



# FAMILY LINK

## The Evolving Meaning of Honor: Navigating Kibud Av V'em as Our Parents Age

Ematai to host virtual workshop on honoring our parents on Sunday, March 30.



By Bassie Taubes

One of the universal truths that connect all of humanity is that every person has—or had—a biological mother and father. While the nature of the relationship beyond biology and the length of time we share with our parents vary greatly, the fundamental fact remains: We all come from one mother and one father. The Torah explicitly commands us to honor our parents; indeed, it is one of the Aseret HaDibrot—the Ten Commandments. This mitzvah, kibud av v'em, broadly interpreted as demanding respect, is therefore taken very seriously. During infancy, children are completely dependent on their parents for both physical and emotional needs. Honor, love, admiration and even the fear of disappointing them become deeply intertwined in the parent-child relationship. Young children often need reminders that they cannot simply raise their voices or throw tantrums to get their way. Their parents are in charge, and listening to them is one of the primary ways they show honor and respect.

As children grow, they gradually gain independence. A school-age child can manage many of his or her own physical needs with some pa-

rental support, but their parents remain their primary source of comfort and love. At this stage, the concept of honoring parents begins to shift, as children start to see themselves as individuals. The teenage years, of course, present new challenges for both parents and children. Teenagers often push boundaries, testing their independence while still relying on their parents in many ways. In those moments, parents may find themselves using classic reminders such as, "Who do you think you're speaking to?" or "You must have forgotten—I am not your friend, I am your mother!" Yet, even amidst occasional defiance, honor takes on new forms. A teenager might express respect by running errands, cooking dinner, setting the table or making the parent a cup of coffee.

Beyond the natural evolution of the parent-child dynamic, the very definition of kibud has also changed with the times. While the core principles of honor remain unchanged, societal expectations have evolved.

I remember this well from my own experience. When I was a senior in high school, considering my future, I thought about going into special education after spending a summer at HASC. My mother, however, had other ideas. She wanted me to have financial independence. While she knew little about nursing as a career, she knew two important facts: Nurses are always in demand, and

the government was then offering scholarships and stipends due to a nursing shortage. Without hesitation, she registered me for the National League for Nursing exam. I took it—without argument—because I trusted her wisdom. She was right. I have never been unemployed, and I graduated debt-free. Looking back, I recognize that this type of parental guidance, where a child simply obeys and follows, was a common dynamic in my generation. Today, such a scenario might seem unusual, as children are encouraged to be more vocal about making their own choices. The way we show honor has thus shifted over time.

In my family, my siblings and I honored our father with a sense of deep respect, awe and, admittedly, a little fear. I believe the way our generation related to parents is different from today's parent-child relationships. Many modern children share a level of closeness and emotional intimacy with their parents that was less common in previous generations. The challenge now is balancing kibud with the expectation of a more open, emotionally connected relationship.

But how does kibud evolve when we become adults ourselves, raising our children, and perhaps even grandchildren, as our own parents age? In many cases, the roles begin to shift—sometimes in ways that can create tension. Adult children may feel that it's time to host family gatherings,

like Yomim Tovim and simchas, believing it to be too much for their aging parents, while the parents may resist, feeling fully capable and reluctant to relinquish their role. Similarly, driving often becomes a point of contention: Children worry about their elderly parents' safety behind the wheel, while the parents insist that giving up driving would strip them of their independence.

Another common challenge arises when adult children move far from their aging parents due to career opportunities, leaving them unable to provide day-to-day care. What, then, is their obligation? Does honoring a parent require physical presence, or does it take on a different form at this stage of life?

The mitzvah of honoring one's parents is a lifelong journey. There is no single answer, no perfect way to navigate the complexities involving aging parents.

On Sunday, March 30 at 8 p.m., Ematai will be running a workshop on Zoom to address some questions of kibud av v'em with Jewish wisdom, halacha and practical guidance from experts. I hope you will join us. Visit [ematai.org](http://ematai.org) for more information.

Bassie Taubes is the director of community outreach for Ematai, an organization dedicated to integrating Jewish wisdom into healthcare decision making. She is the owner of Wellness Motivations in Teaneck, where she works as a health coach, fitness instructor and advocate for well-being. Additionally, Bassie serves as the rebbetzin of Congregation Zichron Mordechai in Teaneck, combining her professional expertise with her communal leadership role.

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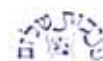
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Moderated by Bassie Taubes, RN  
Ematai's Director of  
Community Outreach



March 30



8PM ET



Zoom

To register for the Zoom link:  
[tinyurl.com/kibudavVem](https://tinyurl.com/kibudavVem)

Recording will be available for those who register



Submit questions ahead of time to [office@ematai.org](mailto:office@ematai.org)

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