

You Shall Honour your Mother and Your Father Introduction to Units 1-3

Our Jewish tradition commands us to honour our parents. Indeed, honouring our parents is the fifth of the ten commandments and the first that relates to our conduct toward other human beings. One of our traditions teaches that respect and reverence for the people who made it is the basis of our relationship with God.

Yet the duty to honour our parents may also raise some troubling questions. Is this an obligation without limit? How must we relate to a seemingly irrational parent, or to a parent who tries to lead their child away from an upright way of life, or even one who abuses their child?

This study pack is written for groups of people learning together without the support of a rabbi or other Jewish teacher. You are of course welcome to use it if you do have access to one of these or both!

You are of course also very welcome if you are not Jewish.

We recommend that you find someone to study with, a study partner or *chavrutah*.

Knowledge of Hebrew is not required, as translations are provided, but if you do know how to read some Hebrew then have a go and try to tackle the Hebrew texts. Those with vowels are obviously a good place to start.

There is a page of **Notes** for this pack. You can use this to look up the sources and find out a bit more about when they were composed and who wrote them. There are also notes on translation and one book for further reading.

Unit 1 Honour Your Father and Your Mother explores what the rabbis called 'a difficult obligation'. You will learn how they thought about this obligation and see how they defined honour and reverence, as having two quite distinct meanings.

Unit 1 is a lengthy **double unit**, and you will need to work through this content in two one hour study sessions.

Unit 2 Responsibilities investigates how the commandment to honour our parents translates into real practical action. As in any subject, the rabbis of the different generations and different parts of the world do not always agree, and you will have an opportunity to compare their views. This session also covers one well accepted view of our responsibilities towards parents with dementia. This is a long **double unit**, and you will need to complete it over two one hour sessions.

Unit 3 Limits asks the difficult questions. What is one's obligation toward a parent who harms their child, either through their own folly or through their own 'wickedness'? Are there any limits to the duty to honour our parents, and if so, what are they?

Wishing you success and insight. *B'vracha*, in blessing,

Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu and North London Progressive Jewish Community

