

HONORING OUR PARENTS PART 3

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Last week we discussed how honoring our parents helps inculcate the trait of gratitude. One reason why we must honor our parents is because we should feel immense gratitude at the numerous kind deeds that they have done for us. And first and foremost, they gave us the greatest gift possible - that of life itself.

This week, we hope to take this idea further; it is well-known that the command to honor our parents is one of the Ten Commandments that were given to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. These commandments were engraved onto two tablets of stone, five on each one. The Rabbis write that there are two general categories within which all commandments belong; 'between man and G-d' or 'between man and his fellow'.

Those that are between man and G-d include commands such as eating kosher food and keeping Shabbat. The purpose of such commands is to develop our relationship with G-d by following these commands, they have little obvious relevance to our relationships with other people¹.

In contrast, the commands that are between man and man are intended to enable us to improve our relationships with those around us - obvious examples are, 'love thy neighbor' and 'do not steal'.

The Rabbis have a tradition that the first tablet was engraved with the first five commandments which all fall into the 'man and G-d' grouping. The difficulty with this understanding, is that the fifth commandment, which is part of the 'man and G-d' section is 'honor your parents'. It would have seemed that this command is purely one that helps develop our relationship with our fellow man and has little direct relevance to improving our relationship with G-d. However, on deeper analysis it is clear that keeping this command properly will greatly enhance our relationship with G-d.

The Sefer HaChinuch who we quoted last week discussing the importance of being grateful to our parents, continues to develop this theme. He discusses how appreciating our should lead us to appreciating everything Hashem has done for us. He writes:

"Once a person fixes this trait [of gratitude to our parents] in his heart, he will come to a great feeling of gratitude towards Hashem, who is the cause of his existence and that of all his ancestors back to Adam HaRishon². [He will thank Hashem for] bringing him into the world and for providing his needs for his whole life... and gave him a knowing and thinking soul, for without this soul he would be like a wild horse, and he should think how important it is to be

careful in serving Hashem correctly³."

By focusing on everything that our parents have done for us, we should automatically come to a recognition that Hashem has done even more kindness than them - for example, even after we leave our parent's home and have to fend for ourselves, we are still constantly being looked after and guided by Hashem. Thus, in a similar way that our gratitude to our parents should cause us to honor them, so too our gratitude towards Hashem should make us do our utmost to follow His ways. Moreover, we should realize that His unending kindness demonstrates his immense love for us and that anything He tells us to do is ultimately for our own benefit.

¹ It should be noted that even commands that are in the 'man and G-d' category can nonetheless greatly enhance our relationships with other people. Observing Shabbat, for example, offers an excellent (and otherwise rare) opportunity for family members to spend quality time together without being distracted by television, internet, or telephones.

² 'Rishon' means first.

³ Sefer HaChinuch Mitzva 33.

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