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Covid 19 and Coveting

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Most mitzvot mandate our behavior - which actions are obligated and which are banned. The second more challenging set of mitzvot regulate our thought and our belief system: which ideas are we meant to subscribe to, and which views are heretical. Though “mental mitzvot” are more complex and complicated, they are still reasonably attainable. Ideas can be studied and assimilated and the thought-system of a Jew can be outlined by the Torah. The third set of mitzvot- those which govern human emotions- are clearly the most challenging; the Torah actually maps which emotions are obligated such as love and fear for G-d. Likewise the Torah prohibits the emotion of covetousness; the final Commandment – Lo Tachmod- prohibits coveting the possessions or the wife of another.

Assuredly, the halachik parameters of this prohibition are quite limiting- it is extremely rare to be in actual violation of this prohibition. Technically, the prohibition only bans ‘acting’ upon our desires but not internal coveting which is never implemented. If desire doesn’t translate into, at the very least, an attempt to extract the coveted home or secure the desired woman, the legal prohibition hasn’t been violated.

Secondly, the strict prohibition would only obtain to “unique objects” such as a home or a wife. In these instances, the person’s desire comes at the cost of the “current” husband who must be somehow displaced so that desire can be fulfilled. My desire for another person’s home can only be realized if that person is relocated. Unbridled coveting is based upon the assumption that the current husband or resident is somehow less deserving of the home or of a particular wife than the person who covets. In a world of mass produced goods, the strict prohibition of Lo Tachmod rarely applies, since the person who covets can easily satiate their envy by purchasing a similar item without depriving the

original owner. My envy for a sports car doesn’t come at the cost of the current owner’s license and therefore, strictly, I haven’t violated the legal prohibition of Lo Tachmod. From a strictly halachik standpoint, Lo Tachmod only applies to unique items and only when efforts were exerted to dislodge the current owner or husband.

Though the strict legal prohibition may be quite limited, the spirit of this prohibition applies more generally and is especially relevant in the modern era. Capitalism has become a game-changer in the struggle to regulate our covetousness. We may not often broach the actual prohibition of Lo Tachmod, but we certainly struggle with the temptation to acquire and with a thirst for shopping and purchasing. The modern world has empowered most of us with greater buying power than past generations possessed. Mechanization and the dizzying technological revolution have fed our desire to acquire the latest and greatest models. A world of throwaway goods and of easy “replaceability” has bred a culture of disposability and constant turnover of the objects. Efficient supply chains and delivery systems have facilitated the quick and effortless acquisition of our desired objects. It is ironic but instructional, that Amazon began as an online seller of books aiming to deliver ideas to the human imagination. This behemoth has now morphed into the largest global marketplace delivering electronics, clothing, food and housewares with unimagined ease (Yes, I am an Amazon Prime member). We may not violate the actual prohibition of Lo Tachmod, but we all struggle with the religious and moral challenges within the culture of “acquisitiveness”.

Battling this potentially hazardous trend requires first understanding it. Sometimes, our outsized consumerism is merely a form of addiction; like any addiction it offers an escape from the difficulties or drudgeries of daily life

into a fantasy world of blurred reality. Many feel a rush when a package arrives, and that rush or thrill can distract us – momentarily- from our heavy responsibilities or our painful frustrations. Behavioral therapists have coined this disorder BDS- or “Buying Shopping Disorder” and on-line shopping has exacerbated this addiction. Like other addictions, a compulsive desire to acquire goods can destabilize our day-to-day experience as well as damage our personal relationships.

In most cases however, our consumerism doesn't attain levels of harmful addiction. More often our “desire to acquire” is wedded to lofty and valuable character traits. Ambition and a general desire to improve our current condition is vital to a meaningful lifestyle. To fulfill these healthy and worthy ambitions we often purchase the objects we deem necessary to enable our general welfare and enable our advancement. These items- we believe- will enhance our personal prosperity, free us from menial labor and increase our general productivity. Just as our purchase of essentials such as food is vital to our basic survival, similarly, our acquisition of the “tools of improvement” is crucial to assist us in the fulfillment of our dreams and the attainment of our personal goals.

However, a healthy moral life is based upon a careful calibration of our desire to improve or change our reality, with a healthy acceptance of our situation and the ability to excel within our current framework. The oft-cited Mishnah in Pirkei Avot attributes inner bliss to our ability to sense contentment with our “lot in life” and the ‘chelek’ or portion we have been allocated. This inner contentment must extend to our financial condition, our personal and professional lives and, yes, even our “religious portion” or our religious roles. Very often, over-ambitious people suffer from terminal restlessness and cannot ever sense

The Greatest Source of Consolation

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

As Parshas Devarim is always read the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av, Parshas V'Eschanan is always read the Shabbos after Tisha B'Av. This Shabbos is also known as “Shabbos Nachamu”, the Sabbath of Consolation or Comfort, after the opening words of the Haftorah, נְחַמוּ נְחַמוּ עַמִּי, Console, console My people, says your G-d (Yeshayahu 40:1).

Aside from the words of consolation which we read

the inner tranquility so vital to healthy emotional life. Ultimately, this inner disquiet or the “uneasiness born of over-ambition” is the more threatening danger of extreme immersion in the modern consumerist culture. Healthy life demands the fostering of ambition, but also the careful calibration of that ambition with acceptance of our framework and of our circumstances.

This current medical crisis has, in many ways, exposed the importance of this calibration between ambition and contentment. Firstly, the flimsiness of our consumerist culture has been unmasked and we now realize how terribly fragile the entire supply chain truly is, and how quickly it can be disrupted. It is more obvious than ever that the objects of our cravings will not always be quickly or easily obtainable. Additionally, we are likely veering toward a financial slowdown (at best) and we all sense that our purchasing power will be diminished, forcing us to contract our consumerist tendencies.

Beyond these practical changes, the Corona experience is also teaching us about “accepting our reality” and excelling within that reality, as opposed to altering or improving our reality. As much as we desire a return to a normal world – it appears that the “familiar” “normal” reality is still, at the very least, a few long months away. We cannot easily remodel our current framework but we can learn to thrive within that framework. Will these tools of life help us better balance personal ambition and inner contentment when this crisis blows over? Will this experience dampen our consumerist passions or, at least, help us regulate them more carefully? Will the lessening interest in consumerism liberate our imaginations to pursue matters of greater spiritual weight? Will we invert the “Amazon effect” and begin to pursue ideas and religious experience rather than goods and items?.

in the Haftorah, what is the message of consolation embedded within the parsha itself? As the juxtaposition of the weekly parshios with the different mo'adim that fall during a given week are not random, there must be a lesson of nechama - comfort and consolation - in V'Eschanan as well.

It is in this parsha that Moshe Rabbeinu, at the end of his life, recalls and reiterates the Aseres Ha'Dibros (The

Ten Statements, or Declarations), which were first given to the nation forty years earlier (in Parshas Yisro of the book of Shemos). The Aseres Ha'Dibros are so fundamental that כל שש מאות ושלש עשרה מצוות בכלל עשרת הדברות הן, all of the 613 mitzvos d'Oraisa are included in these ten (Rashi to Shemos 24:12).

I am Hashem your G-d; Do not have gods of others before me; Do not take G-d's Name in vain; Remember/Guard the Sabbath day to keep it holy; Honor your father and mother; Do not murder; Do not commit adultery; Do not steal (kidnap); Do not bear false witness against your neighbor; Do not covet anything that your friend has (Shemos 20:1-13, Devarim 5:6-17).

Why is V'Eschanan always read after Tisha B'Av; why is it this parsha that is associated with the Nachem of Nachamu?

Perhaps we can answer that it is the Torah itself - the giving of the Torah, the covenant that bound us to the RS"O and He to us, our acceptance of the Torah, and our Torah way of life - that is itself the greatest nechama there is.

Before he introduces the Aseres Ha'Dibros in our parsha, Moshe says to the nation, and to every generation of Jews in all times: ה' - כָּרַת עִמָּנוּ בְּרִית בְּהַר סיני - Hashem has made a covenant with us at Chorev (another name for Har Sinai); לֹא אֶת-אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, כָּרַת ה' אֶת-הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת: כִּי אֲתָנוּ אָנַחְנוּ; - not with our fathers alone did G-d enact this covenant, but with us! We who are here today, all of us alive (Devarim 5:2-3).

The binding covenant of Torah, and the life-giving force of Torah, is given to us as a beacon of light as we navigate the turbulent waters of this world. וּבַחַרְתָּ, בַּחַיִּים--לְמַעַן - and you shall choose life, so that you may live, you and your children! (Devarim 30:19). Is there a greater nechama than recommitting ourselves to Torah and reminding ourselves that Hashem chose us as His nation?

"A woman once asked Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt'l if she was permitted to benefit from a government program to which she was not entitled according to the strict letter of the law. R' Yaakov replied, 'Absolutely not.' 'But plenty of non-Jews do this,' she countered. 'That may be true,' R' Yaakov replied, 'But their ancestors did not stand at Har Sinai to receive the Torah. Yours did.'

"The very last words of Moshe Rabbeinu to the Jewish people were: וְאַתָּה עַל-בְּמוֹתֵימוֹ תֵּדָרֵךְ, You (the Jewish people) will tread upon their (your enemies') high places (Devarim 33:29). R' Shimon Schwab zt'l interprets this

as symbolizing the very high standards of middos and general behavior expected of a Jew. When a Jew sets moral and ethical standards for himself, he must use the highest standards of society at large as his starting point. Where their striving ends, ours must begin" (Honor Them, Revere Them, Artscroll, p.6).

As we move away from the mourning and churban of Tisha B'Av, to the consolation of Nachamu and V'Eschanan, we take comfort in the wisdom of Torah and the exaltedness of the mitzvos, which we once again read of in our parsha.

R' Soloveitchik zt'l teaches: "We have already noted that during the last century of the existence of the Beis Ha'Mikdash (BHM"K), and even right after the churban, Rome did not institute any religious persecution. On the contrary, the Roman governors in Jerusalem received strict orders not to interfere with the rituals in the BHM"K while it was still standing. And then, suddenly, after Beitar, about sixty to sixty-five years after the churban, Rome's policy completely changed. Rome suddenly became one of the worst religious persecutors in Jewish history.

"Apparently Rome realized that it had made a mistake. They had thought that once the BHM"K was destroyed, they would have no problems with the Jewish people as a separate entity; they assumed that the Jewish people would be assimilated into the general society that was open to them. All they had to do, thought Rome, was to destroy the BHM"K. They assumed that it would not be necessary to touch Jewish observances.

"But Rome realized later that even though they had destroyed the BHM"K, they had not destroyed the Jewish community. The Jewish community was as loyal to G-d after the churban as it was during the time the BHM"K was standing. Rome realized that the strength of the Jew is not dependent upon the BHM"K; that Torah is the cohesive force that unites the Jews and helps them carry on even under the worst of circumstances. The observance of Jewish law is what unites them. And it was at this point that a wave of persecution in the form of restrictive decrees inundated the Jewish community and the first of the Ten Martyrs were killed..." (The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways, p.253-254).

As we long for nechama - consolation and comfort - in the aftermath of destruction; as the world around us today seems to descend deeper and deeper into chaos and mayhem; as so much of what we see makes no sense, and

our only hope is to cling to G-d, come what may - let us recall the Aseres Ha'Dibros. For there is no hope and no

comfort, no life and no good, without the gift of Torah, the greatest gift of all.

Grit or Quit?

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

Imagine you were pursuing a goal with all your heart and soul for years. There were struggles along the way, but you persevered through them. You are almost there. You can see the finish line. It is within your grasp. But you stumble one more time. This time, you can't seem to figure a way out. You try repeatedly, but you keep getting stuck. Do you persist or do you give up?

Dr. Angela Duckworth, a psychologist from the University of Pennsylvania, studies the construct of grit, which is the ability to persevere and persist towards long-term goals despite challenges and setbacks. Those who demonstrate grit tend to be more successful in academic and professional settings. We have argued in the past, that grit is an essential element of learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvot. Yet, is grit always the proper response? Can't grit also double as an unhealthy stubbornness?

In contrast to Dr. Duckworth, Dr. Carsten Wrosch, a psychologist from Concordia University in Montreal, studies the benefits of quitting. He argues, that there are certain times where giving up is a better response than persisting. People who let go of unattainable goals tend to have fewer depressive symptoms, less negative affect, lower cortisol level, less systemic inflammation, and fewer physical health problems. Moreover, there is an opportunity cost as well. Investing time and energy into one goal prevents us from trying to attempt different, perhaps more attainable or more beneficial goals.

While knowing the line between a healthy grit and an unhealthy stubbornness is not always easily determinable, perhaps we can look to Moshe Rabbeinu for broad guidelines as to how to act when an impassioned goal is

blocked. Moshe longed to enter the land of Israel. He desired to finish his original mission of bringing Bnei Yisrael into the land. He yearned to fulfill the various mitzvot that are only pertinent within the physical boundaries of Israel. Minimally, he just wished to experience the feeling of basking in the space of such a holy place. But he stumbled at the finish line. Because of what happened at Mei Merivah, G-d told him he could not enter.

When a strong desire and goal of his was blocked, Moshe did not go down without a fight. He begged and pleaded to G-d to let him enter the land. The midrash expounds on the numerical value of the word Vaetchanan (וַאֲתַחֲנֶן), and informs us that Moshe articulated 515 supplications to G-d. Moshe serves as a paradigm for grit in the face of challenges. When faced with an obstacle, be determined, tenacious, and persevere.

Yet, taken from a different perspective, Moshe also serves as a paradigm for quitting. As soon as G-d told him to stop pleading, he stopped. He put in the effort, but once he realized that the goal was unattainable, he quit. Once he does, he is freed to focus on a new task. He puts his effort in to crafting a farewell message that will influence generations to come in the land if Israel, even though he would not physically be present there.

Within the same narrative, Moshe provides for us a role-model for extreme persistence in goal attainment, as well as an example for quitting when the goal is clearly no longer attainable. When confronted with challenges to our own goals, may G-d grant us the wisdom to discern whether to respond with grit or to quit, the strength to persevere if necessary, and the courage to give up when appropriate.

The Shema: Left for Last?

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

Following the repetition of the Aseres Ha-Dibros (Ten Commandments) and its aftermath, in the fourth and fifth aliyos of Parshas Va'eschanan, the Torah presents the Shema ("Shema Yisroel" and

"V'ahavta"), which commences the sixth aliyah.

It is incredibly perplexing that the Shema, which is the foundational statement of Yahadus, of Judaism, does not appear in the Torah until this point, well into the fifth

and final book of the Torah! One would expect such an essential text to appear at the beginning of the Torah, or at least much earlier than at this very late point, in Sefer Devarim/Mishneh Torah (Moshe Rabbeinu's review or restatement of the Torah), as we are near the end of B'nei Yisroel's 40-year journey. Why is the Shema pretty much left for last?

Furthermore, the first two of the Aseres Ha-Dibros, referred to as "Anochi" ("I am Hashem your God, who took you forth from Mitzrayim...") and "Lo yihyeh" ("There shall be no other gods..."), establish Hashem's Oneness and His unique relationship with B'nei Yisroel. As such, what is the Shema adding, such that we recite it twice daily, rather than reciting "Anochi" and "Lo yihyeh", which would appear to convey the same basic ideas as the Shema?

The Shema contains two quintessential concepts: 1. Hashem is our God, meaning that He has a special, close and exceptional relationship with the Jewish People; 2. Hashem is One - the exclusive God and Master of the universe, such that there exists no other deity or competing power. These two concepts are obviously featured earlier in the Torah, going all the way back to Bereshis, as we read of Hashem's absolute creation, control and authority over existence, as well as His establishment of an intimate and unmatched permanent relationship with B'nei Yisroel, starting with Avrohom Avinu and the selection of Yitzchak and Yaakov over their brothers, and culminating with the Geulah (Redemption) from Mitzrayim, Mattan (the Giving of the) Torah, the construction of the Mishkan, and so forth, as depicted through the progression of the Torah narrative.

Please note that these two cardinal concepts of Achdus/Adnus Hashem - the Oneness and Mastery of God - and Bechiras Yisroel - our people being chosen for a special relationship with Hashem - are presented in the Shema in the reverse order of their presentation in the Torah thus far; the Torah began with Hashem's Oneness and Mastery/Creation and then proceeded into the account of the cultivation and development of B'nei Yisroel as the Chosen People, close to Hashem and privileged to experience His miracles and to receive His Torah. In the Shema, Bechiras Yisroel comes first, and is followed by Achdus/Adnus Hashem.

This change of sequence is the key to the revolutionary significance of the Shema, why it appears so late in the Torah, and why it is our foundational statement of emunah.

Until this point in the Torah, at the culmination of the Midbar (Desert) experience, we observed that Hashem is manifest in the world in two ways: through His general mastery over nature and the physical world, in the same vein as Avrohom Avinu came to realize that there must be One God, the Creator and Authority of the universe, Who fashioned the unfathomably systematic and intricate mechanisms of the cosmos and of all life - and also through Hashem's relationship with B'nei Yisroel, as expressed by Geulas Mitzrayim, Mattan Torah and so forth. One could see Hashem through nature and also through His interaction with the Jewish People.

In the Shema, everything is reversed. Hashem is no longer the God of Creation, and later the God of a chosen people, B'nei Yisroel, but rather, Shema is trailblazing and extraordinarily novel, establishing the starting point of "Hashem Elokeinu" - "Hashem, our God, God of B'nei Yisroel" - and the endpoint of "Hashem Echad" - God's exclusive Oneness and authority over all, by dint of His being Hashem Elokeinu, God of the Jewish People. This means that that solely through B'nei Yisroel will Hashem's reign as God of the universe and all existence be manifest. (This is intimated by Rashi [Devarim 6:4].) Hashem Elokeinu comes first in Shema, as it is the foundation of everything.

Such is the revolutionary message of Shema, which is quite a step beyond the basic and sequential notions of Achdus/Adnus Hashem and then Bechiras Yisroel.

How does the Shema concept operate, that Hashem's Oneness shall be manifest specifically and solely through B'nei Yisroel? Cannot one still look to the wonders of nature and realize their Exclusive Author and Creator?

The Shema is a futuristic, visionary message, affirming that through the Geulah Ha-Asidah, the Final Redemption, Moshiach will emanate from B'nei Yisroel and lead them, establishing Hashem's earthly kingdom permanently, and the entire world will then come to recognize Hashem. It will not be a few individuals, who realize through the wondrous mechanisms and patterns of nature that there must be One God; rather, a dynamic, compelling and vivid message - the live and palpable experience of Hashem, at the time of the Geulah, with B'nei Yisroel at the front and center - will shake the world into a robust and animated acceptance of Hashem's authority, His presence and His truth.

This futuristic and revolutionary message of Shema was

reserved for the final section of the Torah, in which the knowledge imparted thus far is now projected toward B'nei Yisrael's upcoming mission and ultimate destiny. Shema by definition could not be featured sooner.

Chazal tell us that Yaakov Avinu recited the Shema as Yosef embraced him in tears after 22 years of separation, and that Yaakov's sons recited the Shema at their father's

deathbed, as he commenced his final words to them. The Shema manifests in these narratives and for eternity as a promise passed down to future generations about the faith destiny of our people. It is the message of our spiritual mission, and eventually - we pray soon - it will pertain to all mankind.

Chip Away

Rabbi Chananya Berzon

In the sefer 'משולחנו של הבית הלי' there is a story related in regards to this week's parsha. At a large rabbinic conference, a wealthy man pushed his way up to speak - he asked the rabbis to find ways to lower the Torah's demands, citing the reasons that the laws are difficult to observe, and that it is no longer "fashionable" to observe them.

The Beis Halevi asked the MC if he could speak. When handed the microphone, he responded to this man by way of a story.

Late one night, a businessman knocked on the front door of one of the many suppliers he sold for on consignment - and whom he hadn't paid back for a long time. After telling the supplier he was at the house with an urgent request, he was brought to sit and the supplier asked what could be so urgent. When the buyer said he was here to pay his long-standing bill, the supplier woke up all his children so they could look at the books and run the figures. At each item, the business man chipped away,

"That should be five ruble, not ten. That should be twenty ruble, not forty." The conversation ended with the businessman chipping away at the very large sum of one hundred ruble, bargaining the supplier down to fifty ruble.

As the businessman stood up to leave, the supplier asked for his compensation. The businessman responded, "You know I have no money, I can't pay you!"

The supplier asked, "Then why would you wake me up in the middle of the night to figure out the bill?"

The businessman simply responded that he couldn't sleep, feeling guilty about such a large sum of money so he came to lower the amount, and therefore he would not feel badly about the large sum.

The supplier responded, "Now I know that you are not only a thief, but also a רשע and חצוף, an evil and arrogant man."

The Beis Halevi concluded his story, and turned to the wealthy man, "You are asking for leniencies and compromises under the guise of making life easier for the Jewish people, but truthfully you're not interested in any of the mitzvot! You are trying to ease your conscience!"

In the פסוק that deals with not adding anything, or taking away anything, from the mitzvot, most mefarshim, commentators, address the pragmatic aspect - that the problem with adding to a mitzvah is because there will then be an excuse to diminish part of that mitzvah, and will ultimately lead one to diminish on all of their mitzvot observance. One coming from the pragmatic approach would like to suggest that the Torah lifestyle is too demanding, and it should be chipped away at until it's down to matzah balls and gefilte fish.

Rav Hirsch addresses the philosophical approach.

"Any arbitrary addition or curtailment [of the mitzvot] would be tampering with the word of Hashem, bringing human opinion deems right into the truth of eternal thoughts of Hashem."

One who comes from the philosophical approach suggests that Torah shouldn't be accepted the way it was put forth; many mitzvot should be disregarded, as Hashem would never have required such foolish practices. Essentially dragging down divine instructions to the level of human superficiality.

Both those who come from the approach of ולא תוסיפו and ולא תגרעו find Judaism difficult and they question G-d, without realizing we are simple human beings.

Let us hope that we can observe מצוות קלות כחמורות, the more lenient mitzvot like the less lenient mitzvot, not to עובר בעל תגרע. or עובר בעל תוסיף

Not to chip away, not to bargain down; instead to live in exactly the way הקב"ה, G-d, wants the Jewish people to live.

The Torah's Radical Approach to Parenting

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week we observed Tish'ah B'Av, the Fast of the 9th of Av, commemorating the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem. How fortuitous it is then, that in this week's parasha, parashat Va'etchanan, we encounter a basic law of the Torah that, if properly observed, may actually result in the rebuilding of the Temple.

In parashat Va'etchanan, the Decalogue, the so-called "Ten Commandments," are recorded in the Torah for a second time. The Ten Commandments first appear in Exodus 20, and are repeated in Deuteronomy 5.

The name, "Ten Commandments," is a well-known misnomer, which is why traditional Jews refer to these verses as עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרוֹת—*Aseret Ha'dibrot* or the Decalogue. Decalogue, which means "ten words" or "ten statements," is more correct than "commandments," since not all of the ten "statements" are actual "commandments." In fact, according to some commentators, there may even be many more than ten commandments in the Ten Commandments.

The fifth commandment, as it appears in Deuteronomy 5:16 reads: כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ, Honor thy father and thy mother, that your days may be lengthened. The fifth commandment is often referred to as the "swing commandment," since it is the statement which relates both to the first set of five statements and the second set of five statements. The first five "commandments," concern human relationships with G-d, while the second five "commandments" concern human relationships with their fellow human beings. However, the fifth commandment does not really fit with the first four commandments, since it deals with the inter-human relationship of parents and children. The rabbis, however, say that since parents are "Loco Deus"—G-d's representatives in this world, it is entirely appropriate for the fifth commandment to bind or meld the first set of five statements with the second five, hence the appellation, "swing commandment."

In Leviticus 19:3, we find another verse describing child-parent relationships: אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ, every person should fear his mother and his father. The Torah there introduces the concept of יִרְאַה —"Yir'ah," generally translated as "fear." The rabbis explain that fear in this context does not really mean to be afraid in the

conventional sense, but rather to express awe or reverence. Children are expected to be in awe of their parents and revere them, meaning that they should never do anything that will hurt them. This is what is meant by the Talmudic expression, יִרְאַה מִתּוֹךְ אֲהָבָה, reverence resulting from great love—not fear of punishment, but rather great love that results in a reluctance to do anything that might hurt a parent's feelings.

Code of Jewish Law, in Yoreh De'ah 250, deals extensively with the laws of both honoring and fearing parents. "Honor" is interpreted to be the positive actions that children must perform on behalf of their parents, while "Yir'ah," reverence, are negative behaviors to avoid.

According to Jewish law, every child has an obligation to feed, clothe, shelter, and transport one's parents. If parents have their own money, then children may use their parents' funds to ensure that these services are properly provided. If the parents are impoverished, and the children have the wherewithal, the children are expected to support their parents from their own resources. If both the children and the parents are impoverished, then children are not required to collect for their parents, but should rather take care of their own needs first.

"Yir'ah," reverence, according to Jewish law, means that a child must show utmost respect. Thus, children are not permitted to stand in the place where parents stand during prayer, or sit in the seat that is usually occupied by a parent. Children are prohibited from calling parents by their first names. They are not permitted to disagree with their parent's words, or even say, "It appears to me that what you are saying leads to the following conclusion."

The Code of Jewish Law offers a hypothetical Talmudic example, expressing the extent of a child's obligation of "Yir'ah," fear. Even if a child were a famous rabbi, sitting in his finest clothes, delivering a Torah lecture to a huge congregation, and his mother and father come, rip his garments, hit him on his head and spit in his face, the child is not permitted to embarrass his parents, but must remain silent, because that is what the Al-mighty, King of Kings, has commanded. Another version has the parents taking the child's life savings and throwing the savings into the sea. Once again, the child is not permitted to embarrass his parents. However, the child does have the right to sue them

for the losses.

Interestingly, the amount of money expended in service of a parent is often not the decisive factor in determining whether one has properly honored one's parents. Often, "attitude" is the determining factor! Even if a child finds a menial job for one's poor parent, but does it with the clear intent of benefitting the parent, then the act is considered favorable. However, if a child feeds one's parents the finest foods every single day, but does it begrudgingly, it is not considered meritorious, and may even be deserving of punishment.

What emerges from this brief survey of the laws of honoring parents, is that according to the Jewish understanding, parents are G-d's mortal representatives on earth, period! Parents have all the rights, while children seem to have no rights. Thus, there are very few instances cited from the Talmud, or in the Code of Jewish Law, which permit a child to disagree with a parent—one may choose a mate to marry or go to study in a particular yeshiva in a city, even over one's parents' objections. However, in almost all other instances, it seems as if the child has no rights, while parents have absolute authority.

This radical formula for parenting espoused by Judaism requires careful review and analysis. Apparently, the Torah wants to, first and foremost, set down the law, a priori, that father and mother, who biologically bore the child, deserve ultimate respect, simply because parents have "created" their children's lives. They may be miscreants or scoundrels, but they are still entitled to the respect and honor of their children.

Consequently, the Code of Jewish Law suggests that in circumstances where parents are crazed and the child cannot possibly be respectful, the child may move away, making certain that the parents are cared for properly by hired help. However, under normal circumstances, since

parents represent G-d in this world, children owe their parents total and unconditional allegiance and respect.

Sounds pretty harsh and unrealistic!

Now here comes the clincher!

While the Code of Jewish Law and the Talmud unequivocally record that parents have all the rights, the Code of Jewish Law clearly and strongly suggests that parents should not be too onerous or overly didactic in exercising those rights. In fact, there is a fundamental principle of Jewish Law that totally mitigates unilateral parental authority: parents who renounce respect due them, may do so! This means that although the positive obligations may never be canceled: feeding, clothing, sheltering, and transporting—children may indeed call their parents by their first names if the parent explicitly allows it. A child may sit in a parent's place or stand in the parent's place of prayer, and a child may even disagree with a parent, if the parent is so disposed.

We see here that Judaism attempts to create a very delicate balance. Initially, every child must know and learn, that without doubt, parents are the ultimate authority, and total respect is due to parents. Parents are to lay down the law, set up firm parameters, and let children know precisely the rules of the game. However, once a sense of respect and reverence is established, a parent may, in fact should, be lenient. Of course, the cards are always in the hands of the parents, and if things get out of hand, they may once again choose to enforce the stricter rules.

These radical regulations of parenting, that are set down in our Talmud and in our Code of Jewish Law, are based on the insights of our Torah. While they're ancient, they are extremely insightful—and they work!

May we all merit to see the rebuilding of the Temple in our days, soon in our lifetime!