed with peacefulness and grief all at once. I loved my father and respected him, and he loved and respected me, and yet we always made one another miserable....*

*He was a Jew, a complete Jew, and in his broad heart he found room for all that is good and beautiful alongside true fear of heaven.*

*He loved the younger generation, and of course me as well, tremendously, unconditionally. He knew how the young people related to the things he considered sacred, the sacredness of the people, and he regretted that terribly, but his love for them did not cease. ...*

*And his love for me, his son, who did not follow his ways, was profoundly tragic. I knew how much he loved the Torah commandments, how careful he was to keep them, how strong and courageous was his belief in God, the God of Israel! And how sad he was that I discarded them, that I don't believe!... And I was always sorry for his pain, but what could I do? ...And my father is dead....*

*"My beloved son, I request" – he wrote in his will – "that so long as his ideas about belief in God and the holy Torah have not changed, that he should not recite the Kaddish after me. A prayer that does not come from a believing heart brings destruction and ruin; although I am certainly very sorry about this, that I have a son but no 'Kaddish' – my poor soul! – nevertheless my salvation will not come from an insincere prayer."*

*So much. So many tears I cried over that will, for the soul that is closest to me and yet so far.*

*And yet, on that very day, when I passed by the Beit Midrash and heard the congregation recite "Aleinu" [the end of the prayer, right before the mourners' Kaddish], my heart shook and I could not move on. Although my father beseeched me not to recite Kaddish, I thought to myself, but have I ever obeyed my father in my life? I didn't listen to him in life, and I'm not going to listen to him in death. "Yitgadal v'yitgadash shmei raba" – May the great Name of God be exalted and sanctified – burst out from my heart as I walked into the Beit Midrash.*

1. Why did the father forbid his son from reciting the *Kaddish*? And why, despite that, did the son recite it anyway? Did the son thus respect or disrespect his father?
2. Choose one sentence from the story that made an impression on you, that made you angry or upset or emotional. Copy the sentence and explain why it affected you.
3. Write a letter to the author explaining your reaction to the story.

## **Appendix: Honoring your Parents: The Payback: A Wooden Bowl**

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and a four-year old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together at the table.

But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth. The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about Grandfather", said the son. "I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating and food on the floor".

So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl. When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometimes he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food.

The four-year-old watched it all in silence.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?" Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food when I grow up." The four-year-old smiled and went back to work. The words so struck the parents that they were speechless. Then tears started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled.



## Appendix: Institutionalizing Parents with Alzheimer's Disease

by David Golinkin

YD 240:10

### Question:

*As life expectancy grows, many people are faced with the difficulties of caring for a parent with Alzheimer's disease.<sup>1</sup> According to Jewish law, is it permissible to institutionalize such a parent?*

### Responsum:

This question presents a difficult moral dilemma. On the one hand, the Torah commands us to "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16) and again: "You shall each revere his mother and his father" (Leviticus 19:3), which seem to be absolute requirements regardless of their behavior. On the other hand, if the parent has deteriorated to such an extent that he or she requires being strapped into bed or being drugged or having a diaper changed, is it "honor" and "reverence" for a child to do this? Or is it greater honor for an outsider to do so? What about the emotional strains on the child? How much must he or she bear?

This sounds like a new dilemma but, in fact, the problem of parents who have deteriorated mentally is mentioned in Jewish sources as early as the second century b.c.e., and the specific question raised above has been hotly debated by halakhic authorities for over 800 years.

The apocryphal book of Ben Sira, dating to the second century b.c.e., tells us (3:12-13):

My son, be strong in the honor of your father; and do not leave him all the days of your life. *Even if he loses sense, let him do [all that he wishes]* and do not shame him all the days of his life.

A post-Talmudic midrash teaches much the same thing:

Even if your father's spittle is running down his beard, obey him immediately.<sup>2</sup>

The Talmud does not explicitly deal with our issue, but it contains three passages which discuss the erratic behavior of parents.<sup>3</sup> Dama ben Netina, the gentile "Mayor" of first-century Ashkelon, was once chairing a meeting of the City Council. His mother entered, tore off his golden silk cloak, hit him on the head, and spat in his face - but he did nothing to shame her.<sup>4</sup>

Another Talmudic passage reads:

They asked Rabbi Eliezer: "To what extent must one honor one's father and mother?" He replied: "To the extent that if he takes your wallet and throws it in the sea, you should not shame him" (*Kiddushin* 32a).

These two Talmudic passages were codified by Maimonides (*Mamrim* 6:7) and Rabbi Joseph Karo (*Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah* 240:3, 8) and they seem to agree with *Ben Sira* and *Seder Eliyahu* - no matter what you parent does, you must obey him and not shame him.

But if this is the case, what can a child do if he can no longer bear his parent's strange or abnormal behavior? This dilemma is dealt with in a third Talmudic passage which became the basis for most subsequent halakhic discussion:

Rav Assi [who lived in Babylon] had an aged mother. She said to him: "I want jewelry!" He made some for her. "I want a husband!" He replied: "I'll look for one for you." "I want a husband as handsome as you!" He left her and went to Israel. When he heard that she was coming after him, he asked Rabbi Yohanan: "Is it permissible to leave Israel for *Hutz La'aretz* [the Diaspora]?" He replied: "It is forbidden." [He asked:]

"Towards his mother - what is the law?" He replied: "I don't know.".. . In the meantime, Rav Assi heard that her coffin was coming. He said: "Had I known, I would not have left Babylon!" [Or: "Had I known, I would not have asked permission to leave Israel!"] (*Kiddushin* 31b).

This story is very problematic. Was Rav Assi's mother mentally disturbed (she seems to be interested in marrying her own son) or merely crotchety? Can a child run away when he can no longer tolerate a parent's erratic behavior? And what does the final ambiguous sentence mean? Did Rav Assi regret abandoning his mother or is he saying that not only did he act properly by leaving her, but he was not even required to meet her coffin?

The halakhic authorities interpreted this story in two conflicting directions. Maimonides (1135-1204) and his followers used it to legitimate custodial care, while Ra'avad of Posquieres (1120-1198) and his followers came to the opposite conclusion.

Maimonides codified the story as follows:

If one's father or mother should become mentally disordered, he should try to treat them as their mental state demands, until God has pity on them. But if he finds he cannot endure the situation because of their extreme madness, let him leave them and go away, *commanding others to care for them as befits them* (*Mamrim* 6:10).

According to the last sentence, it is perfectly legitimate to institutionalize a parent with Alzheimer's disease, even though this is not explicitly stated in the story about Rav Assi.

Ra'avad of Posquieres (1120-1198), Maimonides' classic critic, disagrees (*Hassagot*, ad. loc.):

This is not a correct ruling! If he goes and leaves him, who shall he command to watch him?!

Apparently, in Ra'avad's time and place there was no option of custodial care and, indeed, the first Jewish old age home seems to have been founded in Amsterdam in 1749.<sup>5</sup>

All subsequent halakhic authorities aligned themselves with either Maimonides or Ra'avad. The Maimonidean camp,<sup>6</sup> replies that since Rav Assi's mother was brought to Israel in a coffin, he must have ordered others to take care of his mother. Regarding the practical issue raised by Ra'avad, they reply that the child can hire someone to take care of the parent. They further state that in cases of a parent who has deteriorated mentally, an outsider can do a better job than a child for two reasons: First of all, the parent will be embarrassed to misbehave in front of an outsider. Secondly, an outsider can raise his voice or physically restrain the parent if necessary, while a child would never be able to do such things and is not allowed to do so.

Ra'avad's followers reply that it is clear from the end of the story (see the first translation above) that Rav Assi regretted having left his mother and therefore the story proves that custodial care is prohibited.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, if, as Maimonides claims, "others" can take care of the parent, then why can't the child do so himself since he has a better understanding of his parent's desires and idiosyncrasies? In addition, this camp seeks support from R. Jacob ben Asher (1270-1343) who in his code (*Tur*, *Yoreh Deah* 240) quotes Ra'avad *after* Maimonides, which seems to indicate his agreement with the former. Lastly, this camp asserts that Rav Assi's mother was *not* mentally disturbed but rather old and crotchety. Rav Assi left her because he knew he could not honor her requests properly. But a demented or senile parent needs *extra* physical care from the child while his demented requests can be ignored because he no longer has all of his faculties.

What then are the halakhic options open to a child faced with the dilemma of caring for a parent with Alzheimer's disease? It appears from the above analysis that there are three legitimate halakhic options:

1. A child with stamina and emotional fortitude can follow the line of thought expressed by Ben Sira and advocated by the Ra'avad and his camp. They view "honor thy father and thy mother" as an absolute value

which cannot be absolved by the erratic behavior of the parent. Regardless of how the son feels, he must *personally* take care of his parents as commanded by the Torah and must not "leave [them] all the days of his life".

2. Others may place their parent in a nursing home, following the example of Rav Assi as interpreted by Maimonides and his followers. According to this view, a child is not *personally* obligated to care for the parent, if he must sacrifice his own emotional health Responsa in a Moment 40.in the process. They further state that in cases of mental deterioration, the honor of the parent can be better served by an outsider who can do things the child cannot do and that the parent would not want him to do.

3. Yet I believe the preferred halakhic solution is one implied by a number of the rabbis in the Maimonidean camp - to keep the parent *at home*<sup>8</sup> but pay an outsider to attend to the functions which are painful or inappropriate for the child to perform. This solution incorporates the concerns of both Ra'avad and Maimonides. On the one hand, the parent *feels* wanted and loved by his or her child, a feeling frequently lacking in an institutional setting. The parent functions better at home than in a new and strange environment.<sup>9</sup> By keeping the parent at home, the child fulfills the commandment to "honor your father and your mother" in a direct and personal fashion as demanded by Ra'avad. On the other hand, following Maimonides, the child protects the parent's honor and the child's own emotional health by ensuring that a professional is on hand who can perform functions not in keeping with the honor owed a parent by a child.<sup>10</sup>

1. Some four million Americans are now afflicted with Alzheimer's disease - see *Newsweek*, December 18, 1989, pp. 54-63 and March 20, 2000, pp. 48-56;

Muriel Gillick, *Tangled Minds: Understanding Alzheimer's Disease*, New York, 1998.

2. *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, Chapter (27) 25, ed. Friedmann, p. 136.

3. Two of the three Talmudic passages cited here are aggadic or non-legal in nature. This is not unusual; halakhic authorities frequently rely on non-legal passages in the Talmud when there is a dearth of halakhic sources.

4. *Kiddushin* 31a and cf. *Yerushalmi* *ibid.*, Chapter 1, fol. 61b. According to a parallel passage in *Devarim Rabbah* 14:1, she was *hasrat da'at* - mentally deficient in some way.

5. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 2, col. 346.

6. R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon (fourteenth century), in *Migdal Oz* ad. loc.; R. Nissim Gerondi (1300-1380), on Rif to *Kiddushin*, ed. Vilna, fol. 13a; R. David ibn Zimra (1479-1573) in *Radbaz* ad. loc.; R. Joseph Karo (1488-1575) in *Shulkhan Arukh Yoreh Deah* 240:10; R. Solomon of Chelm (eighteenth century) in *Mirkevet Hamishneh* to Maimonides ad. loc.; R. Yehiel Michal Epstein (1829-1908) in *Arukh Hashulhan, Yoreh Deah* 240:32; and R. Eliezer Waldenberg, *Tzitz Eliezer*, Vol. 12, no. 59.

7. R. Shlomo Luria (1510-1574), *Yam Shel Shlomo* to *Kiddushin*, chapter 1, par. 64; R. Joshua Falk (1555-1614) in *Derishah to Tur Yoreh Deah* 240; R. Joel Sirkes (1561-1640) in *Bah* *ibid.*; R. David Halevi (1586-1667) to *Shulkhan Arukh Yoreh Deah* 240:10, subparagraph 14; and R. Samuel Strashun (1794-1872) in *Rashash to Kiddushin* ad. loc.

8. The growing phenomenon of adult day care centers enables many children to keep parents with Alzheimer's at home - see *Newsweek*, July 2, 1990, pp. 56-58.

9. *Midrash Hagadol* to *Genesis* 35:6, p. 597 relates that in the ancient city of Luz "when a man became disgusted with his father and mother he would remove them to another city *and immediately they would die*".

10. For further reading, see Gerald Blidstein, *Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother*, New York, 1975, pp. 116-119; Levi Meier, "Filial Responsibility to the 'Senile' Parent" in Levi Meier, ed., *Jewish Values in Bioethics*, New York, 1986, pp. 75-84; Barry Freundel, "Halakhah and the Nursing Home Dilemma", *Proceedings of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists* 10 (1990), pp. 85-106.