

# HONORING OUR PARENTS PART 4

*by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen*

In the past weeks we have discussed the philosophical basis behind the command to honor our parents. We will now discuss the laws involved in the commandment. In truth there are four separate commandments with regard to a child's conduct towards his parents. They are:

- "Honor your father and mother so that your days will be lengthy on the land which Hashem your G-d has given you<sup>1</sup> ."
- "A man must fear his mother and father, and observe my Shabboses, I am the Lord your G-d<sup>2</sup> ."
- "One who strikes his father or mother will surely die<sup>3</sup> ."
- "One who curses his father or mother will surely die<sup>4</sup> ."

In the coming weeks we shall analyze each command in detail.

We will begin with the command to honor our parents, (known in Hebrew as *kibud av v'eim*). The Gemara tells us that 'honoring' refers to providing the needs of our parents; this specifically includes making sure that they have sufficient food, drink and clothing. Thus, for example, when a parent asks his child to bring him a drink, the child is obligated by the Torah to do so. It also includes looking after one's parents if they are unhealthy or elderly and need to be looked after in some fashion.

The question arises when helping one's parents will be at the expense of the child's time or money<sup>5</sup>. Must a child even support his parent financially? The law is that he is not obligated to do so. For example, the child is not obligated to pay the health expenses that his parent incurs, rather the parent must pay himself. The problem arises if the parent has no money - in such a case the child is obligated to help his parent financially as part of his general obligation to give charity, but not because of the law to honor his parents. The laws of charity state that one must give to those closest to him before giving to strangers, consequently, providing for one's parents takes first priority. Even in such a case, there is a limit to how much of one's own money one must spend in order to provide for his parents - one does not have to give away more than one fifth of his money.

Similarly, one does not necessarily have to devote a vast amount of time in order to look after his parents. For example, one is not required to give up his livelihood in order to provide for his parent's needs.

These laws teach us that honoring does not merely mean being polite to one's parents. Rather, part

of our debt of gratitude to them is that we should strive to provide for their needs.

<sup>1</sup> Shemos, Parshas Yisro, 20:12. It is found in the 'Ten Commandments'.

<sup>2</sup> Vayikra, Parshas Kedoshim, 19:3.

<sup>3</sup> Shemos, Parshas Mishpatim, 21:15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 21:17.

<sup>5</sup> There are many varied situations that can arise with regard to the obligation to look after and financially provide for, one's parents - we are only providing a general guide to the laws. In specific cases, one should ask an Orthodox Rabbi how to proceed.

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