

TEN "SUPER-MITZVAHS" and WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN

These are the things that are limitless, of which a person enjoys the fruit of the world, while the principal remains in the world to come. They are:

Honoring one's father and mother

Engaging in deeds of compassion

Arriving early for study, morning and evening

Dealing graciously with guests

Visiting the sick

Providing for the wedding couple

Accompanying the dead for burial

Being devoted in prayer

And making peace among people.

But the study of Torah encompasses them all.

MITZVAH #1: HONORING ONE'S FATHER AND MOTHER

What does it mean to honor? Sometimes it is not easy. The word kibud (honor) has as its root, *kaveid* (heavy). It can be a burden to honor our parents.

What constitutes honor?

One must provide them with food and drink, clothing and garments, to conduct them home and take them out, and rise before them. And one must provide them with all their needs cheerfully: even if one should feed them daily the most delectable foods but does so with ill grace, one incurs Divine punishment. And conversely, if one makes his father do hard labor but the intention is good, viz. to save him from a worse fate — and he appeases his father by showing him that his intention is good — one inherits the world to come.

Also, one must perform for parents all such services as a servant performs for his master; and one is duty bound to render personal services even at personal expense.

To what lengths should the duty of honoring parents go? Even were they to take his purse full of gold, and cast it into the sea in his presence, he must not shame them, manifest grief in their presence, or display any anger, but accept the Divine decree without demur! **[Shulchan Aruch, ibid, 240:4ff.]**

What constitutes reverence?

One must not stand in the place appointed for his father, in a council of elders or the place reserved for him to pray. One must not sit in the seat generally occupied by his father. One must not contradict his father's words nor corroborate his words in his presence (even to say "father's opinion appears correct"), nor call him, while alive or dead, by his name.

To what lengths should the duty of revering parents go?

Even if he is attired in costly garments, presiding over a meeting, and his parents come and rend his garments, strike him on the head and spit on his face, he must not shame them but should remain silent and fear the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, who has thus decreed. **[Hilchos Mamrim 6:7].**

When Not to Obey

These Mitzvot are integral parts of Torah and subject thereto. They can never apply to incidents that would contravene the letter or spirit of the Torah:

"Ye shall revere every man his mother and his father, and ye shall keep my Sabbaths; I am the Lord your God.'

The Torah juxtaposes the observance of the Sabbath to the fear of one's father in order to teach you that 'although I admonish you regarding the reverence of your father, yet if he bids you to desecrate the Sabbath do not listen to him [and the same is the case with any of the other commandments], for 'I am the Lord your God' - both you and your father are equally bound in duty to honor Me.

Do not, therefore, obey him if it results in disobeying My words."

[Rashi on [Lev. 19:3](#); Yevamot 5b; Bava Metzia 32a].

If parents would order their child to transgress a positive or a negative command set forth in the Torah, or even a command which is of rabbinic origin, the child must disregard the order. Moreover, in the event that the father requests a personal service from his son while the son has a Mitzvah to perform, then: if the Mitzvah can be performed by others, let him delegate it to others and attend to the duty of honoring his father, for one commandment is not to be neglected in order to fulfill another.

But if there are no others to perform the Mitzvah (and it cannot be postponed), he must perform it himself and disregard the honor due his father, because both he and his father are duty bound to fulfill the commandment. The latter would include especially the duty of studying Torah which supersedes that of honoring parents [**Hilchos Mamrim 6:12f., Shulchan Aruch, ibid, 240:12f. and 25)**

Some Basic Laws of Honoring Parents

1. One must be extremely careful to honor and revere his father and mother, for the Torah compares it to the honor and reverence of God.
2. Both man and woman are enjoined to honor and revere parents. However, a married woman is not in a position to supply her parents with their needs inasmuch as she depends on others, and she is therefore exempt thereof. But she is obligated to do for her parents all she can as long as her husband does not object.
3. One must honor and respect his step-mother during his father's lifetime and his step-father during his mother's lifetime. It is proper that one honor and respect them even after the death of one's own parents.
4. One must honor and respect his father-in-law and his mother-in-law (as we find that King David honored King Saul, who was his father-in-law, by calling him "my father"; see [I Samuel 24:12](#)). Likewise, one must honor and respect grandparents. Also implied in this Mitzvah is that one must honor his elder brother and sister.
5. If the father or mother is asleep and the key to one's store lies under their pillow, one must not waken them even if he should lose much profit thereby. However, if the father would benefit by being awakened, and if the son should fail to awake him he will grieve over the loss of the profit, it is the son's duty to arouse him since that will make the father happy. It is also the duty of children to arouse their father for the performance of any religious duty (which might otherwise be neglected) as all are equally bound to honor the Almighty.
6. If the mind of his father or mother is affected, one should make every effort to indulge the vagaries of the stricken parent, until God will have mercy on the affected. But if the condition of the parent has grown worse and the son is no longer able to endure the strain, he may leave his father or mother provided he delegates others to give the parent proper care.

7. When a child sees his parent violate the Torah he must not say to him "You have violated a command of the Torah"; he should rather say: "Father, is it not written in the Torah thus and thus?", speaking to him as though he were consulting him instead of admonishing him, so that the parent may correct himself without being put to shame.
8. The Torah is rigorous not only with respect to him who strikes or curses his parents but also with him who puts them to shame. For he who treats them with contempt, even by using harsh words against them, even by a discourteous gesture, is cursed by God, as it is said: "Cursed be he that dishonors his father or his mother." ([Deut 27:16](#))
9. One must honor his parents even after their death. When mentioning parents after their demise one should add: "May his (or her) memory be a blessing."
10. Although children are commanded to go to the aforementioned lengths in their relationship to their parents, the parent is forbidden to impose too heavy a yoke upon them, to be too exacting with them in matters pertaining to his honor, lest he cause them to stumble. He should forgive them and shut his eyes, for a parent has the right to forego the honor due him.