WHO HAS TO HONOR WHOM?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshios Acharei Mos & Kedoshim

Who Has To Honor Whom?

The beginning of Parshas Kedoshim contains a pasuk which presents a very interesting juxtaposition of mitzvot: "Every man shall revere his mother and his father and you shall observe My Sabbaths - I am Hashem your G-d." [Vayikra 19:3]. Rashi wonders about the connection between Shabbos observance and revering one's parents. Rashi cites the Toras Kohanim which teaches, based on the juxtaposition in this pasuk: "Although I enjoined you about revering a parent, if your parent should say to you, 'Desecrate the Shabbos', do not listen to them. And so too it is with regard to other commandments." This is a halachic principle brought down several times in the Talmud, which is also codified in the Shulchan Aruch.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky adds that the Torah is teaching us another message here as well. We believe as Jews that G-d created the world in six days and that on the seventh day He rested. Prior to Creation the world did not exist and obviously people did not exist. This "Creation scenario" is not universally accepted. There are many people who in fact deny any role of G-d in creation. The Darwinian Theory and others posit that human beings evolved from lower species and reject the "story of Creation" as spelled out in the beginning of the Book of Bereishis. This is a philosophical-theological dispute of how one views the world.

There is a practical difference between these two world views. The difference boils down to who needs to honor whom? Should older people need to honor younger people or should younger people need to honor older people? If one believes that man has evolved from the lower forms of life, then presumably the further one gets away from that "original man" the higher form of life one would expect. If man evolved from a monkey, then the first generations of men were not very far removed from monkeys. Later generations have "evolved more" than earlier ones and hence the earlier generations must honor the later ones. The bottom line is that parents should honor their children. If on the other hand, -- as we believe -- the Almighty created the First Man, it follows that the First Man was the most perfect human being that the world has ever seen. He was without flaws because he was the handiwork of the Master of the Universe Himself. No one can improve upon that! As we get further away from that First Man, man diminishes in stature. If we are going down,

rather than up, it is clear that the younger generations need to honor the previous generations.

With this introduction, the pasuk now is crystal clear. "A man shall revere his mother and his father." Why? It is because "My Sabbaths you shall keep - I am Hashem your G-d." There is a link between these two parts of the pasuk. Since there was a Creation - which you testify to by observance of Shabbos on the seventh day of the week, then parents who are a generation closer to creation and to the original man who was created by the Almighty need to be revered by the younger generation!

This insight of Rav Yaakov comes with a story as well. In his later years, Rav Yaakov attended a Kenesiah Gedolah of Agudas Yisroel in Eretz Yisrael. He was already an older man at the time and was accompanied on his travels by one of his sons. As we all know, the trip to Eretz Yisrael is a long trip and Rav Yaakov was an older man. His son waited on him hand and foot throughout the journey. There was a person on the plane sitting nearby who was astounded by the love, respect, and dedication the son was showing to his father. At one point, he commented to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, "My children do not treat me like that. What is your secret in child-raising that your son treats you like a King?"

In effect, Rav Yaakov told him the above quoted idea. We implant in our children the belief that the further we are removed from Sinai, the more one has had to endure the phenomenon of "yeridas haDoros" [lessening of the generations]. Therefore, they understand that the older generation is a "better generation" and hence they honor and respect us. "If your children do not act this way", Rav Yaakov told the gentleman on the plane, "perhaps it is because they feel that they are more advanced than you are and that on the contrary, you should honor them."

Rabbeinu Dovid Abudraham: What's In A Name?

The pasuk in the parsha says, "You shall not steal, and you shall not deny falsely, and you shall not lie to one another." [Vayikra 19:11] Rashi points out that the theft mentioned in this pasuk refers to monetary theft, while the prohibition "Thou shall not steal" in the Ten Commandments refers to the capital offense of kidnapping. This fact is not widely known in the world at large. The average person who is not versed in the traditions of the Oral Law, believes that "Thou shall not steal" in the Ten Commandments refers to monetary theft.

I would like to relate an incident which teaches how careful a person must be to avoid stealing money (or property). There is a famous Sephardic commentator known as Rabbeinu Dovid Abudraham. Rabbeinu Dovid wrote a commentary on the Siddur, which is one of the classic commentaries on Jewish liturgy. How did he get the name Abudraham? This is not a common name, even among Sephardic Jews. There is a story that goes with the name.

Rabbeinu Dovid was a merchant. I do not know exactly what he sold, but whatever it was, people

would give him their money and he would measure out the commodity he was selling and give them what they purchased, based on weight. In those days, the scales were far more primitive than today. Also, they did not weigh in pounds or ounces, kilos or grams. The unit of weight in those days in his country was something called the dram. However, when someone ordered 10 drams of merchandise, Rabbeinu Dovid would not put 10 drams on the scale and measure it all at once; he would put one dram at a time on the scale. With each dram that he would sell, he would give a little more than the exact measure, to be sure that he was not near the borderline of possible theft. He would repeat this slight perk for the customer with each dram he weighed out.

One day a Gentile entered the store and told Rabbeinu Dovid that he wanted 9 drams of merchandise. So Rabbeinu Dovid went through his ritual and weighed out a dram nine times, wrapped up each dram, and gave the package to the customer. However, when the customer left the store, Rabbeinu Dovid began to think, "Maybe I only wrapped up 8 packages; not 9. Maybe I short-changed the customer on this order!" He ran out of the store to catch the customer before he got too far down the block, to tell him he might have only received part of his order." The truth is he probably gave him 9 drams worth of merchandise even if it was only in 8 packages because of his practice of giving extra; and most likely, he had given him the full number of packages anyhow.

At any rate, the Gentile was so impressed with the honesty of Rabbeinu Dovid that he converted to Judaism.

In Arabic the name preface "Abu" means "father of" (similar to the Hebrew word Aba). That is why he had the name "Abudraham" - it meant in Arabic "Father of the Dram," because he was so meticulous in his business dealings that he measured out each order dram by dram.

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