

HONORING OUR PARENTS PART 7

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In the past weeks we have covered two of the commandments that relate to how a child must treat his parents. There are two remaining commands: "One who strikes his father or mother will surely die¹."

"One who curses his father or mother will surely die²." The prohibition to curse one's parents is fairly straightforward, however the command to not strike one's parents is more complicated.

From the language of the Torah with regard to not striking, it would seem that the prohibition is limited to actually striking one's parents and nothing else. However, the Gemara discusses whether it is permissible for a child to blood let for his father³. The Gemara then goes on to tell us that there were great Rabbis who would not allow their children to take out thorns that were stuck into their parents' skin, for fear that some extra bleeding may take place as a result of the child's efforts. We see from here that taking blood out of one's parents is included in the prohibition to not strike them. Moreover, the prohibition applies even when the child's intentions are totally pure⁴.

The Halachic authorities discuss whether there are any situations in which a child may be allowed to cause his parent to bleed. This situation can arise when the child is a surgeon and his parent would like him to perform surgery, or when the child is a dentist and his parent would like him to take out his tooth.

The Ashkenazic authority, Rabbi Moshe Isserles⁵ rules, with regard to blood letting, that if there is no one else available then it is permissible for the child to do it himself⁶. It is not clear how far we can extend this leniency in cases where there are other people who could perform the surgery but the parent prefers that his child to do so. In such situations one should consult with an Orthodox Rabbi.

Another aspect of this commandment is that a parent must be extra vigilant not to strike his child when his child is older, because he may provoke his child to strike him in return and thus cause the child to transgress this serious transgression to not strike one's parents. The Torah says that one cannot put a stumbling block in front of a blind man. The Rabbis explain that this means that it is forbidden to put another person in a situation where he is likely to sin, thus a parent cannot put his child in a situation where he may sin⁷.

¹ Shemos, Parshas Mishpatim, 21:15.

² Ibid, 21:17.

³ In those times, blood letting was a common form of healing.

⁴ Sanhedrin, 84b.

⁵ Known as the 'Rema' - he lived in Poland in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. His rulings form the basis of Ashkenazic law, as opposed to that of Sefardim who follow Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of 'Beis Yosef' and the Shulchan Aruch.

⁶ Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, Simun 241, sif 3.

⁷ It should be noted that many experts in parenting say that nowadays a parent should never strike his children.

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