

SACRED AGING: ON THE OBLIGATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF ELDER CARE

Exodus 20:11

יא כִּבֵּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ, וְאֶת-אִמֶּךָ--לְמַעַן, יָאָרְכוּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ. **11** Honor your father and thy mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Leviticus 19:3

ג אִישׁ אִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ, וְאֶת-שַׁבְּתוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ: אֲנִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. **3** You shall fear/revere your mother and father and you shall keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 5:15

טו כִּבֵּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמֶּךָ, כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ--לְמַעַן יָאָרְיִכָּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, וְיֵטֵב לָךְ, עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ. **15** Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD thy God commanded you; that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you, upon the land which the LORD your God gives you.

(Bavli Kiddushin 31b - 32a)

R. Tarfon had a mother for whom, whenever she wished to mount into bed, he would bend down to let her ascend; (and when she wished to descend, she stepped down upon him). He went and boasted thereof in the school. Said they to him, 'You have not yet reached half the honour [due]: has she then thrown a purse before you into the sea without your shaming her?'

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף לא עמוד ב

רבי טרפון הוה ליה ההיא אמה, דכל אימת דהוה בעיא למיסק לפוריא - גחין וסליק לה, וכל אימת דהוה נחית - נחתת עלויה, אתא וקא משתבח בי מדרשא, אמרי ליה: עדיין לא הגעת לחצי כיבוד, כלום זרקה ארנקי בפניך לים ולא הכלמתה?

Our Rabbis taught: What is 'fear' and what is 'honor'? 'Fear' means that he [the son] must neither stand in his [the father's] place nor sit in his place, nor contradict his words, nor tip the scales against him. 'Honour' means that he must give him food and drink, clothe and cover him, lead him in and out. The Scholars propounded: At whose expense? Rab Judah said: The son's. R. Nahman b. Oshaia said: The father's. The Rabbis gave a ruling to R. Jeremiah — others state, to R. Jeremiah's son — in accordance with the view that it must be at the father's expense. An objection is raised: It is said: Honour thy father and thy mother; and it is also said: Honour the

Lord with thy substance: just as the latter means at personal cost, so the former too.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף לא עמוד ב

ת"ר: איזהו מורא, ואיזהו כיבוד? מורא - לא עומד במקומו, ולא יושב במקומו, ולא סותר את דבריו, ולא מכריעו; כיבוד - מאכיל ומשקה, מלביש ומכסה, מכניס ומוציא. איבעיא להו תלמוד בבלי מסכת

קידושין דף לב עמוד א

משל מי? רב יהודה אמר: משל בן, רב נתן בר אושעיא אמר: משל אב. אורו ליה רבנן לרב ירמיה, ואמרי לה לבריה דרב ירמיה, כמ"ד משל אב. מיתבי נאמר: +שמות כ+ כבד את אביך ואת אמך, ונאמר: +משלי ג+ כבד את ה' מהונך, מה להלן בחסרון כיס, אף כאן בחסרון כיס; ואי אמרת משל אב, מאי נפקא ליה מיניה? לביטול מלאכה

Come and hear: R. Eliezer was asked: How far does the honor of parents [extend]? — Said he: That he should take a purse, throw it in his presence into the sea, and not shame him. But if you say, at the father's expense, what does it matter to him? — It refers to a potential heir. As in the case of Rabbah son of R. Huna: R. Huna tore up silk in the presence of his son Rabbah, saying: I will go and see whether he flies into a temper or not. But perhaps he would get angry, and then he [R. Huna] would violate, Thou shall not put a stumbling-block before the blind? — He renounced his honor for him. But he [R. Huna] violated, Thou shall not destroy [the trees thereof. . .]? He did it in the seam. Then perhaps that was why he displayed no temper? — He did it when he was [already] in a temper.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף לב עמוד א

ת"ש, שאלו את ר"א: עד היכן כיבוד אב ואם? אמר להם: כדי שיטול ארנקי ויזרקנו לים בפניו, ואינו מכלימו; ואי אמרת משל אב, מאי נפקא ליה מיניה? בראוי ליורשו; וכי הא דרבה בר רב הונא, דרב הונא קרע שיראי באנפי רבה בריה, אמר: איזול איחזי אי רתח אי לא רתח. ודלמא רתח, וקעבר +ויקרא יט+ אלפני עור לא תתן מכשול! דמחיל ליה ליקריה. והא קעבר משום +דברים כ+ בל תשחית! דעבד ליה בפומבייני. ודילמא משום הכי לא רתח! דעבד ליה בשעת ריתחיה.

Rabbi Judith Hauptman: JTS Torah Commentary on Aharei Mot- Kedoshim, May 2, 2009

The obligation to honor parents appears in the Mishnah in the first chapter of Kiddushin (1:7), regarding marriage law. This may seem like a strange location. When discussing women's exemption from and obligation to mitzvot, the rabbis single out honoring parents for special mention. They say that sons and also daughters are obligated to perform this mitzvah. Why did they mention it separately, given that they subsume almost all other mitzvot under general rules? The answer is that when a woman marries and moves in with her husband's family, she needs to know that her obligations to the parents she left behind do not cease. In addition, the Mishnah implies that she acquires new obligations to her husband's parents. It is she who will be burdened with the responsibility of caring for them. This becomes clear when the Mishnah says elsewhere that a husband may stipulate that his ex-wife continue to care for his parents for a period of time, even after the divorce (Mishnah Gittin 7:6). Surprisingly, both Talmuds later reduce a woman's obligation to her own parents. They say that for so long as she is married, she is exempt from honoring them. It seems that caring for her husband trumps caring for her parents. We thus see that honoring parents has a direct connection to marital law and to women.