

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

An Interactive PARSHA EXPERIENCE



Parsha: VaEtchanan

Title: Take It On

Contributor: Susan Yammer, Director of Novice Teacher Support,
Pardes Center for Jewish Educators

The Parsha at First Glance

Spotlight on the Parsha:

VaEtchanan is a *parsha* chock full of stories that are very well known. We find Moshe continuing to review with the nation all that they have been through together for the last 40 years of wandering in the *midbar* (desert).



Here are some of the highlights:

Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good hill country... [Devarim 3:25]

Moshe is recalling when he pleaded with God to allow him to join the Israelites when they cross over the Jordan River to enter the Land of Israel. Sadly, God had refused Moshe's request and Moshe will only be granted the opportunity to see the land from a mountaintop on the opposite side of the Jordan River.

Face to face the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire. [Devarim 5:4]

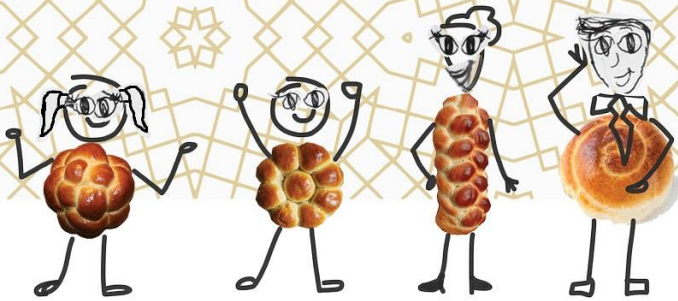
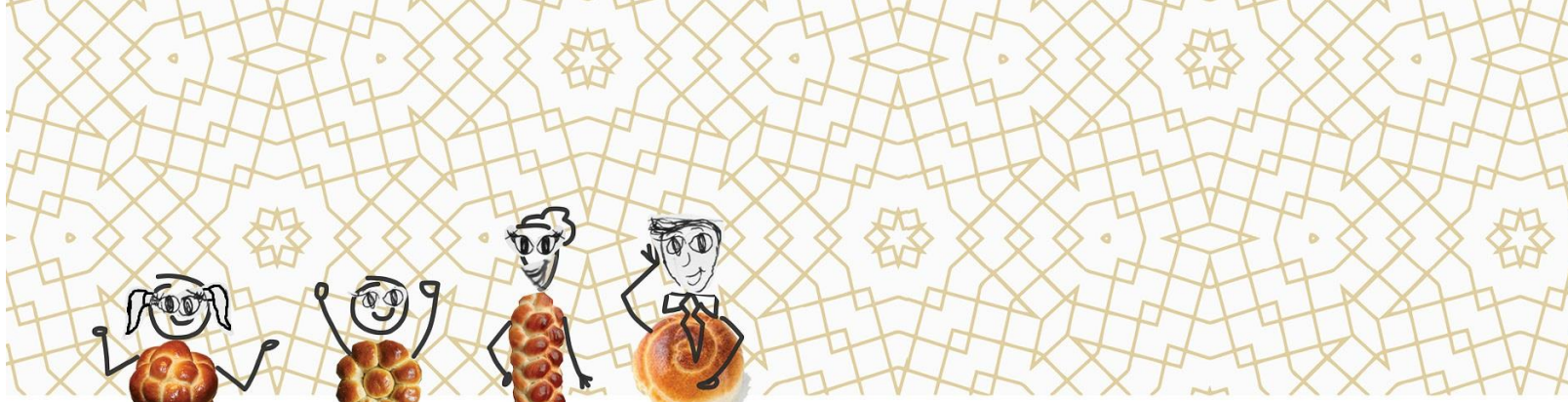
Moshe also reminds them of how they stood on *Har Sinai* as it was filled with fire and how God gave Moshe the ten commandments to bring down to the nation.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. [Devarim 6:4]

Moshe also tells the nation to obey these commandments and gives us the words of the *Shema* prayer, which forms one of the most well-known and basic prayers that Jews say up until today.

Zooming In:

We're now going to zoom in on the ten commandments that God gave the Jewish people on Har Sinai. Specifically, we are going to focus on one particular commandment – the one that sits on the bottom of the first column:



"Honor your father and your mother."

The first thing to notice if you read the four *mitzvot* that come before *"Honor your father and your mother"* is that all of these *mitzvot* concern our relationship with God – whether it's having no other gods, not misusing the name of God or observing Shabbat (which is a way we imitate God's resting on the seventh day of creation by resting ourselves). These *mitzvot* are in the category we call **בין אדם למקום**, 'between man and God.' It seems strange that the *mitzvah* commanding us to honor our parents would appear in the column of *mitzvot* that deals with our relationship with God. It would have been more logical to have this commandment appear in the second column, along with all the other *mitzvot* that are about our relationships to people, like: Do not murder, Do not lie, Do not be jealous....

Questions for Consideration:

The first question to ask around the Shabbat table is:

- Why is the *mitzvah* of honoring your parents found in the same column as the *mitzvot* connected to our relationship to God? What could honoring your parents, *kibud av v'em*, have to do with God?



One answer our rabbis give is: God was a partner in creating you along with your parents.

The Parsha Through Another Lens

Let's go deeper!

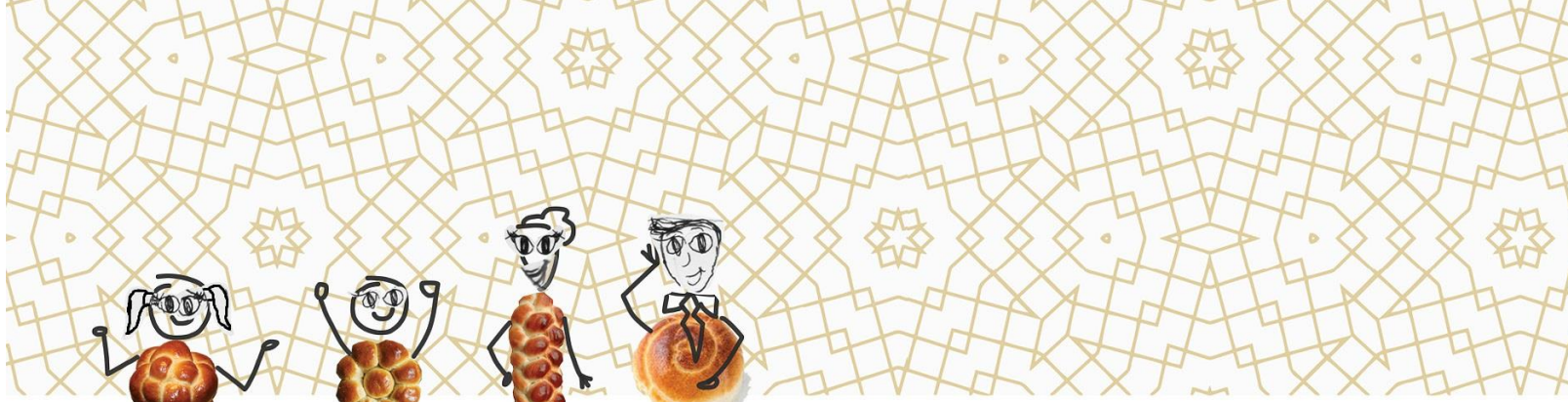
Hopefully your conversation got everyone started in thinking about the importance of *kibud av v'em*, honoring one's father and mother. Let's ask another question. What does *kibud av v'em* look like?

Our revered rabbis must have had the same question. In the most famous books of Jewish law, the Talmud, you can find a list of actions that the rabbis say are examples of *kibud av v'am*.

A child's obligations to his parents are:

- to give them food and drink
- to cover/shelter them
- to escort them in and out
- to wash their face, hands, and feet
- to not sit in their seat
- to not speak for them
- to not contradict their words

Looking at this list we see there are two kinds of examples: what a child *should* do to honor his/her parents and what a child *shouldn't* do in honoring his/her parents. Let's choose one and see if we can understand it better.



Why would it be important to not sit in your parent's seat? Do your parents have a special place to sit at the table? How would it feel to them if you decided to sit in their seats?

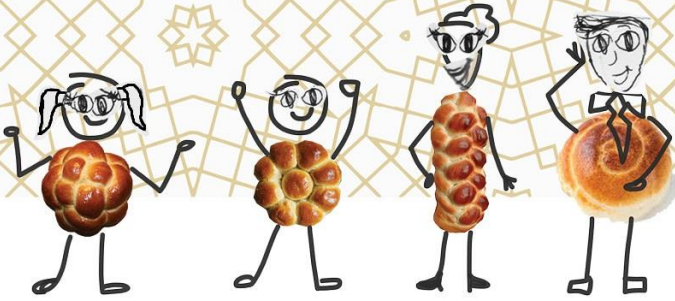
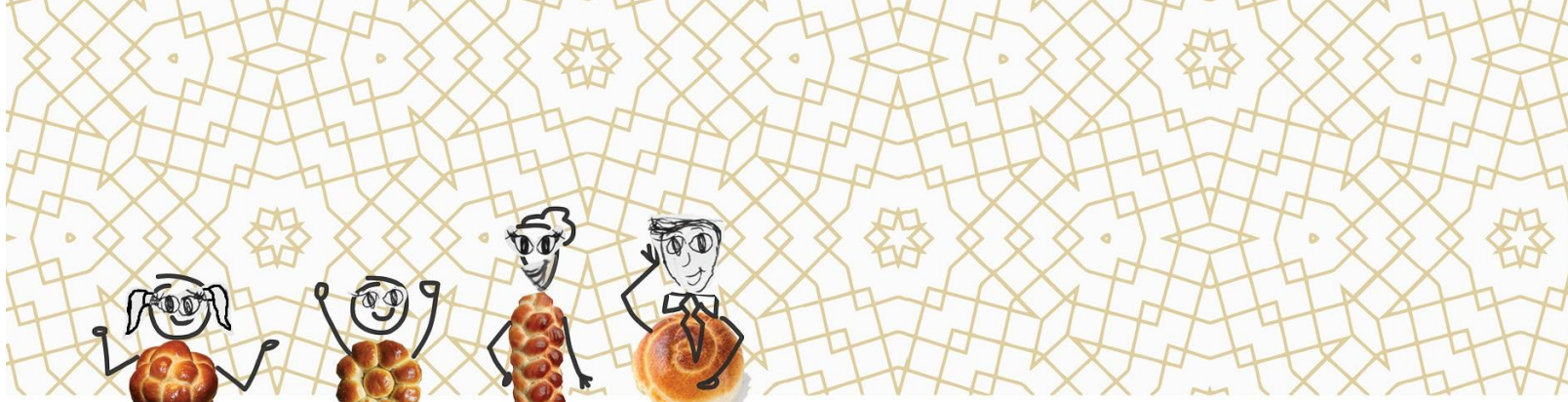
How would you update this list? Go around the table and ask for suggestions for how these actions might look today.

Time to role play!

Let's try our hand at this very important mitzvah. Below are some situations where kibud av v'em may not be so easy. When taking on one of the characters in the story, try it from the other side – let the child play the parent's role and let the parent play the child's role. See how it feels to look at this mitzvah from the 'other side.' You might discover a new way of understanding kibud av v'em.

1. You are in the middle of an exciting game and your parent asks you to clean your room now. You really don't want to do it. What do you do?
2. Your parents bought you a new winter coat. They are very excited about giving it to you. When you take it out, you really don't like it. Do you tell them the truth?
3. You disagree with your parents about your bedtime. You believe that since you are older now it should be later. Can you respectfully disagree? How would you do it?

Having tried our hand at these more difficult examples of kibud av v'em, come up with a list of all the things you think you already do to fulfill this mitzvah. Maybe your parents can remind you, and then pat yourselves on the back.



Perhaps you can newly commit yourself to paying more attention to fulfilling this mitzvah. You needn't look for the big acts, even small ones will do.

Shabbat Shalom!