

Drawing together these Scriptures we discover that children are commanded, both in the Old Testament and in the New, to honor their parents, to fear them, reverence them, obey them, be subject to them, and listen submissively to them. They are commanded not to dishonor their parents, not to treat them with contempt, not to lightly esteem them, and not to hold them of little account.

Must children honor parents who are not honorable, noble, worthy, or exemplary, but are dishonorable, disreputable, despicable, depraved, blasphemous, cruel, filthy, perverted, dishonest, and vile? And must children honor parents with whom they have monumental differences of attitude, viewpoint, and opinion? God says "YES." But suppose children think their parents' ideas, viewpoints, attitudes, opinions, convictions, and decisions are just plain unreasonable or even stupid? Must children still honor their parents? The Bible says, "YES." But suppose the parents' views and attitudes and decisions on certain questions really are bad and really are stupid? What are children's obligations then? And does "honoring parents" mean that a child must obey a parent when the parent tells the child to do something clearly wrong?

Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, in his book To Be a Jew, includes a brief chapter on "honoring parents." Summarizing rabbinic teaching on this point, Donin says: "even where parents disregard the Torah, never must a son or daughter speak arrogantly or angrily to a parent; never may they be insulting or abusive. There is never any justification for such behavior no matter how objectionable or vile the behavior of a parent might be." Regarding the specific question of what a child should do when he is told to do something clearly wrong, Rabbi Donin says: "If there is a conflict between what a father or mother says and what the Torah teaches, it is the wishes of the Father in heaven that must take precedence, since the parents too are bidden to revere Him."

Of course the question inevitably arises: When does a child cease being a child? In one sense the answer is never! But in another sense, when a son or daughter leaves the table and roof of his/her parents, becomes independent of their support, and establishes his/her own home, he/she ceases being a child and becomes an adult.

When this happens, such new adults are not exempt from the obligation to honor and reverence their parents. They are no longer obligated to obey and be subject to them as dependents, but they still owe their parents respect and esteem.

What happens if a son or daughter reaches a certain biological age but does not leave table and roof and does not establish his/her own home? What obligations does he/she have toward his/her parents? He/she still owes his/her parents respect and esteem, should contribute toward his/her costs, and should obey and be subject to the rules of the house. Various adjustments in relationships will doubtless need to be made.

(b) Who are intended by the terms "father" and "mother"?

The primary idea is that of our natural parents, but by extension it can easily be seen to include those who substitute for and act in