

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Throw Away Your Crystal Ball

*“These are the descendants of Yishmael...over all his brothers he fell... And these are the offspring of the Yitzchak, the son of Avraham...” (25:12,18,19)*

Nobody has a crystal ball, and even if they did, they’re not very reliable.

If you told someone living a couple of hundred years ago that the Arabs would be a force to threaten Western civilization, they’d have laughed. The thought that a bunch of nomads floating around the desert like some lost extras from Lawrence of Arabia could rule the world would have seemed preposterous. But, “He who dwells in the Heavens will laugh.” (Tehillim 2:4)

The Divine sense of humor decreed that there would be an Industrial Revolution, and that revolution would run on oil, and Yishmael, the Arabs, would have so much of it that they could buy the world – or a large part of it.

The Torah predicted the rise of Yishmael at the end of days. And his eventual fall.

The last words of last week’s parsha, Chayei Sarah, are “over all his brothers he (Yishmael) fell...” And the first words of this week’s Torah portion, Toldot, are, “And these are the offspring of the Yitzchak, the son of Avraham.”

When the nation of Yishmael falls at the end of days, then the world will see the coming of Mashiach ben David, “*the son of Avraham.*” And for that, you don’t need a crystal ball. It is written in the Torah.

*\*Based on the Baal HaTurim*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Bava Batra 151-156

### The Reality of Words

*“To not open his mouth to the Satan.”*

This means that one should not speak about events that he does not wish to transpire, such as disasters and catastrophes, since words have been given the power by Above to possibly cause these misfortunes to happen. This phrase is how the Rashbam explains an opinion in our *sugya*, and is codified in halacha by the Rema (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah 376).

Here is how it applies to what we learn on our *daf*, and also how a person should follow this principle in everyday speech. This includes being careful to word certain statements in ways that require great care and sensitivity, instead of expressing the same ideas in ways that may seem to be acceptable and accepted as a “kosher” way to speak.

What is the context of this idea in our *gemara*, and what is an example of how this halacha should be moved to the forefront of one’s mind and tongue when expressing certain thoughts?

The *gemara* deals with a gift given by a *shchiv me’ra*, meaning a person “on his deathbed and facing death. When a healthy person gives a gift, the gift belongs to the intended recipient immediately, and the giver cannot change his mind to rescind the giving and take the given item back. The law regarding a gift made by a *shchiv me’ra*, however, is quite different. His intent is that the gift should pass to the recipient when he passes from this world, but should he somehow recover from his life-threatening status to good health his intent is that the gift giving was not final and he may retract the giving and keep the item for himself.

A dilemma is posed by the *gemara*: If a *shchiv me’ra* has a document written for giving a gift, and it contains two opposing words, “In life and in death” (the text of the Rashbam is “In my life and in my death”). He apparently cannot mean both “life and death” because “life” would make it an immediate gift, which is irreversible, even if he recovers; whereas “death” would mean that it takes place when he dies, and is therefore reversible, and he may keep it if his good health is restored. So, how is this baffling phrase to be interpreted?

The great Torah Sages Rav and Shmuel dispute its meaning. Rav says that the person means to give it only when he dies, and the giver may retract the giving as long as he is alive. Rav argues that this is because he wrote in the document for the gift “in death,” meaning that it is only a gift when he dies. So, why did he also write “in life” says Rav? “As a sign of life,” he explains. The Rashbam says that since his true intent is to give it only when he dies, and he truly meant the words “in death,” he adds the words “in life” as a *siman tov* (a good sign) — in order not to “open his mouth to the Satan” — although he does *not* really mean that the gift is given now when he is alive.

Shmuel rules in just the opposite manner and claims that the *shchiv me'ra* really meant to give it “in life” and he may not retract the giving. So why did he write “in death”? “In life and death” is a somewhat poetic way of saying that the gift is the recipient’s “from now and forever” (in the giver’s lifetime and also after his death).

One example of being careful not to “open one’s mouth to the Satan” is that one who has not seen a specific person for a long time, and that person has also not returned his communications, should not say: “So-and-so must have died since I have not heard from him for so long.” Opening one’s mouth with such “appalling” words as “He must have *died*” might be a negative factor regarding the other’s well-being, due to the tremendous power of human speech.

There is another, perhaps less obvious, example that was pointed out to me in my youth, which also falls into the category of “not opening one’s mouth to the Satan.” It is the following type of sentence that a person might say when discussing even a theoretical situation. Reuven says to Shimon, “You know, the Torah says that if a person *kills you* unintentionally, then he can flee to an *ir hamiklat* (a “sanctuary city”), and live there in safety.” Or any variation where the speaker mentions a tragedy that happens to “you.” Instead, he should say, “kills *a person*,” or whatever verb is appropriate to the case — but not speak to you and say “*you*.”

And who is this “Satan” mentioned by the Rashbam? Our Sages teach: “The Satan, the *yetzer hara* (the inclination in a person to do wrong) and the angel of death are all one.”

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak’s prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding on to Esav’s heel. They grow, and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah, developing his soul.

On the day of their grandfather Avraham’s funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day’s hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of firstborn.

A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but Hashem tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells that were dug by his

father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by Hashem, makes a treaty with him.

When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he could find a suitable wife.

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### **KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 17)**

#### **UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON**

*“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”*

(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah then continues with a verse from Shir HaShirim (8:5): “How worthy she is who rises from the desert, clinging to her Beloved!”

One of the indispensable commentaries on Nach (an acronym for Nevi'im – Prophets, and Ketuvim – Writings) is that of Rabbi David Altschuler (1687-1769). One of the greatest scholars of his generation, when he was younger he served as a judge on the Beit Din in Yavoriv in Galicia, and later on as the Chief Rabbi of Prague. He authored a commentary on nearly the entirety of Nach because he felt that Torah study had weakened over the generations and attributed it, in part, to the lack of a clear commentary for people lacking an in-depth background in Talmudic studies. He titled his classic work “Metzudat David,” which was subsequently split up into two separate works by his son Rabbi Yechiel Hillel. The first part, “Metzudat David,” explains the verses as a whole. The second part, “Metzudat Tzion,” explains individual words and phrases within the verses.

According to Rabbi Altschuler, our verse profoundly describes the Jewish People's indescribable yearning to greet the Shechinah. The “she” in the verse is a reference to the Jewish nation. The “Beloved” is Hashem. The Jewish People are trying to “remind” Hashem of how loyal they were in the past. How they followed Hashem into the desert, relying solely on Hashem alone. And, although externally it may seem as if we are not as loyal to Hashem

as we once were, it is not true. We know that we belong to Hashem now, and that we will always belong to Him.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zilber (1917-2004) was born in Kazan, Russia, just before the Bolshevik revolution. Already as a young teenager, he was clandestinely teaching Torah to all those who were prepared to risk being caught and put on trial for the “heinous crime” of attending his shiurim in the “Communist Paradise.” Unsurprisingly, someone informed the authorities, and he was arrested. At his “trial,” he was sentenced to hard labor in one of the desolate work camps that were found mainly in the most inhospitable parts of the communist Soviet Union. Despite the bleakness of his reality and the seeming lack of hope, Rabbi Zilber never stopped believing that Hashem was with him at all times. Through sheer tenacity, he managed to keep Shabbat and he ate only kosher food during his imprisonment.

Many years later, in 1992, after he had lived in Israel for twenty years, he was visiting Yeshivat Torat Moshe in Moscow for Pesach. During his stay, he related an astonishing story. One of the leading Communist officials where Rabbi Zilber was incarcerated was a Jew named Vishinev. Just like most Jews who had abandoned their Judaism for the “god of communism,” he could not stand the fact that Rabbi Zilber still clung onto his “old fashioned” beliefs. Vishinev had fine-tuned the art of making Rabbi Zilber’s life as miserable as possible. As Rosh Hashanah approached, Rabbi Zilber was focused on making a Minyan with the other Jewish inmates. Rabbi Zilber knew the Rosh Hashanah prayers by heart but he was determined to find at least one machzor (Rosh Hashanah prayer book) for the others to use. After unsuccessfully exhausting all the other options, he was left with no alternative but to turn to Vishinev to see if he would agree to supply them with a machzor. And, completely out of character, Vishinev agreed, and just before Rosh Hashanah he presented Rabbi Zilber with a machzor.

Rabbi Zilber’s motive for telling this to the students in the Yeshiva was to engrave on their hearts that nothing – not even the most committed communist – can stand in the way of a person’s spiritual desires and aspirations.

As he came to the end of his narrative, an extraordinary thing happened. One of the students jumped to his feet and announced, “I am a grandchild of Vishinev! My father told me how my grandfather used to relate that there was a fellow called Zilber in the labor camp, and how he had brought him a machzor for Rosh Hashanah!”

There is truly nothing more beautiful than King Shlomo’s poignant description, “How worthy she is who rises from the desert, clinging to her Beloved.” Even in the Gulag. Even in the darkest moments. Even when the whole world rises up against us, we cling to our Beloved. Not just because it is clear that there is no one else to cling to, but because we belong to Him.

*To be continued...*

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot"?



## Answers

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
- 10.26:2 - Through the akeida he had attained the status of a korban and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
- 11.26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
- 12.27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angels' tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the akeida; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
- 13.27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
- 14.27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a korban Pesach.
- 15.27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
- 16.27:27 - The scent of Gan Eden.
- 17.27:36 - Italy.
- 18.27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
- 19.28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
- 20.28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Noble Clothes

When Jacob's evil twin brother Esau was born, the Bible offers a description of that fellow, saying that he was "ruddy, entirely like a hairy aderet" (Gen. 25:25). An aderet is a furry article of clothing that has been variously translated as "robe," "cloak," "cape," "gown," "coat," or "mantle." Targum Onkelos translates the word aderet in this context as *gelem* — a cognate of *glima* — which refers to a person's outer clothes. Yet in several other places, Targum Jonathan renders the Hebrew word aderet as *itz'tal* (see Targum to Josh. 7:21, 7:24). In this essay, we will briefly discuss the Hebrew word aderet before moving on to the seemingly-Aramaic words *glima* and *itz'tala* that serve as synonyms.

The word aderet appears eleven times in the Bible. Its most well-known appearances are in the context of Elijah the Prophet. When Hashem "revealed" Himself to Elijah at Mount Sinai, the Bible reports that Elijah hid his face in his aderet (I Kings 19:13). Later on, Elijah is described "a hairy man" (II Kgs. 2:8), which is probably a reference to his aderet. One of the most famous episodes involving Elijah's aderet occurs when he uses it to miraculously part the Jordan River (II Kgs. 2:8). In fact, Elijah's aderet becomes central in the transfer of his prophetic leadership to his protégé, Elisha. After Elijah is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha picks up the aderet that fell from Elijah (II Kings 2:13-14), which symbolizes his role as Elijah's successor. [It is interesting to note that Otzar HaChochmah has over 30 different seforim named Aderet Eliyahu!]

The word aderet also appears in the Bible in the story of Achan. In the time of Joshua, when the Jews were conquering the Holy Land from the Canaanites, Achan illegally stole from the consecrated booty of the conquered city of Jericho, and one of the items that he took was a "Babylonian/Sumerian aderet" (Joshua. 7:21, 7:24).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim traces the word aderet to the biliteral root DALET-REISH (looking at the initial ALEPH and the final TAV as extraneous to the core root), which refers to "freedom of from all impediments and obligations." The different declensions of that root as explained by Rabbi Pappenheim include: *dror* "freedom / emancipation/manumission," whereby an indentured slave is set free), *dardar* ("thorn," a sort of wild thorn that grows in ownerless places), *dirah* ("domicile/home" called so because in one's own personal domain, one is essentially free to act howsoever one wishes), *dor* ("generation," the approximate duration of a person's domiciled state in This World), *madurah* ("bonfire," a wild fire that is free to spread without impediment), *dohar* (a horse's "neighing" when it is released from the barn and is allowed to roam outside), *neder* ("vow," a sort of voluntary obligation that a person



imposes on himself out of his own free volition), adir ("powerful," a state of having unrestrained strength and influence), and more.

As part of that framework, Rabbi Pappenheim offers two ways of explaining how the word *aderet* relates back to the general theme of this two-letter root: Either the connection is seen in the way the *aderet* is worn on the body in a relatively free way (as opposed to more fitted clothing which are more snugly held in place), or in the way that only important *adirim* wear this sort of garment as a symbol of their status.

The word *glima* is used many times throughout the Talmud to refer to a type of outer garment, often a robe or formal attire. Readers might be familiar with this term because it appears in the commonly-used *Ketubah* ("marriage document"). In that Aramaic document, the husband guarantees all of his property as sureties for the payment of his financial obligations upon the termination of the marriage, including a clause that specifically stipulates "and even the *glima* that is upon my shoulders." Nowadays, the term *glima* is often used to refer to the fancy gold dress-coat that is worn by the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel (Rishon L'Tzion). In one place, Rashi (to *Shabbat* 10a) defines *glima* as *aderet*, while in another place (Rashi to *Bava Metzia* 47a), he defines it as *sudar*. But in the overwhelming majority of cases, Rashi defines the word *glima* as *tallit* (see Rashi to *Shabbat* 110b, 138b, *Eruvin* 94a, 96b, 102b, *Ketubot* 79b, *Bava Kamma* 119b, *Bava Metzia* 28a, 114b, *Bava Batra* 128a, *Sanhedrin* 7a, and *Chullin* 127a).

*\*To read the full version of this essay that explores the rest of these synonyms, visit us online at: [http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)*

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

*“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)*

## HONORING PARENTS

Mitzvos #33 and #212 (*Shemos* 20:12 and *Vayikra* 19:3)

There is no Mitzvah more rational and just than the Mitzvah to honor parents and to treat them with reverence (*Maharal, Tiferes Yisrael* §41). As *Sefer HaChinuch* explains, honoring parents is a matter of basic gratitude for their bringing him into this world and raising him. We may add that since people eventually become elderly and incapable of caring for themselves, the obligation of children to care for their parents is a vital societal arrangement.

Since this Mitzvah is logical, one would think that the Torah does not have to mention it; yet, the Torah mentions it multiple times and places great emphasis on it. Sometime between the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah, when the Jewish people arrived at Marah, Hashem decided that the Jewish people could not go any longer without Torah study, and He commanded them regarding three Mitzvos; this Mitzvah was one of them. Then, at the Giving of the Torah, Hashem placed this Mitzvah on the first of the two *Luchos*, among the Commandments that pertain to His own honor. Although His words in the Ten Commandments were concise and few, He promised great reward for fulfilling this Mitzvah — which is basic human nature, after all! The extent to which the Torah obligates a person to honor his parents is mind-boggling: a person is required to accord his parents the honor due to a king and queen (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* §39), and indeed, to honor them like the King of the world Himself (*Ramban*)! Clearly, this Mitzvah is more than just a reminder to act morally.

We may understand this based on what *Sefer Hachinuch* writes, that by honoring one’s parents, he comes to realize that he ought to show even greater appreciation for the Creator, the ultimate source of any benefits he has ever received, both from his parents and other intermediaries. Had Hashem not created each person with parents and commanded him to honor them, he would have had difficulty understanding his more abstract debt of appreciation to the invisible Hashem. This Mitzvah is therefore a stepping stone to all the Mitzvos. Thus, when *Mesillas Yesharim* defines the Mitzvah of loving Hashem, he writes, “We are commanded to instill in our hearts love for Hashem, such that we feel a desire to bring Him pleasure, just like a person feels a desire to bring pleasure to his parents.” Since how a person treats his parents affects how he treats Hashem, the honor due to them parallels the honor due to Hashem.

The Sages state further that when a person honors his parents, Hashem dwells among them and considers it as if He has been honored (*Kiddushin* 30b). In other words, honoring parents does not just *lead* to honoring Hashem; it *is* honoring Hashem. In their role as a person’s

forebears and the providers of all of his needs, parents *represent* Hashem, and their honor is Hashem's honor. Thus, as the Gemara there relates (*ibid.*, 31b), when Rav Yosef heard his mother approaching, he would immediately stand up, saying, "The Divine Presence is approaching!"

With this understanding, we can comprehend the extent to which the Torah obligates us to honor our parents. The *Zohar* (*Pinchas* pg. 215) writes that one must honor his parents "like a horse and like a donkey," running to fulfill their every request even if it entails demeaning oneself like a lowly animal. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who excelled in honoring his illustrious father his whole life, acknowledged that Eisav outdid him a hundredfold (*Bereishis Rabbah* 65:16). It seems that there is no limit to the Torah's obligation to honor parents — just like there is no limit to that amount due to Hashem. The obligation to honor parents is so great that it is impossible to fulfill it completely, and only someone who never knew his parents cannot be held accountable for treating them with insufficient honor. Thus, one of the Sages remarked (*Kiddushin* 31b), "Fortunate is he who never knew his parents (i.e., an orphan from infancy)!"

*Abarbanel* adds that honoring parents is an essential component of the Torah's continuation from generation to generation, for only if children honor their parents will they be willing to accept from them the traditions of the Torah. Accordingly, *Rav Tzaddok of Lublin* explains that Rav Yosef associated his mother's footsteps with the approach of the Divine Presence because she had educated him in the Torah's ways, and he thus regarded her as a representative of Hashem (*Pri Tzaddik, Chayei Sarah* §2).

In conclusion, honoring parents is not merely a moral obligation that we share with all the nations; it is a Divinely given Mitzvah that connects man on earth to his Creator in Heaven. However, being a moral obligation in its essence, it makes our perception of the parallel honor due to our Father in Heaven natural, and this permeates and inspires every aspect of our relationship with Him.

Eisav, who is remembered for excelling in this most difficult Mitzvah but failing dismally in all other Mitzvos, apparently did not realize this distinction. The honor he accorded his father did not bring him to honor Hashem similarly. We do not even find that he honored his mother, and some infer from this that the honor he accorded his father was not for the sake of the Mitzvah, but rather for hope of gain. Be that as it may, he merited greatness in this world for this single Mitzvah (*Bereishis Rabbah* 82:14). If we fulfill this Mitzvah as a fundamental part of our service to our Father in Heaven, we can expect a far greater reward. *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu* (§24) sums it up: *Whoever desires wealth, honor, and life in this world and the World to Come should do the will of his Father in Heaven and honor his father and mother.*