

You Are Your Parents' Keeper

by Rabbi Reuven Becker ('71R)

Published by Feldheim Publishers, 2012

Reviewed by Rabbi Ira Kronenberg ('71R)

A prominent rabbi was once visiting a congregant in the geriatric center that I work in. After seeing so many residents who were old and frail, including many suffering from dementia, he told me this vort in the name of the Rov z'l. The posuk in Kedoshim states, "Ish imo v'aviv tirau v'es Shabbosai tishmoru, ani Hashem Elokachim."

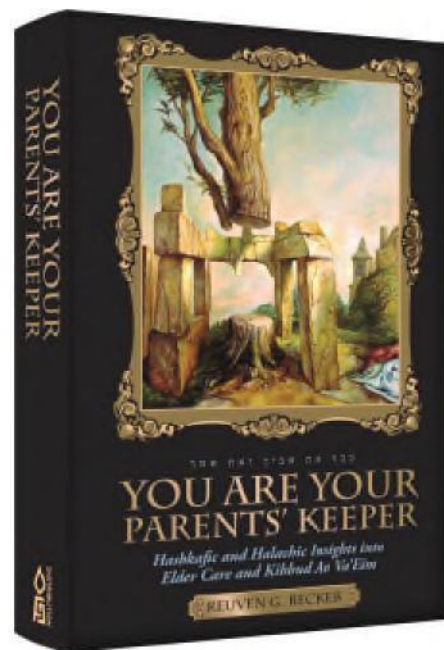
What is the connection between Shabbos and kibud av va'eim? Rashi, quoting the Gemara, explains that if your parent tells you to violate the Shabbos or any other mitzvah, you should not listen. The Rov z'l had a more hashkafic connection between these two mitzvos. He stated that both Shabbos and kibud av va'eim have two aspects to them, the rational and irrational. Even if we were not given the mitzvah of Shabbos, man would have eventually understood that he needed a day of rest during the week; practically all societies and cultures have a day when they refrain from work. However, without the Torah, would we have ever thought that carrying a feather dale amos in the public square is considered work? There is no rational way of explaining this melachah. Kibud av va'eim also has both a rational and an irrational aspect. When a parent is healthy, when a parent can be there for you, physically, financially and emotionally, it is easy to perform the mitzvah of kibud. However, when a parent gets older and may no longer be in full possession of their faculties, it can be emotionally difficult to honor the parent.

The Torah is telling us that we have an obligation to fully honor a parent, even a parent who is no longer able to be the parent who raised us.

In his Sefer, aptly named *You Are Your Parents' Keeper*, Rabbi Reuven Becker describes all aspects of the mitzvah of kibud av va'eim, from the halachic to the hashkafic to the practical. While this mitzvah is incumbent upon all children at all times, it is particularly difficult when the parent is elderly and sick. Many times there is a role reversal in the parent-child relationship and the child becomes the caregiver. Often, the children are themselves parents and are therefore caught in the "sandwich generation," not only having to care for their own children, often with both the father and mother working, but while having the additional burden of caring for their own parents as well.

While there are many seforim that are available that discuss the various themes found in this sefer, Rabbi Becker has combined all the issues that present themselves to children with elderly parents. Starting with the fundamental care management issues that adult children face as parents can no longer care for themselves, he continues with the issues that arise from end-of-life concerns such as dementia and terminal illness. As the halachos of kibud av va'eim continue even after petirah, there are also sections on levaya and aveilus. The sefer is a unique synthesis of halacha and hashkafa, as well as practical solutions for dealing with this important mitzvah. As someone who has spent over 37 years in geriatric care, I was particularly impressed with the sensitive way Rabbi Becker deals with what I call the "elephant in the room," the financial aspects that accompany end of life care issues.

The sefer is suited both for the rabbi and the layman. Everything in the sefer is



carefully footnoted so that the reader can go to the original sources. The section, "Confronting the Challenges of Life, Death, and Illness," featuring writings by Gedolim, is an excellent source for drashos on these topics. The worksheet for aveilus practices during the 12 months of aveilus allows the layman to know when he has to ask his rabbi a shaila.

Rabbi Becker is uniquely qualified to author this sefer. A 1971 musmach of our Yeshiva, Rabbi Becker earned a master's in Jewish education from Ferkauf Graduate School the same year, as well as an MBA from City University. He is the founder of L'Orech Yomim/Center for Healthy Living as well as the center's "Caring for our Elders" lecture series that integrates rabbinic and professional expertise and is the model for this sefer. The sefer has the haskamos of the Rosh Ha'Yeshiva and Rosh Ha'Kollel HaRav Hershel Schachter ('67R) and HaRav Noach Isaac Oelbaum, Rav of Congregation Nachlas Yitzchok. ▽