1. Question. "איש אביו ואמו תיראו ואת שבתותי תשמרו" – Rashi notes the juxtaposition of the two מצוות – Shabbos and kibud av v’eim – and explains סמך שבת למורא האב לומר אע"פ שהזהרתיך על מורא אב ואם אם יאמר לך חלל את השבת אל תשמע לו, וכן בשאר מצוות. This certainly explains why כיבוד אב ואם is juxtaposed with another מצוה, but it really doesn’t explain why it is juxtaposed specifically with שבת. After all, the הלכה is that one does not listen to a parent who instructs you to violate *any* עבירה, even just an איסור דרבנן. Wouldn’t it have been better for the תורה to teach that we don’t obey a parent’s instruction to violate a minor עבירה and then we would know through a קל וחומר that we cannot obey their instruction to violate more serious עבירות like שבת?
2. The דובב מישרים offers an ingenious, but difficult to accept, answer. He suggests that one might have assumed that if one is violating שבת just to make his parent’s happy, it is not a violation מדאורייתא of חילול שבת because it is a מלאכה שאינה צריכך לגופה. The מהרי"ק, for example, writes that when a non-Jew forces a Jew to violate שבת, it is considered a מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה since the Jew is only doing the איסור to satisfy his gentile oppressor. Rav Waldenberg זצ"ל even goes so far as to suggest that this is why we can violate שבת to save a life. Even though חילול שבת is tantamount to עבודה זרה, which in turn is יהרג ואל יעבור, it is not really חילול שבת מדאורייתא when your only intention is to save a life.
3. The difficulty with this approach, brilliant as it may be, is that it suggests a very broad expansion of the concept of מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה. Normally we do not define מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה as a מלאכה with a different *motivation*, but as a מלאכה with a different *goal* in terms of *what is accomplished*. If one digs a hole because he wants the dirt, and not the hole itself, he has done the מלאכה with a different *goal*. However, imagine if one cooks, not because he’s hungry, but because his wife asked him to do it. Imagine if one builds a house, not because he wants to live in it, but because it is a model home to show people. Are these not violations מדאורייתא of בישול and בונה?!
4. Rav Zilberstein tells the story of the non-religious fellow who lived in a very religious neighborhood, and wanted to upset his חרדי neighbors, so he drove around in his car on שבת with music blaring, up and down every street in the neighborhood. According to the מהרי"ק and דובב מישרים and Rav Waldenberg the joke is on him because it is not even really a מלאכה דאורייתא since it is אינה צריכה לגופה. This does not seem to be correct, though, which leaves us back with the question of why שבת was chosen as the mitzvah to juxtapose with מורא אב ואם.
5. Perhaps the reason שבת was chosen is that חז"ל tell us that שבת is more than just a single מצוה. The גמרא שבת דף קיח says that כל המודה בשבת כאילו מודה בכל התורה כולה וכל הכופר בשבת כאילו כפר בכל התורה כולה. Shabbos apparently, is not just an example of a מצוה but the paradigm and symbol of all מצוות בין אדם למקום. שבת is a יסוד האמונה. Perhaps כיבוד אב ואם enjoys a similar status amongst מצוות בין אדם לחבירו. It is not merely an example of a מצוה בין אדם לחבירו, but is the model of all מצוות בין אדם לחבירו. When we analyze the details of כיבוד אב ואם they may provide insight into the proper attitude for all מצוות בין אדם לחבירו, just as a detailed analysis of שבת will provide insight into our attitude toward all מצוות בין אדם למקום.
6. The basis of כיבוד אב ואם seems to be a sense of הכרת הטוב – recognizing the good that our parents have done for us. Perhaps, understood more broadly, we need to focus on the good that others do for us. Things don’t just happen. People give צדקה, do חסד, work hard for communal organizations that we all benefit from. The first step of בין אדם לחבירו is to recognize that more often than not our friends *deserve* our help.
7. The honor one shows to a parent has two components – כבוד ומורא:
8. כבוד refers to acts of service. We help with whatever they need, be it food, clothing, companionship or anything else. When dealing with others it is important to find what it is that they would need and appreciate, not what *we think* they should need or appreciate. We have a difficult time seeing things from any other perspective aside from our own. Studies have even been done that measure just how self centered we are subconsciously. For instance the 39th most popular men’s name in America is Jerry, the 40th is Dennis and the 41st is Roger. There are 270 dentists in the United States named Jerry and 257 named Roger. So how many dentists are named Dennis? Logically it should be somewhere between 257 and 270… but it is 482. We are so connected to ourselves that we choose professions that sound like our names – Dennis the dentist, Lawrence the Lawyer etc. My kids didn’t believe me that this was true so I told them that think about it – my name is Rabbi Lebowitz and I am a rabbi! The names Jack and Phil are equally popular, but if you live in Jacksonville Florida there is a four times greater chance that your name is Jack than your name being Phil. But that may be true only because all the Phils live in Philadelphia where you have twice the chance of having the name Phil than having the name Jack.
9. מורא, the other half of the מצוה, relates to what we would typically call respect – not sitting in their seat, not inserting our own views into their conversations, and similar acts of reverence. Perhaps, on a smaller scale, all מצוות בין אדם לחבירו have to be understood and practiced with a similar respect for people’s personal space. When we say תהלים for somebody we want to know every single detail of their illness – even if the family wants to be more private about it. Just as this sense of מורא probably comes from the fact that our parents are considered partners with Hashem, מצוות בין אדם לחבירו should be practiced with the understanding that the other party is not merely a חפצה של מצוה, but a genuine צלם אלקים.
10. But there is a limitation on the מצוה of כיבוד אב ואם. The moment it begins to destroy our relationships with Hashem or with our spouse, the honor stops. It cannot be self destructive. This is certainly true of other מצוות בין אדם לחבירו as well. As nice a guy as you may want to be, if it involves being with friends who will lead you to an environment that is far from קדושה, we reject the friendship. If our wives are uncomfortable with certain relationships, we remember who our most important friend is. A parent cannot instruct a child to ruin their own lives, nor should they ever want to. A friendship is valuable and important, but should never come with a loss of one’s own identity.
11. After spending what was hopefully a beautiful יום טוב with lots of family, and for many of us having the unique opportunity to observe the grandfather of all מצוות בין אדם לחבירו – כיבוד אב ואם, we should carry that inspiration back home to our communities and practice the principles of כיבוד אב ואם in all of life’s relationships.