

MITZVAH 41: HONORING YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

by Rabbi Moshe Goldberger

"Respect your father and your mother..." (Shemos 20:12)

The Torah commands us to honor our father and mother, the two people who were Hashem's partners in bringing us into the world. This mitzvah has many practical aspects, including standing up for our parents, respecting their wishes, and caring for their needs. In fact, the Chayei Adam explains that there are three parts to this mitzvah: 1) to think highly of our parents; 2) to speak highly of them; and 3) to act on their behalf, as in caring for them (Chayei Adam 67:3)

Honoring them is considered Hashem's honor (Kiddushin 30b)

In the Ten Commandments, we are told "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be extended..." (ibid.). This is explained in two ways:

- By helping and honoring your parents, you enable them to live longer. Thus, you gain that merit in return.

- By showing that you honor those who helped bring you to life, you deserve more life.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 30a) instructs us to learn how to honor our parents from a non-Jew, Dama ben Nesina, who gave up a potential profit of a huge sum of money in order to avoid waking his father. For that, the Talmud says, Hashem rewarded him with a red heifer, which he sold for exactly the amount he lost in not waking his father. We can ask three questions:

- What was his logic in not waking his father? Why didn't he rationalize, "The loss will be so great - I'll just wake my father this one time"?

- What would have happened if the key to the red heifer's corral had been under his father's pillow. Would he have lost this deal, too?

- Why did Hashem reward him with a red heifer? Why not just give him a treasure full of gold?

The answer is that Dama ben Nesina's logic was "My parents are the only two people in the world who gave me life. Thus, they are irreplaceable. The money I lose today, Hashem can send me tomorrow."

The red heifer was a unique entity, the only one of its kind in existence at the time. (There have only been nine of them in all of history, and the tenth will come in Mashiach's time [Rambam, Hilchos Para Adumah 3:4].). Thus, the Sages would have returned for it if the key was unavailable. It was only the

sale of gems which was forfeited because the Sages found them somewhere else.

Hashem gave him a red cow, which was one of a kind, to reward him, measure for measure, for treating his parents with unique honor. This teaches us the great concept of treating our parents with proper respect, as they are the only ones who have granted us life!

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