



# Aseret Hadiberot -

## The Fifth Commandment



Honor your father and your mother.

כִּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ

ve'et-i-me kha et-a-vi kha kab-bed  
and your mother your father Honor!



### Introduction

The Fifth Commandment marks a transition from the first four (which have to do with our vertical relationship with the LORD) to the following five (which have to do with our horizontal relationship with others). The commandment to honor our parents is therefore basic to all other social relationships and is the foundation for decent human society.

The importance of this mitzvah cannot be overstated, since the word translated "honor" (*kabed*) derives from a root word meaning "weighty" (in terms of impressiveness or importance) and is often used to refer to the glory of God. The meaning of *kabed* in this context derives from the preceding verses (i.e., the first four commandments) which center on honoring God Himself. When we likewise honor our father and mother, the LORD says, "I reckon it as though I dwelled with them and they honored Me" (Kiddushin 31a).

Our parents resemble the Creator, since they were God's partners in creation of the child. They also represent God in the life of the small child, functioning as primary caregiver and teacher. A person should recognize that his parents are the cause of his life in the world and it is therefore proper to love and respect them.





Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that “the most difficult of all the mitzvot is to honor your father and mother” (Tachuma, Ekev 2). There is no limit to the honor that is due to them, and often obedience to this commandment is taxing. The child must never shame his parents, never bring them any pain or heartache; never display anger toward them.

The LORD intended that the mishpachah (family) would picture His relationship with us. Just as He created both man and woman in His image (Gen. 1:27), so children are to regard their parents as divinely ordained and truly significant.

The first four mitzvot tell us about God; and it is only through obedience to these commandments that we are able to really understand our own identity - as well as the identity of others in our family, our community, and our world.

### The Blessing of Obedience

The full pasuk (verse) of the Fifth Commandment reads:

כְּבֹד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמֶּךָ לְמַעַן יִאָּרְכּוּן יְמֵיךָ  
עַל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days  
may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

The reward for honoring your parents is long life. Conversely, disrespecting one’s parents results in judgment from the LORD, even a shortened life (this is an example of *midah k’neged midah* (measure for measure) judgment). Devotion to one’s parents is also a sign of respect shown to one’s culture and identity, ensuring the perpetuation of both. Respecting your parents ensures that succeeding generations will accept the teachings of their elders, too.



## Repeated in the New Testament

The Apostle Paul quotes the Fifth Commandment in his letter to the Ephesians:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Eph 6:1-3)

The Apostle is actually quoting from the second version of the Ten Commandments given in the book of Deuteronomy (this second version is said to include the text of the second set of tablets that Moses wrote). The repetition of the commandment includes the phrase, "so that it may go well for you":

לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָךְ

l'ma'an yitav lakha

According to midrash, God knew that the first tablets were going to be destroyed, and He did not want the Israelites to despair that their hope for a good life would be shattered with these tablets. God then saved this extra blessing for the second set of tablets (Bava Kamma 54b).

Just as we are called to honor our father and mother, so we understand that YHVH is our Heavenly Father, and the reciprocity of respect shown to Him will be demonstrated in the way we show respect to our parents.

## Esteeming Others

The opposite of honoring others is disrespect, a form of unbelief that denies that others were created *b'tzelem elohim* - in the image of God (or rejecting the providential work of God in the world). Only by refusing to accept others as God's handiwork can people justify the atrocities they commit against their fellow man.

We are commanded to show honor to God (1 Tim. 6:6), to parents (Eph. 6:1-3), to employers (1 Tim 6:1), to fellow-believers (Rom. 12:10), to leaders and teachers of the Church (1 Tim 5:17), to civil servants (Rom. 13:1-7), in short, to everyone:



כְּבֹדוֹ כָּל-אִישׁ כְּכֹבֹדוֹ אֲהַבּוּ אֶת-אֲחֵיכֶם  
יִרְאוּ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים וְהָבּוּ כְבוֹד לַמֶּלֶךְ:

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood.  
Fear God. Honor the king. 1 Peter 2:17

Of course the command to honor is made easier to fulfill if we live in honorable conditions, and parents, in particular, are commanded to ensure that children are taught to fear the LORD and become disciples of Yeshua (Eph. 6:4). The duty of children to honor their parents is not categorical, since it is assumed that the parent is not abusing his or her privileged position of authority. The same can be said of governmental authority, if that authority attempts to coerce us into disobeying God (Acts 5:29). Indeed, in countries that purport to be democracies, the honor to be ascribed to elected officials must be predicated on their integrity as representatives of the people. If an elected official, in other words, promotes godlessness or seeks to undermine those whom they serve in their position of trust, they have abandoned their God-given role and are subject to divine judgment. In such cases, the necessary evil of human government becomes a curse rather than a blessing...

Even in dictatorships and autocracies this principle applies. We are commanded to pray for those in authority over us, but note the qualifier: “*so that* we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim. 2:2). This emphatically does not imply a fatalistic resignation to the decrees of evil authorities or rulers. Think of Nazi Germany, for example. Surely we do not want to say that it was a biblical imperative to honor and obey Hitler! The same principle can be applied to cases of spousal or child abuse, various war crimes (including state-sanctioned torture and genocide), various forms of propaganda methods and brainwashing (including public education), etc. Sometimes we are called to fight for our faith, *chaverim*...

Sadly, we live in an age that glorifies evil and dishonors those who are to be truly honored. Disrespect and mockery are the standard form of humor in our culture. Yeshua Himself experienced such reproach (John 5:41-44), but His humility and grace overcame evil with good. We are called to follow Him and do likewise (Rom 12:22).