

**Honoring My Daughter on Her Birthday**  
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**Parashat Yitro 5785 / February 14, 2025**

Today is my daughter Lindsay's 16th birthday. She has some friends over right now to celebrate, and I've been informed that we're not welcome to come home until much later tonight.

Although she's not at services, I am dedicating my sermon tonight to Lindsay. Not only is it her birthday, but it's also Shabbat Yitro, when we read the Ten Commandments.

Commandment Number Five is "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may long endure on the land Adonai your God is giving you." (Ex. 20:13) Rashi says this means that "if you honor them, your days will be long, and if not, your days will be shortened." That reminds me of a scene in *The Cosby Show*, when Cliff said to his son, Theo: "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."

It's been tempting at times over the last 16 years. My daughter has a strong will, and she doesn't hold back.

She came into the world on Saturday, February 14, 2009. We had checked into the hospital the night before. Early in the morning on the 14th, the doctor woke us up to say she needed to do an emergency C-section: The umbilical cord was wrapped around Lindsay's neck, and they needed to get her out right away. Thank God all went well, and Lindsay was born perfectly healthy.

It's apropos that she came into the world with drama, because it's been all drama ever since.

For the first three years of her life, she was the most docile child. While the other kids at school and playdates and temple were rambunctious and noisy, Lindsay sat on the sidelines quietly observing. I remember one time asking my friend, who was staying with us, to keep an eye on Lindsay while I took a shower. When I came back 15 minutes later, he said, "She sat there still the whole time and didn't make a sound. I've never seen anything like it."

When she turned three, she came out of her shell. She started showing a knack for dancing, singing, and acting. She also showed a knack for pushing back against her parents—at age three. Oy, I remember those tantrums: 45 minutes of solid screaming!

The classical interpretation of the mitzvah to honor your parents centers on extreme deference to their authority. Halakhically, you fulfill the commandment by serving your parents food and drink when they want it, not sitting in their favorite chair, and not contradicting their opinion. It's about what Aretha Franklin called "r-e-s-p-e-c-t."

I'll be honest, that's a work in progress in our house. (I'm pretty sure I said that at her bat mitzvah, too, so progress clearly takes time.) But, my daughter honors her parents in many ways. She honors us by her character, by her work ethic, by her values, by the kind of person she is.

Lindsay is a wonderfully upstanding young lady. She knows who she is and she's not afraid to be different. She has never been afraid to go places where she doesn't know anyone else. She's moved twice to new cities and started over at new schools, and she's handled it both times with admirable courage and flexibility.

We came to Great Neck the summer before she started eighth grade. That could have been a very rough transition for a new kid in town, but Lindsay found her place and made friends and rose to the top. She earned the lead female role in the school musical her first year here, and the principal selected her to speak at her middle school graduation. Her life had been uprooted twice, and yet she navigated it with grace, confidence, and poise.

Lindsay is a person of strong character and moral clarity. She has an instinct for justice and fairness. She's meticulous about following the rules—well, outside the house that is. Like most girls her age, she has experienced her share of friend drama, but she has always had the wisdom to avoid entering the fray; she has the ability to float above it. She's a real leader.

Her teacher Dr. Pam Levy, who is also our wonderful choir director at TBE, told me that Lindsay has unionized the school choir and has become its spokesperson. Dr. Levy said that when she gets an email from Lindsay "on behalf of the choir," she knows she better pay attention.

Lindsay is an incredibly hard worker. I don't know how she does it. She starts her school day with choir at 7:15, and after school she goes straight to cheer practice or play rehearsal, and after that she goes to dance. She gets home most nights at 9 or 9:30.

She has incredible energy and focus. She gets all A's in school. She wants to be a Broadway performer someday. She knows it will be extremely hard to do, but there's one thing I know for sure: When it comes to pursuing her goals, Lindsay will outwork everyone.

She's also a very thoughtful and good friend. She spends hours making gifts for her friends on their birthdays and doesn't shy away from expressing her pride in their accomplishments. She makes Karen and me very proud.

She does the mitzvah of honoring her parents in so many ways. Tonight, on her 16th birthday, I honor her.