

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I presently live in Dallas, as do my parents. I was offered a very lucrative job in Cincinnati where I could do much better than my present job. My parents, however, would prefer I stay in town, as they are aging and I often help them out in the house and we are very close. Part of me wants to stay to honor them, and part of me says that this is the chance to get ahead in my own life. Does the commandment “Honor thy mother and father” oblige me to stay, or could I go? I want to do the right thing.

Thank you,
Marc E.

Dear Marc,

The Torah states “Honor your father and your mother” (Shemos/Exodus 20:12). The Talmud explains this “honor”, among other things, to mean to provide them with food and clothing. The question arises, does this obligate the son/daughter to provide the food and clothing out of his own money? Or does it just mean that the son or daughter are obligated to prepare and bring the food and/or clothing to them that have been purchased out of the parents’ money, but the son or daughter are not obligated to spend their own money to do so?

Like most good Jewish questions, the Talmud cites two opinions on this matter. (*Kiddushin* 32a). The majority ruling is, however, that the children are exempt from spending their own money, and the mitzvah only obligates them to provide the parents’ needs with the parents’ own money, (although it is considered meritorious to use one’s own money when necessary, it is not obligatory). This is the ruling cited in the *Code of Jewish Law* (*Yorah De’ah* 240:5).

The Talmud goes on to rule that although one is not obligated to spend their own money on this mitzvah, one would be obligated to lose time from work to do so. This is based upon a common principle in Jewish law, which differentiates between loss of *money* and loss of *earnings*. This ruling would seem to imply that one should forego a more lucrative position than the present one, as it would not involve the expenditure of his money, rather the loss of earnings not yet his.

There is, however, a precedent in Jewish law which refutes this conclusion. A question was recently posed to a leading authority in Jerusalem, that a father wanted his son to enter his business. To do so, the son would have to take a loss from what he could potentially earn in another job. The rabbi ruled that the meaning of the Talmud that a child needs to give up working to help his parents is if this happens from time to time. The loss of an hour’s work, if it would not have ramifications on his job (would not put his job in jeopardy, etc) is considered the loss of earnings, not money. In that case, one must honor one’s parents. To lose a job, however, would be to honor them from one’s own money, and outside the obligation. This includes getting a better paying job. To lose that would be considered one’s own loss, and is exempt from honoring parents to take that type of loss. This would apply to your situation as well; you are permitted to move and take a more lucrative position.

Be sure, however, to do your best to make up the loss to your parents by speaking often, and visiting as often as is practical. As you mentioned, honoring one’s parents is in the ten commandments, it is considered parallel to honoring G-d Himself!