Senile parents, a case study from the Talmud

The rabbis of the Talmud addressed the question of honoring one's parents when they are senile or mentally disabled.

They examine a case of a famous rabbi, Rab Asi, who lived with his elderly senile mother. He took very good care of her and did whatever he could to please her, honor her and not to contradict her. The Talmud illustrates his mother's erratic behavior: and Rab Asi's reaction: one day she asked him for jewelry and he brought her some. Another day she ask him to look for a husband for her. Trying to appease her, he told her, he will look for one… The situation got to a point where her requests were increasingly eccentric and her behavior turn more violent. Rab Asithen decided to leave her.

The Rabbis first explained that Rab Asi did not abandon her but left her with a kind person whom he hired to take care of his mother.

The rabbis explain that Rab Asi believed that otherwise, in those circumstances, he will be forced to disrespect his mother and perhaps be coerced to physically restrain her.

They also explained that, for some reason, Rab Asi's mother's behavior would turn more aggressive in his presence but with somebody else she will be calmer.

Based on this precedents the rabbis conclude that in certain circumstances the son or daughter might leave his elder parents under the care of another individual.

Obviously, each case is completely different from the other and must be addressed specifically. I strongly advice that in no circumstances children will make this kind of decisions based just on intuition. Rather, they should consult with a

social worker and with a Rabbi to determine what is the best thing one can do for his or her parents.

Mr. Jack Ezrahian sent me this beautiful video clip in Farsi.

For those who do not understand Farsi: The father asks a few times: 'what is that?' The son answers "Gonjeshk" a bird. After a few times repeating the same question, the son gets very angry at the father and yells at him "I told you, it is just a bird, nothing else!"
The father goes and comes back with his diary and asks his son to read one of the pages in a loud voice. The son reads: "My son is almost 3 years old and we went to the park. My son asked me 21 times 'what is that?' And I answered him each time "Gonjeshk" with patience. And each time he asked the question again,I hugged him and answered him back, because I love my son so much".

The end does not require translation…