

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Friday Erev Shabbat 5:49 pm

Services

Thursday Morning Feb 5 8:30 am Minyan followed by Bagels and Bible
Saturday Feb. 7 9:30 am Shabbat morning service.

PARSHAT YITRO
NOT HONORING PARENTS

“Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that your Lord God is assigning to you.” (Exodus 20:12)

Professor Jane English (1947-1978), who tragically died at a young age in a mountaineering accident on the Matterhorn, argues that children have no obligations towards their parents. Obligations only occur when one chooses such a commitment. Children did not choose to be brought into this world. Parents, by choosing to bring children into the world, accept ethical obligations towards them. But children have no such obligation. English does suggest that children can become friends with their parents. But we choose our friends; we do not choose our parents.

I do not know how Professor English would react to how far some of her ideas have gone today. In 2019 an Indian businessman named Raphael Samuel sued his parents for bringing him into the world against his will. When asked about the suit, Samuel wrote, "There's no point to humanity. So many people are suffering. If humanity is extinct, Earth and animals would be happier." This anti-natalist approach was articulated by David Benatar in his 2006 book, *Better Never to Have Been*. Of course, we all do exist in this world, but we can blame our parents. They brought us into the world against our will.

If these views seem a bit extreme, there is a movement among many people, fueled by social media, to cut off contact with one's parents. The movement goes by the hashtag #NoContact. Several therapists have joined the approach that for one's mental health, it is best to totally separate from one's parents. Oprah Winfrey did an entire show on this movement. It is important to note that this approach is not necessarily for people who were raised by abusive parents. Adults need not maintain contact with people who abused them. But the movement applies to all parents. For an adult child's mental health, the adult child should cut off contact. I have often been the counselor of loving parents who have been deeply wounded by their children in this way.

How foreign this all seems to anyone raised in the Biblical tradition, “Honor your

father and your mother.” Note that it does not say to honor parents only if they were wonderful or worthy. It says to honor all parents. None of us our perfect parents. Children do not come with instruction manuals, although Dr. Benjamin Spock (1903-1998) tried when my parents were raising me and my brothers. His 1946 book *Baby and Child Care* was one of the best-selling books of the twentieth century, almost a Bible for my parents.

This week we read the Ten Commandments, which our Torah gave to the world. In the middle of these commandments is the obligation to honor our parents. We honor them not because they were perfect. Rather, we honor them because they gave birth to us, raised us, and taught us how to live in this world. It is a sad tragedy when estrangement from parents becomes a therapeutic norm, practiced by so many people of the Instagram and TikTok generation.

It is noteworthy that the Torah never says love your parents. Nor does it say obey your parents. It says honor your parents. It means to respect the dignity of the position known as “parent.” I once heard a lecture by the radio commentator Dennis Prager, currently recovering from a serious spinal cord accident. He mentioned that when the President of the United States walks into a news conference, all the reporters stand up. This includes reporters who sharply disagree with the President. They are not standing because they agree with the President. They are standing out of respect for the dignity of the office.

Like the office of President, so is the office of parent. Whether we agree with them or not, we need to respect the dignity of the office. We need to honor our parents.