

HONORING OUR PARENTS PART 1

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

We live in a society that looks very much to the future. Technological and academic advances make the lifestyles of the past decades seem backward and unappealing. Whilst acknowledging and welcoming the new opportunities that technological advances bring, the Torah stresses the necessity to show a great deal of respect for the past. This means that a Torah Jew does not look back contemptuously at his ancestors as being 'backward', rather he recognizes that there is a great deal to learn from them.

This outlook is one of the underlying factors behind the commands to honor our parents, grandparents, and elders. One may nonetheless ask, 'in what way are our parents so special that we must honor them?'

Judaism teaches that a pivotal moment in world history was the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. This was so fundamental because it represented the introduction of the ultimate source of wisdom, the Torah, to the world. The generation that directly experienced that Revelation, is called the 'Generation of Wisdom' because they were the first generation to be exposed to the Torah's wisdom. Since that moment, the Oral and Written Torah were passed down from father to son in a chain that goes back to Sinai. Consequently, as history develops, each generation is one stage further away from the Giving of the Torah. Therefore, younger people are supposed to look at their parents as being closer in the chain of wisdom back to Sinai and honor them accordingly.

Another aspect of the Torah's emphasis on respecting one's parents, is that it stresses the value of life experience. In a time when newness is in vogue, (as is demonstrated by Barak Obama's victory in the Democratic Primaries), the value of experience can be downplayed. However, living through numerous events and enduring the ups and downs of life will surely teach a person valuable life lessons. A person may have a tendency to dismiss his parents as being behind the times and anything but a source of wisdom! However, if he were to adopt a new mindset in viewing his parents, then he could learn a great deal from them.

These are some of the fundamentals that lay behind the key mitzva of honoring our parents.

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