

Parsha Q's Yitro – based largely on N. Leibowitz 5722

“Honor (*kabeid*) your father and mother [“as I have commanded you” – inserted in Devarim] so that your days will be lengthened (*yaarikhun*) on the land which G-d your Lord will give you”.

Let's begin by citing two “classic” questions.

- 1) Why is this commandment, uniquely among the ten, followed by a reward? What exactly is this reward?
- 2) What is the place of this commandment structurally within the ten? Were we to divide the commandments into those G-d related and the man-related, isn't it on the wrong side?

The well-known answer to the second, many variants of which we will shortly meet, is that his commandment is also G-d centered, as “There are three partners in the creation of human beings”. However, Ramban and Sefer HaChinukh have almost opposite approaches to this answer.

One. Ramban argues that G-d, via his commandment, is telling us that parents deserve *kavod* for the same reason he does. In other words, the *kavod* that we presumably acknowledge we owe Him, He extends graciously to parents. Ramban further argues that the commandments against adultery and kidnapping are extensions of this commandment, as they tend to confuse people about their parentage.

Ramban also suggests that this perspective defines the parameters of the obligation. Thus he believes that one must acknowledge one's true parents, that one should serve parents for reasons other than desire for inheritance, and even that one is specifically prohibited from swearing falsely by one's parents.

Abravanel argues that since G-d embeds His authority in tradition, He necessarily has to grant stature to tradition-bearers.

Two. Sefer HaChinukh suggests that the purpose of the commandment is to inculcate in us the virtue of gratitude, which will naturally lead us to G-d. In other words, the *kavod* that we can easily be brought to recognize that we owe our parents will then be extended to G-d.

As for the reward, two basic axes of interpretation emerge:

- 1) national vs. individual
- 2) eternal/eschatological vs. temporal/earthly

Taking the individual and temporal approach, Bekhor Shor suggests pragmatically that those who honor their parents are more likely to be supported in old age by their own children. This interpretation may be based on the oft-noted point that the Torah uses “*yaarikhun*”, “will be lengthened”, rather than “*yaarikhu*”, “will lengthen”; *yaarikhum* can also be “*will be lengthened by x*”, thus setting off a search for the missing cause.

Note that Seforno suggests that the reward statement applies to all of the first five commandments.

I have little or nothing to add to the interpretations above. I would like, however, to raise a broad general question that may help us choose among them, or perhaps understand them more deeply. My question: Is there a commandment to give *kavod* to G-d? My suspicion is no (although see Joshua 7:19) – if that's correct why not? There are, of course, commandments of *yir'ah* and *ahavah* in relation to G-d.

And a note to go along with the question: The Torah describes a particular Divine manifestation as “*k'vod Hashem*”, but I'm not aware of any similar manifestation of *yir'ah* or *ahavah*.

Shabbat Shalom!