

Rabbi Zechariah Goldman, Sefat : Honoring Parents

From the Torah:

Honor your father and your mother. You will then live long on the land that G-d your L-rd is giving you.
(Ex. 20:12)

These matters are those that a man eats their fruits in this world and their principal is retained for him in the World to Come. And these are they: Honoring one's father and mother... (Shabbat 127a)

From the Arizal [Rabbi Isaac Luria – 1534-1572]:

Behold the son that comes from the father, the son is an "effect" of the father, and the father is the son's cause, who brought him into being. [Accordingly,] the effect is bound to the cause that brought him into being...

This explains the reason for honoring parents, for no *shefa* (abundant spiritual energy) from Above is drawn to the son, except through the means of the pathways [established by his parents] and their agency, for he is their effect, as has been mentioned. Now this explanation suffices when the souls of the parents and the children are from one [spiritual] source. Then they are above and he is below them, and needs them, in order to draw down his abundant spiritual energy and life force by their agency. But, the majority of children, as is known, are not from the same [spiritual] source [of their parents], for this one is from *chesed* (kindness), and this one is from *gevura* (restraint) and their like. Particularly in the case of reincarnated souls, the children do not have a [spiritual] lineage with their fathers in most cases, and they do not have any [spiritual] lineage or closeness with the souls of their fathers, or their mothers at all, in any essential way. And many times we find the opposite: a despised man, and lowly in the extreme, fathers a completely righteous and great wise son, whose soul is higher than that of his father 1000 levels. In such cases, why are the children obligated to honor their parents?

But the secret of the matter is the following: Know that every soul is drawn from either the *hasadim* or the *gevurot* in the *daat* of *Zeir Anpin*, and the soul has its own source there. When a man unites with his soul mate, they draw down this soul here mentioned, and then her father gives to her a small portion from the dimension of his *chasadim* (kindnesses) that is in him, and they join with this new soul. The dimension from her father is made into something like a garment for her, in order to guide her and assist her in this world, to fulfill the *mitzvot* and be absorbed in the Torah. For since the infant is born small, how will it know on its own to walk in the ways of Torah and the *mitzvot*, if not by the means of the portion of the father's soul that assists, advises and guides him? And if this soul is new [i.e. not a reincarnated soul], it is not habituated to this world and needs support to help, establish and guide her. And if she is a reincarnated soul, she too requires help, for her original sins prevent her to travel along the good way.

Similarly, the mother gives to this soul a portion from the *gevurot* (severities) that is in her, making for her something like a garment. In this manner, whatever a person does in this world, a portion of it can be linked to the father and the mother, for they are his helpers, guiding him in this world, by the means of this garment with which they enclothed him, as mentioned. And even all the *shefa* that is channeled to him from above, is drawn down only through this garment. (*Gate of the Commandments, parashat Yitro, pp. 33-34*)

From the Talmud The Rabbi's taught: There are three partners in a person's creation: The Holy One, blessed be He, the father, and the mother. The father supplies implants the white substance, out of which are formed the child's bones, sinews, nails, the brain, and the white in his eye. The mother supplies the fluid of the red substance, from which is formed the skin, flesh, hair, blood and the black in his eye; and the Holy One, blessed be He, gives the child the *spirit* and the *soul*, beauty of features, eyesight, the power of hearing and the ability to speak and to walk, understanding and discernment.(*Nidda, 31a*)

From the Ramak [Rabbi Moshe Cordovero of Sefat/Safed]

We therefore ascribe the color red to the place of judgment (*gevura*), Furthermore, everything that is red is derived from the power of this root...Likewise, the color white indicates kindness and peace (*chesed*)...
(Pardes Rimonim, Shaar Mahut Ve'hanaga)

Commentary:

*Today, the path to honoring one's parents, for many, is a long one, filled with significant internal obstacles. Many people have first to work through their anger and grief, in relationship to their upbringing, before this commandment of the Torah can be integrated and lived in its fullest expression. In order to honor one's parents one needs to have attained equanimity (*hishtavut*) regarding one's past hurts and losses. When we can healthily detach from the ego and operate from a perspective of soul then honoring one's parents, even if they are largely the same people who hurt us, is nevertheless possible and even a liberating act. To love is to give, to be mature is to love. In original cultures the transition from childhood to adulthood has always been related to marriage, the quintessential forum for love. Likewise, with our parents, the transition of our role, from that of primarily being receivers, to that of primarily being givers is a significant stage in life. To love your parents is to honor them. The parent-child relationship is unequal. In its first phase, the parents give to the child; in its later stage the child gives to the parents. In the middle of this process there can be an exchange, but it is never between equals. In the absence of this equality, love expresses itself partially as honor.*

The Arizal's fundamental insight is that honoring one's parents is related to the development of one's spirituality. To honor one's parents is, in essence, to recognize them, and this acknowledgment facilitates for them the potential expansion of their soul. Honoring a person for who they are allows more of who they are to come through. The Arizal is emphasizing that by offering this sincere honor we expand our own soul, via the garment they have bequeathed us, and is still connected to them. Thus we receive through our giving even more than they do through their receiving.

http://www.kabbalaonline.org/Dailylife/selectedmitsvot/Honoring_Parents.asp