

Laws & Costumes

Respecting One's Elder Siblings

The fifth of the Ten Commandments is to honor one's parents. The Talmud infers from the same commandment that one must also respect his/her older sibling. Several reasons are given for this mitzvah:

1) The firstborn is deserving of respect because he is considered somewhat responsible for his younger siblings. The Midrash explains that Reuben saved the life of Joseph while saying to himself, "I'm the firstborn; the blame [of Joseph's death] will fall only on me."

2) According to Torah law, the firstborn son inherits more than his other siblings. This is because the firstborn is considered his parents' representative—and as such deserves respect.

3) The Arizal explains that there is a spiritual chain of descent. It starts with G-d – Parents – Oldest Child – All other Children. Being that the oldest child is the one that provides this spiritual chain for the other siblings he is to be respected as well as the parents and G-d.

4) Rav Yehonoson Eibshitz that the reason a person must respect his older brother is because he did not damage his mother's womb on the way out. A younger sibling owes their entire existence to the peaceful exit of the older ones.



Sinai Mountain

Everybody knows that the Ten Commandments were given by G-d on Mount Sinai. But why Mount Sinai in particular? The Midrash tells us that Mount Sinai was not the highest and most splendid mountain. In fact it is described as being the lowest of all the mountains which might have been chosen.

Nonetheless, G-d chose Mount Sinai for the Giving of the Torah in order to teach an important message: to tell us that humility is a prerequisite to the learning of Torah.

Torah comes from G-d. When hearing an instruction from the Torah, we need the ability to listen. This is a rare quality: usually our own ego gets in the way. We hear our own ideas, not what the Torah is saying. Humility is the step beyond our ego, a mood of selflessness, which makes us receptive to the Torah. Thus we say at the end of the daily Amidah prayer "May my soul be to all as the dust - open my heart to your Torah".

Rope Walker

Chassidic master Rabbi Chaim of Krosno observed an acrobat balancing on a rope high above the ground.

He told his disciples:

"If that man would think about the money he would earn with his act, instead of concentrating on his rope, he would surely make a mistake and crash to his death..."

Concluded Rabbi Chaim: "Shouldn't we concentrate on our service to G-d in the same way?"

Exiled to Siberia, Reb Mendel Futerfas found himself in prison with a tightrope walker. Reb Mendel asked him, "I always wondered: You walk between such tall buildings – how do you maintain your balance?"

The tightrope walker answered, "It's simple. Before I begin, I find an object on the other end and focus on it. I don't dare take my eyes off the object while I'm walking. I don't look to the right; I don't look to the left. As long as I focus on my goal, I make it across."

Saying

"All the challenges and unwelcoming events are the birthpangs of Moshiach."

Rebbe