

## חמיו וחמותו

### *Father-in-law and Mother-in-law*

**T**he ruling of our Sages (Yoreh Deah, 240:24) that a man is obligated to honor his father-in-law and mother-in-law is well-known. Every man is careful in this matter because they, like his mother, speak to him nicely. However, the primary

fulfillment is to honor them after their death, to provide them with contentment, as a person does for his father and mother. If they do not have a son, who, besides him, will have pity upon them? It is proper to have pity upon them – to especially honor them in their lifetime and at their time of death. By doing so, they will be consoled for not having a son and they will give thanks for their portion. When the sons-in-law are good, then daughters are better than sons. There is a rationale in saying that the obligation to honor one's in-laws is greater than to one's parents – due to them he merits to be saved from sin and establish his lineage. How much virtue there is for a husband and wife who have merited! How much effort and toil did his father-in-law and mother-in-law invest until they raised this daughter and married her off to him? It was extremely difficult for them. How will they be repaid? There is an obligation upon the son-in-law not to be ungrateful and to be like a son unto them.

It is most necessary to instruct a wife that she must be careful and quick to honor her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Behold, our Sages (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah, Perek 26) said, “[It is written,] ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ This is followed by, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ What is the connection? This teaches you that if a man married a woman and she does not honor his father and mother in their old age, it is as if he committed adultery all of his days.” How much supreme effort does a parent invest, and how much pain in raising children does he endure, until he has brought a child to the stage of marriage! The parents hope for the best and to marry off their children so that they find tranquility for their souls. Afterwards, a daughter-in-law rises up against her mother-in-law; controversy and argument increase in

the house. This causes the son to also quarrel and bicker with his father and mother, because it is natural for a man to side with his wife – “... a contentious woman is like an annoying dripping.” (Mishlei, 19:13) In the end, the children will go away from the table of their parents, and the brothers will do the same because of the nasty controversy and dispute of the women. Consequently, the fulfillment of the verse (Yirmiyahu, 14:19) “... one hopes for peace, yet there is no good; for a time of healing, and behold there is trepidation.” is experienced by his parents. That woman will bear her iniquity and the sin of her husband. Evil will come upon her and her end will be bitter. As she has done, so too, will her daughters-in-law do to her. All of this is besides the punishment that awaits her in the World to Come.

“... and a woman who fears G-d will be praised.” (Mishlei, 31:30) – this mandates that a woman should honor her father-in-law and mother-in-law even more than her husband and treat them like a king and queen. Her sole purpose should be to understand and know their desire, to make their desire her desire, and not to do anything large or small without their permission. She is undoubtedly obliged in their honor when her husband is financially reliant upon his parents and eats from their bread. However, even if her husband supports his father and mother, she should not treat their honor nonchalantly, Heaven forbid, even if their “yoke” is heavy upon her. This is because the merit of the parents aids the children and their righteousness will be forever. The declaration of our Sages (Yerushalmi, Peah 1:1), “There is a person who feeds his parents stuffed pheasant, yet inherits Gehinom (purgatory); and, there is a person who makes his parents work in a flour mill, yet inherits Gan Eden (paradise).” is

well-known. Everything depends on the pleasant demeanor of one's speech and the degree of respect one shows to them, even if her father-in-law and mother-in-law are bothersome and have bad character, as is common among the elderly. A husband and wife who are intelligent and the fear of G-d is upon their face will bear their yoke and not be worn out by it. They will not argue with them, Heaven forbid. They will be anxious in anticipation of the Day of Judgment, for G-d will judge a person for every evil word he utters and every form of disparagement. The person who honors others will be respected and his reward will be greatly increased. According to one's pain is his gain.

This mitzvah is incumbent upon the husband – to guide his wife and to command her with full authority – that she must forbear and be extremely careful in the honor of his father and mother. If he sees that she is lenient in their honor and it appears to him that the law is in her favor, even so he should rebuke and silence her, in order to appease his father and mother. Privately, the husband should placate her with kind words for the sake of family peace. However, it is known that the elders possess wisdom, and it is necessary that proper understanding come from them. Therefore, if it happens that their son's wife is an evil and difficult woman, the responsibility is upon the elders to bear her yoke, to guide her with pleasantness, and not to impose their burden upon her. If she does inappropriate things, they should admonish her privately and not reveal her impropriety to others. They should only praise and extol her virtue in public, and all the more so, they must not argue with her father and mother. Unquestionably, they must guard themselves and not divulge her misdeeds to her husband, lest he become dissatisfied with her and come to hate

her. Woe unto a father and mother if they cause such a thing! Behold, the Holy One Blessed Be He commanded to scrape into water the holy Name of G-d, which is written in sanctity, in order to make peace between a husband and wife (Shabbat 116a). It is better that a father and mother suffer one thousand troubles and not cause controversy between a husband and wife.

Therefore, a father and mother require tremendous wisdom to behave with proper conduct with their sons and daughters-in-law, in order that their union be peaceful and successful. Even if they have some minor complaints and criticisms about each other, they must be very careful that their personal discord not be visible to others. This would be foolish and shameful to both sides, and it would cause slander and a bad reputation for all of them. My opinion has already been stated that if they are not able to refrain from argument and maintain their civility in public, then it is good and reasonable that they should not sit together. The separation, which is befitting to them, is their life.

