

## Unit 2

### You Shall honour Your Father and Your Mother

כִּבֵּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמֶּךָ

Exodus 20:12

#### Responsibilities

This study unit presents some of the views in the halachic (legal) literature about the extent, and the limits of our responsibilities to our parents. Please do not view the selection of opinions here as definitive, but rather as a sample of the range of views that have developed over time. Here, we set them out as a stimulus for discussion with the aim of deepening understanding of our potential for adopting these responsibilities and the difficulties we may encounter in meeting them.

This is a double unit as it is likely you will need to complete it in two one hour sessions.

We begin where unit one ended, with a range of opinions on our responsibilities towards our parents' material well being.



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## Responsibility and its Limits

Here is the context.

We already looked at this short teaching in Unit 1, page 3, but here it is again.

### Source 1

#### Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 31b

Our rabbis taught: What is 'reverence' and what is 'honour'?

'Reverence' means that one must neither stand in his [parent's] place, or sit in his place, nor contradict his words, nor tip the scales [in a scholarly dispute] against him.

'Honour' means, **give him food and drink** clothe him and cover him, lead him in and lead him out.

ת"ר: איזהו מורא, ואיזהו כיבוד?  
מורא – לא עומד במקומו,  
ולא יושב במקומו,  
ולא סותר את דבריו,  
ולא מכריעו;  
כיבוד – מאכיל ומשקה,  
מלביש ומכסה, מכניס ומוציא.

What does **give him food and drink** mean?

It certainly means to physically assist a parent with eating and drinking.

But, does it mean to **pay** for the food and drink?

This discussion now continues.....

### Source 2

#### Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 32a

From whose [assets are the food and drink, provided]?

Rav Yehudah said, from the son's.

Rav Natan ben Oshaya said, from the father's.

The rabbis rendered a decision to Rav Jeremiah,

or some say it was to Rav Jeremiah's son, that the law is in accordance with the one who says it is at the father's expense.

משל מי?  
רב יהודה אמר: משל בן,  
רב נתן בר אושעיא אמר: משל אב.  
אורו ליה רבנן לרב ירמיה,  
ואמרי לה לבריה דרב ירמיה,  
כמ"ד משל אב.

This seems very straightforward.

The financial burden rests with the father and not the son.

But here comes a challenge.



Source 3

**Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 32a** continues

They challenged this ruling with an equally early rabbinic source.

It is said, “Honour your father and your mother” [Exodus 20:19], and it is also stated elsewhere, “Honour the Eternal with your fortune” [Proverbs 3:9]

Just as there, honouring *God* involves a loss of money, also here, honouring *parents* involves loss of money.

[This means we would expect honouring parents to involve some kind of financial cost!]

If you say it is only the father’s expense, what loss is there to the son?

מיתיבי נאמר:  
[שמות כ+] כבד את אביך ואת אמך,  
ונאמר: [משלי ג]  
כבד את ה' מהונך,  
מה להלן בחסרון כיס,  
אף כאן בחסרון כיס;

ואי אמרת משל אב,  
מאי נפקא ליה מיניה?

And here comes the answer

[Loss to the son arises through] disruption of his work

לביטול מלאכה.

Let’s now sum up.  
The Talmud begins by teaching that the financial burden for ‘giving food and drink’ rests with the parents.  
But a challenge follows. As we are supposed to honour *God* with our fortunes, should we not also do the same for our *parents*?  
The Talmud must now find a harmony between these two positions-  
•that the parent is responsible,  
•and /or that the child must also somehow ‘pay’.  
A compromise is found. The loss to the child comes from giving up their time, and therefore a loss of income from losing time at work.  
Remember we learned in source number 1 that *to give food and drink* can mean to physically help with eating and drinking as well as and to pay for the food and drink.  
Which of these two possibilities does source number 2 seem to suggest is the correct interpretation?

Centuries of discussion now follow. They are summed up in the following source.

**Source 4**

**Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240, 4 and 5**  
**Joseph Caro**

Joseph Caro, the writer and editor says,

What does 'honour' [your father and your mother] mean? It means to feed them and to give them drink.

Where one provides food and drink for one's parents, this means at the expense of the father and mother, if the father has sufficient means.

If the father doesn't have the means, and the son does, they [the communal leaders] force the son, and he provides for the father [and mother] as far as he is able.

If the son doesn't have the means, he is not obliged to go collecting *tsedakkah* from door to door in order to provide sustenance for his parents.

איזהו כבוד, מאכילו ומשקהו.

זה שמאכילו ומשקהו,  
משל אב ואם, אם יש לו.

ואם אין לאב, ויש לבן,  
כופין אותו וזן אביו  
כפי מה שהוא יכול.

ואם אין לבן,  
אינו חייב לחזור על הפתחים  
להאכיל את אביו.

**Source 5**

But **Moses Isserles**, who wrote notes on the laws and customs of the Ashkenazi world into the text of the Shulchan Aruch now now adds....

But there are those who say that he is only obliged to give [to his parents] as much as he is obliged to give to *tsedakkah* [that is between 10 and 20% of his annual means]

And in all cases, if the son has the means, a curse should fall on him if he sustains his parents from the money he had already designated for *tsedakkah*.

הגה: וי"א דאינו חייב ליתן לו  
רק מה שמייחייב ליתן לצדקה.

ומ"מ אם ידו משגת,  
תבא מארה  
למי שמפרנס אביו  
ממעוֹת צדקה שלו.

### Source 6

Moses Isserles continues

If the parent has many children,  
they calculate according to their means.  
If some of them are poor and some are  
wealthy, only the wealthy are obliged.

אם יש לו בנים רבים,  
מחשבים לפי ממון שלהם,  
ואם מקצתן עשירים ומקצתן עניים,  
מחויבים העשירים לבד.

### Source 7

And he continues still

But the obligation essentially falls on the son  
himself, to personally honour the parents by  
physically serving their food, even though  
through doing this he loses work and has to  
go collecting *tsedakkah* from door to door.

אבל חייב לכבדו בגופו  
אע"פ שמתוך כך בטל ממלאכתו  
ויצטרך לחזור על הפתחים.

But this only applies if the son has enough  
food for himself for that very day.  
If he does not, then he is not obliged to  
abandon his work and to go collecting  
*tsedakkah* from door to door.

ודוקא דאית לבן מזונות  
לאיתזוני ההוא יומא,  
אבל אי לית ליה,  
לא מיחייב לבטל ממלאכתו  
ולחזור על הפתחים.

Wow! Confusing ? Perhaps

Use this chart to review and summarise the opinions given in our key sources

<p><b>Sources 2 and 3</b>          Babylonian Talmud  <i>Kiddushin 32a</i></p>	
<p><b>Source 4</b>          Shulchan Aruch  <i>Yoreh Deah 240:4,5</i>          Joseph Caro</p>	
<p><b>Sources 3,4,5</b>          Shulchan Aruch  <i>Yoreh Deah 240: 4,5</i>          Moses Isserles</p>	

and Your Mother

- What do you think?
- To what extent do people expect to support their ageing parents today?
- What about the balance between practical support (physically giving food and drink) and financial support?
- Do these traditional texts have anything to teach us about this balance?

Honour Your Father

## Dementia

A change of subject. We have already learned learned at our tradition requires us to physically care for our parents. In the language of these sources, *to give them food and drink*. But what do our teachers, the rabbis, have to say about caring for an elderly parent who may have, for example, dementia?

### Source 8

Maimonides Laws of Rebels 6:10

Where one's father or mother has developed senility, one should strive to maintain one's conduct with them according to their comprehension as far as one is emotionally able.

But if the child can no longer stand it because they have mentally deteriorated so much, then one should leave them and go and make make arrangements for others to care for them according to their needs.

מי שנטרפה דעתו של אביו או של אמו  
משתדל לנהוג עמהם כפי דעתם  
עד שירוחם עליהן,  
ואם אי אפשר לו לעמוד  
מפני שנשתטו ביותר  
יניחם וילך לו  
ויצוה אחרים להנהיגם  
כראוי להם.

What do you think of Maimonides' ruling here?

Perhaps it stemmed from his own experience, because although he is known to us as a law code writer and philosopher, his professional work was as a physician. Here, he balances compassion for the ageing parents with concern for the wellbeing of their adult children. This is not an easy balance, and it is a question many of us are facing or may expect to face in our lifetimes.

### Summing Up

Did these Jewish sources teach you anything you did not expect to find here?

Were there any surprises?

What were the sources of wisdom?

If you and your study partner or group had any disagreements, what were they about?

Did this study pack change the way you think about caring for your parents?

How