

כבוד אב ואם

Relating to Parents

Prepared by Jim Ponet

INTRODUCTION

Honor and **Reverence** may sound archaic, vestigial values from a lost past. This unit on parents, however, actually explores a number of values critical in the moral development of young people. It might be useful to highlight the values in a dialectical fashion. That is, authority versus autonomy or obedience versus self-expression, or loyalty versus individuality, or communal self versus lonely self.

The family is, after all, a laboratory where the experience of dependency is explored. The challenge of the family unit is to allow individuals to feel and act dependent without being infantilized, humiliated, or demeaned. The family either teaches that dependency and dignity cannot coexist, or, that needs may be acknowledged without fear of abuse.

The units are laid out historically revealing perhaps a growing appreciation for individual autonomy in the framework of honor/reverence demanded by the tradition.

Consider what experiences you have had in your life with *honor* and *reverence*.

We will be studying material from the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and Maimonides.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>I am the Lord your God ...</i> | 6. <i>You shall not murder.</i> |
| 2. <i>No other gods besides Me</i> | 7. <i>You shall not commit adultery.</i> |
| 3. <i>No false oaths in God's name</i> | 8. <i>You shall not steal.</i> |
| 4. <i>Remember the Sabbath day</i> | 9. <i>No false witness against your neighbor</i> |
| 5. <i>Honor your father and mother</i> | 10. <i>Do not covet your neighbor</i> |

YOUR TORAH NAVIGATOR

The Hebrew Bible presents two separate commandments regarding the relationship between parents and children. The first is found within the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) listed above. This ten part legislation is often regarded as the essence of Western morality. These ten statements have been studied as linked pairs, five etched on one tablet and five on the other, for many years.

1. What connections can you discern between the paired elements?
2. And most importantly what connection is there between the summons to honor your parents and the warning not to envy your neighbor?
3. What is problematic about envy?

The second commandment regarding parents appears in Leviticus 19, a section often called "the Holiness Code." To wit:

Leviticus 19:1-2

[פרשת קדושים] א וַיְדַר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּרֹאשׁ־לַעֲדוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַאֲמַר אֲלֵהֶם קְדִים הִנֵּי קֹד אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱהִיכֶם: ג אִי אֹאבְדוּ יִרְא
וְאֵת־תַּנְי מִרְ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱהִיכֶם:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them:

You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

**You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths:
I the Lord am your God.**

Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I the Lord am your God.

This chapter of the Hebrew Bible culminates in the most famous commandment of the Bible, namely,

Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:18).

Holiness seems to begin with reverence for parents and end with love for the neighbor.

YOUR TORAH NAVIGATOR

1. Can you detect a difference between those of your friends who love and respect their parents and those who dislike and disrespect their parents?
2. How would you distinguish honoring parents from revering parents?
3. Why in discussing honor does "father" come first while in discussing reverence "mother" comes first?
4. Why does the Hebrew Bible not explicitly command parents to take care of, nurture and love their children?
5. What is the connection between the commandment to revere parents and the commandment in the same verse to "keep my Sabbaths?"

THE TALMUD

Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 30b - 31a

Our Rabbis taught: there are three partners in every person, the Holy One Blessed be He, the father and the mother. When a person honors his father and his mother, the Holy One Blessed be He says, "I view them as though I had dwelt among them and they had honored Me."

Rabbi (Judah the Prince) used to teach, "It is well known to the One who spoke and the world came into existence (i.e. God) that a son honors his mother more than his father because she sways him with words. Therefore the Holy One Blessed be He placed the honor of the father before that of the mother. It is well known to the One who spoke and the world came into existence that a son reveres his father more than his mother because he teaches him Torah. Therefore the Holy One Blessed be He put the fear of the mother before that of the father."

YOUR TALMUD NAVIGATOR

1. The Talmud links honor due parents with honor due God. What meaning do you find in this linkage?
2. Rabbi seems to think that honoring mother and revering father are natural responses in a child. Do you agree?

TALMUD, Tractate *Kiddushin* 31B

Our Rabbis taught: What is "revere" and what is "honor?" Revere means that the son must neither stand in his father's place nor sit in his place, nor contradict his words nor [even] support his words [when he is arguing with another sage]. "Honor" means that he must give him food and drink, clothe and cover him, lead him in and out.

YOUR TALMUD NAVIGATOR

1. In "**revering**" the son seems small, the father large, the gap between them profound. Why is this relation associated with the command to revere?
2. In "**honoring**" the son seems strong, the father frail, the gap between them gone. Why is this relation associated with the command to honor?

Kiddushin 31B

Rabbi Yochanan said: Happy is he who has never set eyes upon his parents. [Because it is impossible to honor them adequately, and one is punished for failures -- Rashi]. When Rabbi Yochanan was conceived, his father died; when he was born, his mother died...

YOUR TALMUD NAVIGATOR

Why might the obligation to honor a parent seem to a sage to be beyond his ability to perform?