



Parashat Acharei Mot/Kodoshim

Honoring Parents

Dear Rebbetzin,

I'm a new *Ba'alat Teshuva* learning to keep the Torah and Mitzvot, but I'm struggling with how to keep the mitzvah of respecting my parents. They want me to go to college and get a secular education, but I want to go to Israel and learn in a Yeshiva for women. Every night at the dinner table we fight about this issue, and sometimes I get so upset that I use bad words and call them duped, narrow minded and ruthless. Then I feel terrible and remember that I have a mitzvah to respect my parents and even fear them. Does that imply that I have to do what they want and enroll in college?

Jenny Wise (name changed)

Dear Jenny,

What you are going through is not easy. You are developing your own identity separate from your parents who are not religious. You want to live your own life, but your parents are adamant that you get a secular education so you will be able to support yourself. You are torn in your desire to follow your heart and soul to immerse yourself in Torah in the Holy Land, while keeping the mitzvot of honoring and fearing your parents. Your discussions with your parents have turned into unproductive confrontations where your temper gets the better of you, and you later regret your disrespectful words. So how can you live your own life and still respect your parents when they demand that you obey them doing the opposite of your soul's calling?

The Mitzvah to Obey Parents

Parashat Kedoshim teaches us the mitzvah to fear our parents, which can be hard to relate to in our times when it is popular to love but not fear and we are encouraged to do whatever we feel like.

ספר ויקרא פרק יט (ג) איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתתי תשמרו אני ה' אלהיכם:

"A person must fear his mother and father but keep my Shabbats, I am Hashem Your G-d" (*Vayikra* 19:3).

What is the difference between "honoring" and "fearing" our parents? Honoring includes: giving them to eat and drink, assisting them to dress, helping them enter or leave a room or building i.e. picking them up and driving them back to where they want to go, and in general to take care of their physical needs. On the other hand, the mitzvah to fear one's parents includes: not sitting or standing in their place, and not contradicting their words (*Babylonian Talmud, Kedushin* 31b). Not contradicting their words entails obeying our parents if they tell us to do a particular action. Therefore, whenever possible we should try to fulfill our parent's request. However, if the parent will not benefit directly, whereas the child will suffer some type of loss by obeying, the child is exempt from complying with their request (*Sefer Mora Horim u'Chvodam* 1:50). It is not clear whether this exemption applies to you, since it is possible to say that your parents indeed will benefit from your ability to gain the means to make your own livelihood and no longer depend on their financial support.

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Fear and Respect Parents Without Infringing on Mitzvah Observance

So do you really have to give up your dream to learn Torah in Israel in order to keep the mitzvah of fearing your parents? "...But you shall keep my Shabbats..." – Scripture places the mitzvah of keeping the Shabbat immediately after that of fearing one's parents in order to suggest the following: "Although I admonish you regarding the fear due to your parents, yet if they bid you to desecrate the Shabbat do not listen to them. The same is the case with any of the other mitzvot. This is evident, since Scripture adds, "I am Hashem your (plural) G-d," – both you and your parents are equally bound to honor Me (Rashi, *Vayikra* 19:3).

The Mitzvah of Learning Torah in Israel Overrides the Mitzvah to Obey Parents

From this we learn that a Jewish person must fear his Jewish parents only as long as respecting them does not infringe on mitzvah observance. For example, if your parents tell you to turn on a light for them on Shabbat, you may not obey. Likewise, you are not obligated to honor your parents by living outside of Israel in order to be geographically close to them, since it is a mitzvah in the Torah for every Jew to live in Israel. *Yishuv HaAretz* – Settling in the Land of Israel takes precedence over all mitzvot, for it is the only mitzvah that overrides a rabbinic ruling relating to the Shabbat. The Rabbis allow a Jew to purchase a home in *Eretz Yisrael* on Shabbat, if necessary, even if this entails violating the prohibition to tell a non-Jew to violate Shabbat on his behalf (*Babylonian Talmud, Gittin* 8b and *Bava Kama* 80b with *Tosafot*). Likewise, the mitzvah of learning Torah outweighs all other mitzvot (*Mishna Peah* 1:1). Therefore, although this goes against your parents' wishes, the mitzvah of learning Torah in Israel overrides the mitzvah to obey them.

Three Partners in Creation

Although you are exempt from complying with your parents' desires when doing so would disobey Hashem and His Torah, you still need to go about your life in the most respectful way possible. It is of utmost importance to respect our parents in every possible way without transgressing the Torah. This is because the creation of a child includes the partnership between three: Hashem and both of our parents. Therefore, by disrespecting our parents we also disrespect Hashem, G-d forbid. Raising our voice and using insulting words towards our parents could border to the prohibition of cursing them, which is very serious, as it states in *Parashat Kedoshim*:

ספר ויקרא פרק כ (ט) כי איש איש אָנֹשֶׁר יִקְלֹל אֶת אָבִיו וְאֶת אִמּוֹ מוֹת יוּמָת אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ קִלְל דָּמָיו בּוֹ:
 "For any person who curses (insults) his father or his mother shall be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon himself" (*Vayikra* 20:9).

רמב"ן על ויקרא פרק כ פסוק ט וטעם כי איש איש אשר יקלל את אביו ואת אמו יחזור לראש הפרשה שאמר איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואמר כאן כי איש איש אשר לא ישמע (וכו') [בקולין] ומקלל אביו ואמו מות יומת ועל דרך האמת, בעבור שאמר (פסוק ז) והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים כי אני ה' אלהיכם, ואמר (בפסוק ח) אני ה' מקדשכם, כי השם הנכבד הוא המקדש אותנו, כי הוא אבינו וגואלנו מעולם הוא שמו, אם כן המקלל את המשתתפין ביצירה חייב מיתה...

The reason that anyone who cursed his father or his mother is liable for the death penalty is connected to the beginning of the *parasha* commanding us to fear our mother and his father. It states here, that anyone who does not listen to My voice but curses his father or mother shall die. We can understand this in light of the statement, "You shall sanctify yourself and be holy for I am Hashem" (*Vayikra* 20:7), and "for I am Hashem who sanctifies you" (Ibid. 8). For the honorable

Hashem sanctifies us, he is our father and redeemer, His Name is eternal. Therefore, the blasphemer of any of the partners in his own creation is liable for the death penalty (Ramban, *Vayikra* 20:9).

Speaking Respectfully to Our Parents

We need to work on controlling ourselves and learn to speak in a respectful manner to our parents, even when they press our buttons. In the cases when we are exempt from doing their will, we still must try our hardest to avoid a confrontation with our parents. Make an effort not to contradict their words, but rather express yourself in the positive way. Thus, instead of saying, “There is no way I will go to college...” you may say something like, “I really want to go to Yeshiva in Israel for now, but it is likely I will go to college at a future time.” We are indeed indebted to our parents for bringing us into this world and for the struggles they had along the way. Denying this debt transgresses the will of G-d. Once we learn to really respect our parents we can move on to recognizing Hashem’s greatness and all he has done for us, bringing us into the world and fulfilling all our needs. When we engage in active appreciation for our parents, we will eventually realize how much physical, emotional, and spiritual support they have given us throughout our lives. Thus, we must respect our parents where respect is deserved (Based on *Sefer HaChinuch* 33:4).