How to honor our parents?

17th of Cheshvan, 5771

‘Honor your father and your mother… ” (Shemot 20.12)

This is the Fifth of the 10 Commandments.

It is the first of the 10 Commandments that deals with our responsibilities toward others.

Unlike ‘respecting’ parents (‘to obey them’, see previous HOTD) this commandment is primarily directed to adults – not to children.

Honoring parents refers to the care and attention we should provide our parents when they are old and need our assistance. Normally, this commandment takes place after the children become husbands, wives and parents themselves and their parents become dependents.

The rabbis explain that this Mitzva consists in helping and assisting one’s parents in practical ways, as much as we can.

If they are sick or weak and need help to eat, we should feed them. If they need help to get dress, or to clean themselves, or to walk, or to go to the doctor, etc., we should assist them.

Think about it: feeding, getting dress, walking, going to the doctor: those are precisely the things our parents did for us when we were children.

Now, when they depend on us, God Almighty commands us to take care of them and help them. It is very important to remember that Kabod means ‘dignity’. Thus, this Mitzvah means to dignify one’s father and mother, to keep their dignity.

Therefore, when assisting the parents one should be very careful and mindful to preserve their dignity and never become what the Talmud critically calls ‘a parent to his own parents’.

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