

WHERE HONOR IS DUE

by Rabbi Label Lam

Honor your mother and father...(Shemos 20:11)

An overwhelming majority of the words of the Ten Commandments are contained in the first five commandments. If the font size and the distribution of words would be equal then two or three would be on one side and seven or eight would be found on the second. Yet we have a tradition though that they were balanced five and five with one side instructing about matters between man and his Maker and the other side between man and man. If that is so, then there's a big question that shouts out from the bottom of the right column of the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Why then is the honoring of parents found on that side that side of the tablets that deals with issues between man and G-d?

I once heard from a musar giant, Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. a profoundly sharp statement which may require a "Surgeon General" caveat so that it is not misused. The following idea is not meant not to be used as a weapon to accuse or direct blame at others but rather as an instrument for our own self development. He had said that if one bentches, that is if one says the somewhat long version of after blessing for a meal and somewhere along the line fails to give thanks or express appreciation to the host, the waiter, the cook, mother or whoever then according standards of ethics but not legally so the blessings are most probably worthless. Wow! Why is it so?

He explained that the human mind works from the concrete to the abstract and not the other way around. Therefore if someone neglected to thank those who had worked so hard to prepare with care and all the portions of that meal and then they turn their eyes to heaven to offer praise, it is not likely that the words themselves are spiced with sincerity. How can one seriously bypass the earthly agents that deliver goodness and then direct authentic thanks to an entity abstract from the sensory universe?

The Sefer HaChinuch about the Mitzvah of Honoring Parents writes: "Amongst the sources of this Mitzvah is that it is fitting for a person to recognize and do acts of kindness to someone who did him good, and that he should not be so despicable as to deny that indebtedness because this is a very bad and extremely ugly trait to G-d and to people. Therefore one should take to heart that his parents are the cause for his being in this world and it is truly fitting to offer them honor and whatever else that is possible, since they struggled on your behalf countless times since your infancy.

When this trait is firmly installed in the soul of man then he will grow to recognize and appreciate the great kindness of the The Creator Blessed Be He Who is the cause of all fathers going back to Adam and Who brought him into the air of the world, provided for all his needs all the days of his life and Who completed his limbs and gave him a lofty soul and an intelligent mind without which he would be like donkey. He should continuously contemplate this matter and realize how important it is to be careful with His service."

Why are parents on the side between man and G-d? The launching point for relating realistically to those ideals standing at the top of the chart is planted on the firm foundation of active appreciation for a father and mother. To the extent that one recognizes the earthly agents that have lent physical, emotional, and spiritual support can we turn with full hearts to give honor where honor is due. Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.