

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHULCHAN ARUCH PROJECT

The Noahide Laws - Lesson Forty-Four



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Introduction

Lifecycle VII: Growing Up



In the Torah we learn that G-d has expectations on certain relationships. There are mitzvos that set certain boundaries for the relationships between man and woman, king and subjects, and rabbis and students. One of the most important relationships is between a child and his parents. We know that the Torah commands Jews to honor their fathers and mothers. What does the Torah expect for Noahides? Are Noahides obligated in this mitzvah as well? This question is the topic of this lesson.

Are Noahides Obligated in *Kibbud Av VeEim*, Honoring Parents?

It is clear that Noahides are not obligated in the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av ve-eim*, honoring one's father and mother, as stated Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16.

Four places in the Talmud discuss the Noahide relationship to this commandment:

- [Sanhedrin 56b](#) & [Bechoros 8b](#)

The Israelites accepted ten mitzvos at Marah¹ – the seven commanded to Noah, plus the additional, new mitzvos of Shabbos, civil laws, and honoring one’s father and mother.

The Talmud separates the commandments of Shabbos, civil laws, and honoring one’s parents from the universal, Noahide laws. This means that these commandments are specific to Jews alone.

- [Kiddushin 31a](#)

*Asked Rabbi Eliezer: “What is the extent of kibud av ve-eim, honoring one’s parents?” They replied, “Go and observe the behavior of a certain Non-Jew in Ashkelon named Dama ben Nesinah. The sages requested of him certain precious stones for the [ephod](#)² for 60,000. The key to the chest where the stones were kept rested under his father’s pillow. He refused to disturb his father’s sleep in order to retrieve the key. The following year, he was rewarded with a [red heifer](#).³” Rav Chaninah said: “We see the reward of one who is **not commanded** and does, just imagine then the reward of one who is commanded and does!”*

This passage states that Dama ben Nesinah’s observance of this *mitzvah* was voluntary. Therefore, he could not have been obligated in the commandment.

- **Nazir 61a** - [Rashi](#) and [Tosafos](#) point out the Talmud’s implicit assumption is that Noahides are not obligated in honoring their fathers and mothers.

Obligated In Honoring Parents From Another Source?’

Although the Torah verses explicitly mentioning honoring parents do not apply to Noahides, this does not mean that Noahides are not obligated in this *mitzvah*.

¹ See Exodus 15:26 which refers to commandments given at Marah. The Talmud *ad loc.* and in many other places derives which *mitzvos* the Torah is referring to.

² One of the priestly vestments.

³ The value of a red heifer (see Numbers 19) was far more than the jewels.

As we mentioned in earlier lessons, Noahides may observe any *mitzvah* that is compelled by logic. According to most *poskim*, however, observance of these “logical commandments” is obligatory.

Mitzvos Muskalos* – Logically Compelled *Mitzvos

[Rav Nissim Gaon](#) writes:⁴

*Regarding all those mitzvos that depend on reason and the nature of the heart, all are **already obligating** in them from the time God created man and for all generations that follow.*

Additionally, [Rav Saadia Gaon](#) explains that all men, Jews and Noahides, are compelled by force of reason to do good and to pray for their needs.⁵

Most *poskim* agree that Noahides are obligated in logically compelled *mitzvos*. However, we have to determine the nature of this obligation.

***Mitzvos Muskalos* – an Obligation or a Liability?**

It is not entirely accurate to say that Noahides are “obligated” in logically compelled *mitzvos*. It is more accurate to say that Noahides are “liable” for the logical *mitzvos*. What is the difference between “obligated” and “liable?”

We are taught that the city of Sodom was destroyed primarily for nullifying the practice of charity and encouraging rampant cruelty.⁶ [Rav Avraham Grodzinski](#) in his *Toras Seichel HaEnoshi* notes that Sodom was not punished for insufficient charity, but only for actively rejecting the concept of charity.⁷

⁴ In his introduction to the Talmud found in Tractate Brachos.

⁵ *Emunah VeDeos* III:1.

⁶ Sanhedrin 104b.

⁷ The *Toldos Noah, Matza Chein* I: 54:2 discusses this at length.

It appears from Sodom (and many other examples) that Noahides are only liable for punishment for actively and communally rejecting *mitzvos* compelled by logic, yet not for failing to be proactive in the performance of such *mitzvos*.⁸ The active performance of such *mitzvos* is entirely voluntary, though. One may even elect to perform such *mitzvos* according to the Jewish details of the *mitzvah*.⁹

Honoring Parents as a Logical *Mitzvah*

The [*Sefer Ha-Chinuch*](#)¹⁰ says in no uncertain terms that honoring one's parents is, first and foremost, a logically compelled *mitzvah*. He writes:

It is appropriate for a person to recognize and do kindness with those who have done so for him. One should not act as a degenerate, alienating [those who have helped him] and being ungrateful, for this is a bad and completely repulsive trait before both God and man. One should remember that his father and mother are the cause of him being in this world. Therefore, in truth, he should accord them all due respect and benefit, for they brought him into this world.

The *Sefer Ha-Chinuch* further explains that honoring one's parents is a means by which one comes to recognize and appreciate the good that The Holy one does for him. Similarly, our sages have taught other parallels between honoring parents and honoring God:

It is said “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12) and “Honor the Lord...” (Prov. 3; 9). Thus the Torah equates the honor due to parents to the honor due to God. It is also said “Every man must revere his mother and father and keep my Shabbat, I am the Lord Your God” (Lev. 19:3). It is also said “The Lord your God shall you revere” (Deut. 13:4). The Torah compares the reverence of parents to the reverence for God. It is said “He who curses his father or mother shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:17) and it is also said “Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin” (Lev. 24:15). Thus the Torah is equating cursing parents to cursing God... This equation makes sense because of the three are partners in creating an individual. Our Rabbis have taught: There are three partners in creating a person: God, a father, and a mother. When a person honors his father and his mother, God says. “I credit them as if I dwelled among them!” A Tanna said before Rab Nachman:

⁸ Again, see the extensive discussion in the *Toldas Noah*, *ibid*.

⁹ As discussed in earlier lessons.

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“When a person curses his father and mother, God says ‘I did right in not dwelling among them, for had I dwelt among them they would have cursed me too!’”¹¹

The Commandment is Only to Honor One’s Parents

It is interesting to note that the *mitzvah* is to honor one’s parents and not to love them or have any other emotional obligation to them. As the *Chinuch* has written, we are compelled to honor our parents because of a basic, human obligation to show gratitude. This point doesn’t imply that one shouldn’t love his parents, but only that it is not the same as honoring one’s parents.

Unfortunately, many people do not have comfortable relationships with their parents. Nevertheless, their feelings do not change what God expects of them. It is important to remember that the Torah’s ideal for both Jewish and Non-Jewish society is that it is obligation-based, not rights-based. A parent has no rights to a child’s respect. Rather, the child has an obligation to show respect to his parent. This obligation does not come from the parent, but is a divine expectation from God himself.

For a person whose parental relationships are strained, it may be hard, taking even herculean effort to honor them properly. The more effort it takes, though, the more precious is the *mitzvah* on high.

However, the obligation to honor one’s parent is mitigated if the relationship between parent and child is abusive or otherwise pernicious to one’s self or one’s family. In such a case, one should seek rabbinic as well as professional counseling.

An Anthology of the Laws of Honoring Parents

Training Children in the *Mitzvah*

- Parents should not be demanding of respect or honor. Any parent who insists, demanding his child’s honor, will ultimately alienate his children and be despised by them. Rather, a parent should be forgiving, overlooking occasional slights. He should train his children gently, and not insist that the children honor him, but their mother. Likewise, a mother should teach the

¹¹ Kiddushin 30b -31a.

children to honor the father.¹²

- Similarly, when speaking to a child a parent should never command him or order him about. Instead, a parent should speak pleasantly: “Do you mind getting me....” or “Would it be possible for you to...”¹³
- Parents may absolve their children of the duty to honor them.¹⁴
- A child who wants to honor a parent despite the parent having absolved him is praised and fulfills a *mitzvah*.¹⁵
- Although a parent can forego his honor, it appears that he may not allow a child to actively insult or abuse him.¹⁶

**Father vs.
Mother**

- If one’s father and mother ask for something at the same time, the father’s needs take precedence.
- If one’s parents are divorced and both request a task at the same time, the child may choose whose request he wishes to fulfill first.¹⁷

**Husband vs.
Parent**

- It appears that a married woman’s obligations to her husband take precedent over those to her parents.¹⁸

In Laws

- It is appropriate to show honor to one’s in-laws as well.¹⁹ One’s actual parents, however, take precedence.

Step Parents

- Children are obligated to honor their father’s wife, even if she isn’t their mother, as long as the father is living. Doing so is a way of honoring their

¹² *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:19.

¹³ *Sefer Kibud Av V’Eim, ha’arah* 46.

¹⁴ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:19.

¹⁵ *Shu”t RadVaaz* 524.

¹⁶ *She’iltos Parshas Mishpatim, She’Ilta 60 im He’emek Sh’eila*.

¹⁷ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:14. See *Nosei Keilim Sham*.

¹⁸ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:17 and *Shach*.

¹⁹ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:24

father.

- Likewise, they are obligated to honor their mother's husband, even if he isn't their father, as long as their mother is living.
- Although there is no obligation to honor a step-parent after the passing of the parent, it is still a praiseworthy thing to do.²⁰

Grandparents

- There are many diverse opinions as to how the obligation of honoring one's parents applies to grandparents. It is clear that honoring one's own parents takes precedence. However, in a case where parents and grandparents are all in one room, then the grandfather's needs take precedence over one's father's needs.²¹

Sitting in a Parent's Place

- If one's father or mother has a designated spot to stand for certain gatherings or for regular prayers, it is forbidden for a child to stand in that spot.²²
- A child may not sit in a place in the home that is designated for a parent to sit. Standing in the place that a parent sits, however, is permitted.²³
- If a parent has a specific chair (not a specific place, but a particular piece of furniture) it is prohibited to sit in it, even if it is moved out of its usual place. One stand on a parent's chair for a moment for a specific purpose (i.e. in order to change a light bulb).²⁴
- It appears uncertain as to whether the practices regarding a parent's seat apply also to the parents sleeping place. One should ask a parent before sleeping in their bed.²⁵
- Should a child (or son-in-law) take his father into his home to live with his

²⁰ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:21

²¹ *Shu"t Teshuva M'Ahava* 178.

²² *Aruch HaShulchan Yoreh Deah* 240:9

²³ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:2

²⁴ *Pischei Teshuva*, Y.D. 240:16.

²⁵ *Ta"z* to Y.D. 240.

family, there is no obligation for the father to be seated at the head of the table. Rather the son (or son in law) may keep his seat at the head of the table as head of the household. Nevertheless, his father should be seated beside him.

Standing for One's Parents

- Some people have the custom, when their father or father in law comes for a visit, of seating the father at the head of the table and allowing him to lead the meals. This is a custom that is greatly praised because it sets a precedent for the children and grandchildren who are present.
- However, when the food is served one's parents should be served first even though the son or-son-in-law is the head of the household.²⁶
- Children are obligated to stand for their parents when they enter a room. The custom is to do so once during the day and once during the night.
- If a parent is blind, there is still an obligation to rise when he enters the room. Honoring one's parents does not depend on the parent being aware of the honor²⁷

A Sleeping Parent

- A child may not awaken a sleeping parent.
- However, if the reason is to prevent a monetary loss or some other direct benefit the parent will appreciate, the child should wake his parent.
- Similarly, one may awaken a parent for the sake of a *mitzvah*.²⁸

Referring to a Parent by Name

- One may not refer to or address a parent by first name; rather a parent must be referred to as “my father,” “my mother,” “Dad,” “Mom,” etc.²⁹ This rule even applies to a deceased parent.³⁰

²⁶ *Aruch HaShulchan* YD 240:11

²⁷ Rav Akiva Eiger to *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:7.

²⁸ *Chayei Adam* 67:11

²⁹ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:2.

³⁰ *Kesef Mishna Hilchos Mamrim* 6:3.

**Speaking to &
Contradicting a
Parent**

- One should speak to his parents softly and with respect. Imagine how one would speak to a king.³¹
- It is prohibited to contradict a parent.³²
- If a parent has a verbal disagreement with another person, and the child says to the other person “I concur with your view,” it is considered contradicting the parent and is prohibited.³³
- According to some *poskim* this prohibition is only in the presence of the parent. Other *poskim*, however, maintain that even not in the presence of the parent it is prohibited.³⁴
- If the issue is a Torah discussion and the child has clear proofs against his parent, many *poskim* allow the son to contradict the father, even in his presence (albeit he must do so respectfully).³⁵
- If the parent asks the child for his or her input, there is no prohibition in giving it.³⁶
- If a parent does or says something that is against the Torah, the child should not say “You transgressed a Torah prohibition”, as not to cause the parent embarrassment. Rather, the child should say something to the effect of: “Does it not say in the Torah one should not...” in a way that sounds like a question and not rebuke. Allow the parent to realize on his own that he has made an error.

**Caring for Ill or
Elderly Parents**

- A child must take responsibility for the care of an elderly or ill parent. He must ensure that they have food, drink, and appropriate clothing. One should also endeavor to arrange for the parents transportation as needed.

³¹ *Sefer Chareidim Perek* 12 (4 in older editions).

³² *Shulchan Aruch Y.D.* 240:2.

³³ *Shach*, YD 240:2.

³⁴ *Shach*, Taz ibid. *Biur HaGra* 240:3.

³⁵ *Chazon Ish*, *Even HaEzer* 47 d.h. *V'lo soser es devarav*.

³⁶ *Aruch HaShulchan* 242:23.

Ideally, one should tend to these matters personally.³⁷

- One should tend to his parent's needs with a pleasant approach, without making it appear as a burden. Even if one provides his parent with the finest food and luxury, yet does so in ill temper, he receives heavenly punishment.³⁸
- Although a child is obligated to ensure the parent's needs are met, the cost of doing so does not need to be entirely borne by the child. The child may use the parent's money.
- If the parents cannot afford food, and the child can afford food, the child must pay for this food. Courts are empowered, from the standpoint of Noahide law, to compel a child to do so.
- The obligation to provide for parents is divided amongst all the children proportionate to their respective means. If some of the siblings are poor, the obligation to provide needs for the parents falls only on those who can bear it.
- Irrespective of monetary or material support, a child is obligated to personally do things that are requested of him by his parent, even if it will indirectly cause him monetary loss (it is unlikely that Noahides have to go to this extent).
- Tending to a parent's needs take precedence over another positive *mitzvah*. If there is time to tend to both, the parent should be taken care of first.³⁹
- If one's parent is insane or is otherwise incapable of thinking intelligently, the child should try to treat the parent respectfully and attend to their needs as possible. Of course, one should hire professional care as needed.⁴⁰
- When caring for very ill or incapacitated parents, we must remember that our parents did the same for us when we were born. They cleaned us,

³⁷ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:4.

³⁸ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. *ibid*.

³⁹ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:12.

⁴⁰ *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 240:10.

bathing us, dressed us, etc. In the parent's illness or old age, it is now time for us to reciprocate. This is, indeed, the greatest expression of the logically compelling aspect of the *mitzvah*.

Difficult Parents

- The Talmud⁴¹ and Shulchan Aruch⁴² cite the following example:

If a son is dressed in finery and sitting at the head of a table presiding over a congregation and his mother or father approach him, tear his clothing, hit him on the head, and spit in his face, he should not retaliate or insult them. Instead, he should remain silent and fear the King of Kings who commanded him to do so.

The *poskim* debate the exact application of this idea. Most *poskim* rule that this only applies to a parent suffering from dementia, Alzheimer's or a similar condition, but does not apply to normal, healthy parents who should know and behave better.⁴³ Although one is not obligated to bear such insult if the parent is in full control of his faculties, it is praiseworthy nonetheless.

- According to those who hold that the above applies even to a well parent, one may take action to prevent his parent from creating such a public spectacle. However, they hold that once the attack starts, the child must bear it.⁴⁴
- If a parent is a wicked or abusive to a child, most *poskim* indeed rule that the child need not suffer and take the abuse, and should defend themselves and rebuke the parent for their inexcusable actions. The child should do anything necessary to save himself from an abuse.
- If someone is in such a situation a Rabbi as well as a therapist should be consulted for the best course of action.

⁴¹ Kidushin 31a.

⁴² *Yoreh Deah Siman 240:3*.

⁴³ *Tosafos* to Kidushin *ibid.* d.h. *U'bas imo*.

⁴⁴ *Yam Shel Shlomo Kidushin 31a, Siman 64*, at length.

Summary of the Lesson

1. Noahides have no obligation in honoring parents from the versus of the Torah.
2. However, Noahides have an obligation from the side of *mitzvos muskalos* – logically compelled mitzvos.
3. “Obligated,” is not the best term to use when describing these commandments. Rather, one is liable for avoiding such *mitzvos* on principle.
4. There is no obligation to love one’s parents; only to honor them as an expression of gratitude. Therefore, even if one has a difficult relationship with his parents, he must strive to honor them anyway.
5. If a relationship is abusive, this obligation is mitigated.