



Fortifying the Fifth

אנכי... לא תרצח...
לא יהיה... לא תנאף...
לא תשא... לא תגנב...
זכור את... לא תענה...
כבד את... לא תחמד...

From Puzzlement to Clarity

Reb Yom Tov Ehrlich was born and raised in prewar Europe, but few understood America as well as he. In addition to his classic song “Ameritchka” in which he brilliantly analyzes the essence of the United States, his perception of this country was evident in a song he wrote about *Mattan Torah*. He dramatically describes the *Chazal* that tells how the Torah was offered to the various nations, and how each one asked what was written in the Torah. Each country was told of the *mitzvah* it would find most challenging to perform and — turned it down. In the song, Reb Ehrlich tells how communist Russia was told of the first of the *Aseres Hadibros* “I am your G-d”; the Germans were told of the prohibition against murder, and so on. When an increasingly worried *malach* arrived in New York to offer the Americans the Torah, the locals asked him what kind of business it was...

Then, when the *malach* shared with them the fifth of the *Aseres HaDibros*, “Honor your father

and mother,” the Americans replied, “Keep it for yourself. For us, Mother’s Day suffices...”

One of the greatest challenges we face as Jews living in America, and in the many countries affected by American culture, is the battle against the corrosive influence of a society whose view about parents is the polar opposite of Torah *hashkafah*. Instead of revering the older generation for their cumulative wisdom gained by years of experience and exhibiting gratitude to those who brought them into this world and raised them, Americans worship youth. In place of being respected, parents are often looked down upon, perceived as old-fashioned and out of touch with modern technology and other contemporary realities.

As much as we try to keep our value system intact, unless we take concrete steps to swim against the powerful waves, we will invariably drown in the society around us, as the very air we breathe is contaminated.

One place to start is with contemplating of a story that many of us heard in our youth.

The *Midrash* (quoted in the *sefer Seder Hadoros*) tells us that Rabi Yehoshua ben Eilam was informed in a dream to “rejoice in your heart because you and Nanas the butcher

The Ultimate Occupation

I once heard a very powerful thought in the name of the noted *maggid shiur* and *mashpia* Harav Eizek Krishevsky, *shlita*, about the conversation between Rabi Yehoshua and Nanas. The questions had been, "What are your deeds? What is your occupation?"

It was in answer to the second question that Nanas told about his *kibbud horim*. Being a butcher might have been his way of making *parnassah*, but his "occupation" was taking care of his parents.

This brought back a very moving memory.

For decades my mother, *a"h*, taught methods of teaching to seminary students and played a pivotal role in molding an entire generation of teachers. She saw her career in *chinuch* — she previously had served as both a teacher and principal — as a singular *zechus*; the only thing she asked be written on her *matzeivah* was her involvement in *chinuch habanos*. It also gave her much *sipuk hanefesh*.

Yet when my maternal grandmother was in her upper eighties, my mother found it necessary to defend herself in conversations with me over the fact that she was still working.

"Baruch Hashem, Babbie doesn't need me," she stressed. Indeed, my maternal grandmother — who lived in the same house as we did and on whom my mother constantly checked — was in good health, and even babysat once a week for a great-grandchild. "The moment Babbie needs me," my mother insisted, "I am giving up my job to take care of her full time."

My grandmother merited to not fall ill, was *niftar* suddenly at home, and so my mother did continue to teach. But I had no doubt that had Hashem willed otherwise, my mother would have given up her position, for she saw *kibbud eim* as the ultimate occupation.

Later on I got to know a precious Yid who actually took early retirement in order to care for his elderly father. Reb Feivel Hesil, a Kopycznitzer Chassid who lived in Yerushalayim, had a prominent position in the Department of Education in the city municipality.

"How can I leave my father alone with an aide?" he asked me.

After his father was *niftar* he went back to work.

Rabi Yehoshua immediately rose and kissed Nanas on his forehead.

"My son," he told him, "fortunate are you and fortunate is your portion... and I am fortunate that I merited to be your *chaver* in *Gan Eden*."

...

Rabi Yehoshua was initially so distraught by his dream that instead of going to the *beis medrash* to teach Torah, he set out on a journey to find Nanas. Yet the moment this giant of Torah and *avodah* heard of the degree of the butcher's *kibbud horim*, not only did he find the answer to the puzzle, but he became ecstatic by the idea that he would merit to sit with Nanas in *Gan Eden*. For it was clear to Rabi Yehoshua that *kibbud horim* is a ticket to the loftiest levels of *Gan Eden*!

If we only internalized the incredible merit of *kibbud av va'eim*, we would find it so much easier to devote ourselves to properly fulfilling this lofty *mitzvah*. ■

will sit together in *Gan Eden* and your portion and his portion are equal."

When Rabi Yehoshua awoke he thought to himself, *Woe is me, for from the day I was born I have constantly been filled with fear of my Creator and all my toil has been only in Torah. I never walked four amos without wearing tzitzis and tefillin, and have 80 talmidim, and now I am told that all my deeds and Torah [studies] are equal to that of a butcher?*

He sent word to his students that he would not enter the *beis medrash* until he saw firsthand who this Nanas was. Accompanied by his *talmidim*, he traveled from city to city until they discovered where this Nanas resided.

When the townspeople heard whom Rabi Yehoshua was looking for, they expressed surprise.

"Why are you seeking such a person? You are pious and righteous and you are asking about him?"

When the butcher was informed that Rabi Yehoshua wanted to meet him, he was certain that he was being the target of a prank. It was inconceivable to him that such a *tzaddik* sought to speak with him, and he refused to go. Rabi Yehoshua then made his way to see Nanas, who fell at the feet of the *tzaddik* in utter shock.

"What are your deeds? What is your occupation?" Rabi Yehoshua asked.

"My master, I am a butcher," Nanas replied. "I have an elderly father and mother who cannot stand on their feet. Every day I dress them, feed them and wash them with my own hands."