

Torah Table Talk
**What Children Owe Their Parents:
Respect and Honor**
Parshat Va'etchanan
Deuteronomy 3:24 – 7:11

Parshat Va'etchanan contains two of the most significant passages in the Torah. We find in this week's Torah portion not only the Sh'ma, our most basic affirmation of faith, but the Ten Commandments as well. As Moses continues his final speech to the Jewish people, he reminds them of their most basic responsibilities. He tells the people that their experience at Sinai was both unique and powerful. They encountered God in a way that was unprecedented. They must therefore constantly be vigilant to heed God's commandments and remain faithful to his words.

We could conduct a full discussion of any of the Ten Commandments. I have chosen to focus specifically on the fourth commandment: Honor your father and mother. Let's take a look at what this commandment says and how it compares with similar passages elsewhere in the Torah. What does it say and what does it leave unsaid.

Deuteronomy 5:16

Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may long endure, and that you may fare well in the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.

Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and mother that you may long endure on the Land that the Lord your God is assigning to you

Leviticus 19:3

You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep my holy Sabbaths: I the Lord am Your God.

1. Note that the first two verses above are similar to one another. The verse in Exodus appears in the first version of the Ten Commandments which is similar to but not exactly the same as the second version of the Commandments which Moses presents at the end of his career. How might the time frame in which these two versions of the Ten Commandments appear help explain the differences between them?
2. Compare the fifth commandment with the verse in Leviticus. How are they different from one another? How do you understand the difference between honor and reverence?
3. The commandment to honor one's parents is preceded by four commandments which deal with our relationship to God and is followed by five commandments that define our relationship to our neighbors. Why do you think this commandment appears in this particular place in the Ten Commandment? How

does our relation to our parents make a transition between our relationship to the divine and human interactions?

Kiddushin 31b

Our Rabbis taught: What is awe? **Awe** means that the child must neither stand in the parent's regular place, nor sit in his regular seat, nor contradict a parent's words, nor tip the scales against a parent* **Honor** means that the child must provide the parent with food and drink, clothe and cover him, and lead a parent in and out. At whose expense? Rabbi Judah said: The son's. Rabbi Nachman ben Oshia said: The father's. The Rabbis gave ruling in accordance with the view of Rabbi Jeremiah...that it must be at the father's expense. An objection is raised: It is said: *Honor your father and your mother* and it also says, *Honor the Lord with your substance*: just as the later means at personal cost, so the former too. But if you say (costs should be incurred) "at the father's expense" how does it affect him? Through the loss of time.

*(*Should the father be in a dispute with another scholar his son must not side with his opponent Rashi)*

1. According to the Talmud what is the difference between awe and honor? How do the expectations of the sages measure against the expectations most children and parents have today in how children treat their parents? Do you consider this statement timely or out dated. What should a child's obligations to his or her parents be today?
2. What are the ages of the children and adults being discussed in this passage?
3. The Torah discusses reverence and honor but says nothing about love for ones parents? Why? Why do you think the Torah commands us to "Love the Lord your God but it says nothing about loving one's parents?
4. Should there be limits to what we owe our parents? If so, what should they be? How should a child treat a parent who has been abusive throughout his or her life?

Glossary

Kiddushin – The tractate of the Talmud which deals primarily with the laws of marriage. Like many sections of the Talmud it contains many other topics including a lengthy section dealing with parent child relations

How to use Torah Table Talk

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***"All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul."***