



## The Extent of Respecting Ones Parents Parshas Vaeschanan – Nachamu

An emotional father sat before me, his head in his hands, his weeping touched me. He was an elderly man, a Holocaust survivor. He was born right after the beginning of World War Two, and it seems that he had learned of the difficulties of life from a very young age. Nothing came easy to him, including coming to Israel or making a living.

He raised his son with great effort. At some point the son was taken out of his home and put in a welfare institution. Over time, the son broke off ties with his father and refused to speak with him. The father felt much sorrow, as this was his only son.

"How can I help you?" I asked him; the father said the son would not listen to him, he thought that perhaps I might have some influence, as his son has recently began to come closer to his Jewish heritage. I called a phone number and introduced myself. The son answered and said: "You're kidding me. I can't talk now, call me later." Before he hung up I said: "Please keep in mind that I have something urgent to share with you." Again, he said: "How do I know you are Rabbi Grossman? Can you call me after work? I am busy now." I heard someone ask him who he was speaking with and he said: "Someone who claims to be Rabbi Grossman."

His boss took the phone and spoke to me. It turns out that we had recently spoken and he was happy to speak with me again. The son understood his mistake and apologized. I told him I wished to meet with his immediately. He received permission from his boss and was on his way to Migdal Ha'Emek.

\*\*\*

The son knocked on my door and entered, surprised by the request for the immediate meeting. Instead of words of explanation I recited a verse from our weekly parsha: "Honor your father and your mother as the Lord your G-d commanded you."<sup>1</sup> I understood everything and blushed as I continued to speak.

"Do you know the story of Dama Ben Netina?" I asked him. He smiled; who did not know this story.<sup>2</sup> I asked him what

<sup>1</sup> Dvarim 5:16.

<sup>2</sup> Talmud Tractate Kidushin 31a. Rabbi Ulla: How far does the honor of parents extend? He replied: Go forth and see what a certain heathen, Dama son of Netinah by name, did in Ashkelon. The Sages once desired merchandise from him, in which there was six-hundred-thousand gold denari profit, but the key was lying under his father, and so he did not trouble him. Rabbi Yehudah said in Shmuel's name: Rabbi Eliezer was asked: How far does the honor of parents [extend]? Said he, Go forth and see what a certain heathen, Dama son of Netinah by name, did in Ashkelon. The Sages sought jewels for the ephod, at a profit of six-hundred-thousand gold denarii — R. Kahana taught: at a profit of eight-hundred-thousand — but as the key was lying under his father's pillow, he did not trouble him. The following year the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him his reward. A red heifer was born to him in his herd. When the Sages of Israel went to him to buy it, he said to them, 'I know you, that even if I

the connection was between honoring one's parents and the red heifer? Why did the Heavens choose to award him in this fashion?

The answer is given in the holy books: when Dama relinquished the vast sum of money so as not to disturb his father there was a great storm in the Heavens: see this non-Jew who was willing to lose vast sums of money so that he may respect his father. What did G-d do? He sent him a red heifer, and the Sages of Israel were willing to pay enormous sums for it, and by doing so showed great affinity towards the commandment that had no logical explanation, as opposed to respecting ones parents, which was logical.

The son though for a moment and said me: "in the story the father's name is Netinah, the Hebrew word for giving, as he gave to his son. My father gave me nothing and threw me out. Must I respect him?"

A silence overcame the room, and I opened the Meshech Chochmah<sup>3</sup> and read to him: "Why does the Torah stress '**as the Lord your G-d commanded you**'? G-d has commanded us with all the commandments? He answers that the initial commandment to respect ones parents was given at Marah in the desert. In the desert a child did not need his parents. He received Manna from the Heavens, water from the well and meat from the skies. Their cloths were laundered by the clouds surrounding them. Therefore, specifically in a place where there is no need for the parents, G-d gave that commandment."

"Even in a case when one was not raised by his parents," the Meshech Chochmah concludes, "he is commanded to respect them. Even in the desert, where there was no need for parents, G-d commanded you to respect your parents," and so one must respect his parents **as G-d commanded**.

In the same place that the father sat a few hours ago the son now sat with his head in his hands, crying and expressing remorse for the past.

\*\*\*

We all met together that evening. The excited father could not speak; he was able to say only one sentence: "I got my father back." You mean your son, I corrected him. "No, he is my father. He is my father's only descendant and carries his name. How could I leave this world without seeing my only son?"

The son invited his father to come live with him, "I will take care of you." I was very moved; such a special nation.

---

asked you for all the money in the world you would pay me. But I ask of you only the money which I lost through my father's honor."

<sup>3</sup> Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926) was a rabbi and prominent leader of Orthodox Judaism in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century. He is known for his writings on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, which he titled Ohr Somayach, as well as his novellae on the Torah, titled Meshech Chochma.