

# Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter XVII: Yitro (Ex. 18:1–20:23)

Essay 26. The connection between honoring one's parents and not coveting

The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael (20:14) draws a parallel in the Ten Utterances (i.e., the Ten Commandments) between the first five commandments and the last five commandments.<sup>1</sup> I.e., a parallel between the first and sixth commandments, the second and seventh commandments, and so forth. This essay considers the relationship between the fifth and tenth commandments.

### כבוד - לא תחמד

**“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged on the land that the L-rd your G-d is assigning to you”** (Ex. 20:12). **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house: you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s”** (Ex. 20: 14).

בְּכִיבוֹד אָב וְאִם אָמַר הַכְּתוּב "לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ", וְלִרְבִי עֲקִיבָא דְסַבִּירָא לִיהּ בְּפִרְק ד' דִּיבְמוֹת, זָכָה מִשְׁלִימִין לוֹ וְלֹא מוֹסִיפִין, קִשְׁיָה אִיךָ יִתְקַנְיִים זֶה. וְצָרִיךְ לוֹמַר כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָּתְבוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת שֶׁם בִּיבְמוֹת וּ"ל, וְהָא דְאִמְרִינוּ בְּפִרְק קַמָּא דְחִגִּיגָה גְבִי אֲתָתָא מְגַדְלָא נְשִׂיאָא כִּי חֲזִינוּ צוֹרְבָא מְרַבְּנֵן דְּמַעְבִּיר בְּמִילִיהּ מוֹסְפִינָא לִיהּ.

**In honoring father and mother, the Scripture said, “that your days may be prolonged,” but Rabbi Akiva’s opinion in the fourth chapter of tractate Yevamot (50a) is that if one merits, G-d completes his allotted [years], but G-d does not add to his allotted [years]; it is difficult if one accepts Rabbi Akiva’s view how the promise “that your days may be prolonged” will be realized. It must be said as written by the Tosafot there in Yevamot, and this in their language, “and thus it’s said in the first chapter of tractate Chagigah (4b), regarding the women’s hairdresser [who was inadvertently taken before her time, the angel of death said,] ‘when I see a young Torah scholar who disregards [those who mistreat him], I**

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<sup>1</sup> Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, 20:14, “How were the Ten Commandments given? Five on one tablet and five on the other. . . . It is written ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, opposite it, ‘You shall not covet,’ whereby Scripture apprises us that whoever covets, in the end comes to beget a son who curses his father and honors one who is not his father. This is why the Ten Commandments were given, five on one tablet and five on the other. These are the words of R. Chanina b. Gamliel.”

add [years taken from someone else] to him.’”<sup>2</sup> I.e., there are those who disagree with Rabbi Akiva’s view.

אומר ר"י דניחא אפילו לרבי עקיבא דאין זה תוספת פיון שנגזרו לשום אדם עכ"ל. ואף כן האריכות ימים שיוסיפו לו יהיו מאותם שנגזרו לאחרים שלא נכו. ומשום הכי כנגד "כבוד" הזהיר "לא תחמד", כלומר לא תחמד השנים של אותם אחרים שימותו קודם זמנם, או משום חטאם או משום "ויש נספה בלא משפט".

**The Ri<sup>3</sup> says, this is acceptable even to Rabbi Akiva, for this does not add [years] because the [years] were decreed for some [other person].** In other words, additional years will not be created *ex nihilo*, but rather the years had already been in a ledger, but had been assigned to someone else. **Because of this, parallel to “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged,” [G-d] warns, “You shall not covet,” that is to say, don’t covet the years of these others who will die before their time, or because of their sin, or because “[a person] can be swept away without judgment” (Prov. 13:23).**

**אי נמי** דכפרק קמא דעבודה זרה אמר ריש לקיש באו ונגזיק טובה לאבותינו, שאלמלא לא חטאו אנו כמי שלא באנו לעולם, ופירש רש"י, שכל זמן שהם קיימים אין אנו חשובים לכלום עכ"ל. ומשום הכי הזהיר נגד "כבוד את-אביה" "לא תחמד" מיתתו בשביל כבודך, כי בשביל זה אני מבטיח לך שיצריכון ימיד ויתארה נמי כבודך, ומה שפסיד כן פרויט כאן.

**Alternatively, in the first chapter of tractate Avoda Zara (5a), discussing the sin of the Golden Calf, “Reish Lakish said, ‘Come and let us be grateful to our forefathers who sinned with the Golden Calf, as had they not sinned, we would not have come into the world. [He explained] as it is stated [about the Jewish people after the revelation at Sinai, ‘I said: You are godlike beings, and all of you are sons of the Most High’ (Ps. 82:6) [which indicates that they had become like angels and would not have propagated offspring]. [But] you ruined your deeds [and G-d said]: ‘Yet you shall die like a man, and fall like one of the princes’ (Ps. 82:7).” Rashi explains, “As long as they had existed before the Golden Calf in such a holy state, we are considered as**

<sup>2</sup> Chagigah 4b-5a: Rav Yosef asked if it happens that one can go before his time (and die for no reason)? “Yes, like this [incident of] Rav Beivai bar Abaye, who would be frequented by the company of the Angel of Death [and would see how people died at the hands of this angel. The Angel of Death] said to his agent: Go and bring me [the soul of] Miriam the raiser [i.e., braider] of women’s hair. He went [but mistakenly] brought him Miriam, the raiser of babies. . . . Rav Beivai bar Abaye said to [the Angel of Death]: Do you have the right to act in this [manner, to take someone before his time]? [The Angel of Death] said to him: And is it not written: ‘But there are those swept away without justice’ (Prov. 13:23)? [Rav Beivai] said to him: And isn’t it written: ‘One generation passes away, and another generation comes’ (Eccl. 1:4) [which indicates that there is a predetermined amount of time for the life of every generation]. He said: I shepherd them until [the years of] the generation are completed . . . Rab Beivai said to him: Ultimately, what do you do with his [extra] years [those taken away from this individual? The Angel of Death] said: If there is a young Torah scholar who disregards [those who mistreat him], I add those years to him and he becomes the deceased’s replacement for that time.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac ben Samuel the Elder (“the Ri ha-Zaken”) (c. 1115 – c. 1184), French Tosafist; a son of Rabbeinu Tam and thus a great-grandson of Rashi.

nothing in comparison to them.” That is why [G-d] warned in parallel to “honor your father” that “you shall not covet” his death because of your honor, as because of this I will promise you that I will prolong your days and also your honor will be prolonged, and what you lose here, you will gain here. That is, coveting something that belongs to another can cause harm to that person, as the rabbis have explained.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if a son covets years of life belonging to his father, he could cause his father to die early, and perhaps the leftover years would be given to the son. By juxtaposing “honor your father” with “you shall not covet,” G-d is saying that what the son may lose by not coveting and not gaining additional years from his father’s life will be gained by the mitzvah of honoring his father.

וְנָהוּ טַעַם נִכּוֹן לָמָּה שֶׁהוֹצֵרָה הַכְּתוּב לְכַתּוּב דְּנִקְא בְּמִצְוָה זֹאת שֶׁכָּר שֶׁל הָאָרִיכוֹת יָמִים, אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהוּא פָּלַל גְּדוּל בְּכָל הַתּוֹרָה, וְעֵינָיו עוֹד לִמְנוֹן עַל הַשְּׁנוּה כְּבוֹד אָב וְאָם לְכַבוֹד הַמְּקוֹם. וְעוֹד הַכִּיבוֹד תְּלוּי בְּלֵב, דִּישׁ מְאָכִילוֹ פְּטוּמוֹת וְיִוֹרֵשׁ גִּיהֲנוֹם, וְיִשׁ מְטַחֲנֵנוּ בְּרִיחִיִּים וְיִוֹרֵשׁ גֶּן עֵדֶן.

**This is the correct reason why the Scripture had to write precisely in this commandment a reward of longevity, even though [longevity] is a great rule in the whole Torah for one who observes the commandments, and also see later in this essay equating the honor of one’s father and mother to the honor of G-d. Furthermore, the honor depends upon the kindness of the heart, for he can feed him delicacies but still inherit Gehinnom if he serves his father with a scowl instead of a smile,<sup>5</sup> and there is another who will make [his father] grind with a millstone, which is difficult work, and yet [the son] will inherit the Garden of Eden.<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Bava Batra 2b: “Rabbi Abba says that Rav Chuna says that Rav says, ‘It is prohibited for a person to stand in another’s field [and look at his crop] while [the grain] is standing [because he casts an evil eye upon it and thereby causes him damage].’”

<sup>5</sup> Tur, Yoreh De’ah 240, as well as Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah 240: “What is honor? He feeds him and gives him drink, dresses and undresses him, brings him in and takes him out, and does so with a pleasant face, for even if he feeds him delicacies every day, yet does so with a scowl, punishment will befall him.”

<sup>6</sup> Kiddushin 31a-b: “Avimi, son of Rabbi Abbahu, taught: There is [a type of son] who feeds his father pheasant but is removed from the World [i.e., the World to Come], and there is one who makes him grind with a millstone [but this action brings him to the life of the World-to-Come].” It all depends upon whether the son acts with affection and respect or not.

והתמדה תלויה בלב, כי העין רואה והלב חומד, וכל העבירות באות מהתמדה כדכתיב "ואתמדם ואקחם". ומי שמכבד הוריו בשביל שהולידוהו, מכל שכן שיקבד הקב"ה ויקיים מצותיו, שגם הוא שותף ביצירתו ונופח בו נשמה שהוא עקר החיות ומקיים אותו בעולם. אם כן במצות הכיבוד תלוי קיום כל המצוות, ולכן "כבד" הוא ממש נגד "לא תתמד". ועיין עוד לקמן בסמוך (אות פ"ח) על גמרא דקידושין תנו רבנן "כבד" נכו'.

**Coveting something is a matter of the heart,<sup>7</sup> “for the eye sees and the heart covets,”<sup>8</sup> and all the sins come from the coveting, as it is written, “and I coveted them and I took them,”<sup>9</sup> A man who honors his parents, because they gave birth to him, will certainly honor the Holy One, Blessed be He, and keep His commandments, for He is also a partner in his creation and blew into him [the breath of] life,<sup>10</sup> which is the essence of vitality, and which sustains him in the world. Thus, in the commandment of honoring one’s parents hangs the fulfillment of all of the commandments of the Torah, and therefore “honor your father and your mother” is precisely parallel to “you shall not covet.” See further later in an adjacent essay (note 28) on the Gemara in Kiddushin 30b, “The Sages taught that it is stated: ‘Honor your father and your mother’ (Ex. 20:11), and it is stated: ‘Honor the L-rd with your wealth’ (Prov. 3:9). The verse equates the honor of one’s father and mother to the honor of G-d [as the term ‘honor’ is used in both cases].”**

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<sup>7</sup> Rabbeinu Bachya (Bahya ben Asher, 1255–1340, Spanish rabbi), commentary on Shemot 20:14.

<sup>8</sup> Rashi on Num. 15:39, “The heart and the eyes are the spies of the body. They act as its agents for sinning: the eye sees, the heart covets, and the body commits the sin.”

<sup>9</sup> Joshua 7:21.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 2:7.