

Kavod Is Much More Than Action

פרשת קדושים

We have a tendency to view the Torah's obligation of honor and respect as a requirement to perform actions that express value and importance. When we think about כבוד שמים, we emphasize a greater commitment to Torah and Mitzvos, and when we think in terms of כבוד אב ואם, we stress tending to our parents' needs and requests. However, in this week's Parsha we find that our obligation to honor and respect extends not only to the way we act, but also to the way we think and feel.

The Pasuk (19:5) states, "When you slaughter a peace offering to Hashem, you should slaughter it to find favor for yourselves." The Seforno explains that when Hashem said, "I am Hashem your G-d", it was an instruction to the Klal Yisroel to accept Hashem as their G-d. Included in this acceptance of Hashem as their G-d is a commitment to keep the Mitzvos, exalt Hashem, and daven to Him. The Seforno concludes, that this acceptance also includes a person caring and feeling pain for Hashem's honor, to the extent that he will not profane His holy things, even in thought.

We see from the Seforno that our obligation to honor Hashem is not fulfilled merely by doing what Hashem said. It seems to go beyond keeping Torah and Mitzvos, and even extends to our feelings and thoughts. According to the Seforno we are required to be so sensitive to Hashem's honor, that we won't allow ourselves to have any inappropriate thoughts while involved in the process of the Korbanos. Alternatively, any inappropriate thought while involved in the Korban would be a manifestation of a lack of honor, and would thereby profane the Korban, even though in action there is no deficiency.

"Part of our obligation in honoring our parents is feeling honored and privileged at the opportunity to honor them."

The Seforno expresses a similar idea about honor regarding the Pasuk of, "A man should fear his mother and father." (19:3) The Seforno notes that, "This pasuk instructs us not to honor our parents in an arrogant manner, even though we honor them with food, drink, and clothing. As the Gemara says in Kiddushin 31A, 'There are those who serve their father pheasants and chase them out of this world.' Rather, we should honor them in a manner like we honor people we revere, due to their high esteem in our eyes." It is clear from this Seforno that if we perform actions of honor to our parents without the proper focus of, "I am serving an esteemed person," it is not the full fulfillment of the Mitzvah of כבוד אב ואם.

This idea is expressed further in the famous Chazal involving Dama Ben Nesina. The Medrash asks, "What is כבוד אב ואם?", and then continues to illustrate the extent of the obligation of honoring one's parent through a story: The Sages approached Dama Ben Nesina to buy a gem needed for the breastplate worn by the Kohen Gadol. They offered Dama 1,000 gold shekels for it. Dama went to get the gem but

found his father sleeping on the box where the gem was. Dama told the Sages that he could not sell it right now. The Sages thought he wished to get a higher price for the gem, so they replied: "We must have the gem, and we are prepared to offer you 10 times what we offered you before. Here are 10,000 gold shekels if you will let us have the gem immediately." Dama refused in deference to his father's honor. At that moment, his father awoke from his sleep and entered the room. Dama got the gem and handed it to the Sages. They handed him 10,000 gold shekels. Dama responded, "Take back 9,000 for I originally agreed to sell it for 1,000 shekels. The reason why you added the rest was because I would not awaken my father. Heaven forbid that I should benefit from the fact I didn't wake my father up." The next year he was blessed with the birth of a perfect Parah Adumah among his cattle. The Sages heard and hastened to buy it. They paid Dama more than 10,000 shekels for it.

The Medrash implies that Dama Ben Nesinah's reward was not only for not waking up his father, but was a direct result of him refusing to have any benefit from showing honor to his father. In addition, the Medrash seems to include this as critical to the obligation of כבוד אב ואם.

At first glance this seems perplexing, for what would have been lacking if he would have taken the 10,000 shekels? Surely his acceptance would have been legitimate, as they were going to give it to him willingly? It seems from here that part of our obligation in honoring our parents is feeling honored and privileged at the opportunity to honor them. Therefore, Dama could not bring himself to benefit from honoring them, for that would detract from the expression of the privilege he felt.

We see from all of the above sources that in everything we do, what is optimal is not just the action, but the feelings are critical as well. Perhaps we can propose that the feelings are even more important, as it is often that we find that without the feelings, eventually the actions are neglected, since passion is integral to long-term commitment. As our Sages tell us, "The Merciful One wants our heart."

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה
לרפואה שלמה יהושע דוד בן אלטא יענטא