

# Parents

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The fifth of the Ten Commandments is "Honor your father and your mother" Exodus 20. In this week's reading, Leviticus 19, we have a variation. "A person should fear his mother and his father." Notice how the order of the parents is inverted. The Rabbis say that since one's natural tendency is to honor one's mother more than one's father.

That is why in the Ten Commandments when it talks about honor, the father is mentioned first to emphasize that even if one's father is a stern, forbidding character, one should nevertheless ensure that one does honor him as much as mother.

And when it comes to fear, the mother is mentioned first because the natural tendency is to fear or respect one's father more than one's mother. "Fear" is a poor translation. The Hebrew "Yirah" means respect, even awe, but not fear. The Hebrew word for fear is "Pachad."

The relationship with one's parents requires the warmer, honor, love. But it also requires the respect, the slight distance that they deserve for acting as God's agents in raising and taking care of their children.

Interestingly, exactly the same balance between honor and respect is repeated in the Bible about God. We are told to honor and indeed to love God and at the same time to respect and be in awe of God. The two very different emotions are significant. A love without responsibility and duty, is as bad as duty without love or care. We always need to find a balance.