

Parshat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim: 'Honoring' or 'Revering' our parents – April 20, 2013

We find in our Parsha a verse that speaks about the relationship with parents:

"Every one of you is to revere his father and mother, and you are to keep my Shabbats; I am Adonai your God" (Vayikra - Leviticus 19:3)

Interestingly, in the Ten Commandments we can also find a verse which speaks about how to relate with our parents:

"Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which Adonai your God is giving you" (Shemot - Exodus 20:12)

From one side we have the commandment about "revering" our parents, and additionally another one about "honoring" them. So what is the difference between the two?

Rashi, the famous French commentator, says that "revering" is related with regulations like not sitting in our parents' regular places, not to interrupt them, or contradicting them publicly or in a non-respectful way. "Honor", on the other hand, refers to taking care of our parents' needs like giving them food, dressing them, or helping them if they have difficulties to walk.

Once I heard a very nice interpretation about the difference between "honoring" and "revering" which I found very meaningful. Starting from Rashi's commentary, it says that actually we are talking about the same commandment but the difference between the two concepts is found in the specific stage in life when you fulfill it:

Reverence seems to be describing the relationship between a child and her parents: Interrupting, trying to challenge their authority, not obeying them,

are the more common transgressions of children toward their parents. Honoring, from the other hand, would be speaking about the relationship between adult children with their aging parents.

I think this is a very rich interpretation, especially for young parents, who from one side are facing the challenges of raising children while they are becoming teenagers or "small adults", and at the same time they start defining anew the relationship with their own parents. Jewish tradition reminds us that while we become older and we focus almost totally on the needs of our children, we never have to forget about the needs of our parents. They did their best in trying to give us everything, so when the time comes that it seems that you don't need assistance from them anymore, that you are concentrated thinking about what your children need, remember that it is maybe the time for start taking care about your parent's needs. In that moment "revering" them will still be important, but "honoring" them will be necessary to let them live the last stage of their lives with love and dignity.

Shabbat Shalom!