

Rosh Yeshiva Torah

Hakaras Hatov | A Shiur by Rav Daniel Feldman
Compiled by Aryeh Kaminetsky, Y.C. '19

There is a fascinating discussion surrounding the *Gemara* in *Kesubos* which records an obligation to show respect to an older brother. There is a *machlokes* between Rambam and Ramban as to the reason behind this *din*. Rambam says that the *bechor* has a status of a quasi-parent because he inherits some of the *gadlus* of his father, and therefore must be respected. Ramban however, views the *kavod* given to older siblings as a fulfillment of the assumed wishes of the parents that families conform to natural hierarchies in which the younger children listen to and respect their older siblings. There are many practical differences between the two opinions, one being the status of a half-sibling. Rambam would say that only a *bechor* of the father needs to be respected while Ramban would probably say that the honor bestowed to the eldest of either parent would qualify as fulfilling the *ratzon* of that parent.

Rav Yehonasan Eibshitz weighs in on this dispute in an unusual manner. Commenting on the story of the ten *shevatim* going down to Egypt to buy food, he asks how Binyamin could have allowed them to go instead of him if he has a *chiyuv* to be *mechabed* them? Rav Eibshitz concludes that none of the ten *shevatim* going down to Egypt shared a mother with Binyamin and therefore he was not obligated to show them *kavod*. This is a very unusual answer because it does not conform with either of the two models discussed above. Neither Rambam nor Ramban would limit this *mitzvah* to an *ach min ha'eim*! In order to explain this *chiddush*, Rav Eibshitz proposes an alternative understanding to the concept of honoring older siblings in his sefer *Yaros Devash*. There, he explains that *kibud ach hagadol* is really all about *hakaras hatov*.

True *hakaras hatov* is the simple recognition of the source of any factor which has improved one's life

We typically assume *hakaras hatov* is about expressing gratitude towards people who do acts of kindness towards us. However, *hakaras hatov* literally translates to "recognizing goodness." Rav Eibshitz explains that true *hakaras hatov* is the simple recognition of the source of any factor which has improved one's life, regardless of whether it has done so intentionally. This explains why *Chazal* describe Moshe showing *hakaras hatov* to the water and sand in Egypt. Even though they are inanimate and incapable of appreciating his gratitude, Moshe still recognized that they materially improved his life and benefited him. Similarly, the *Gemara* in *Bava Kama* says that one who drinks from a well should not throw rocks in it. This is not out of consideration to the well, but rather because throwing rocks into the well expresses a fundamental lack of recognition that you benefited from that object. We specifically honor the *bechor* of our mother because we all benefited indirectly from this child. By the *bechor* emerging safely and gently from the mother in a way which did not harm her, our future existence was enabled. We need to recognize this inadvertent goodness in our lives by honoring and respecting our mother's elder children.

The *Chelkas Hasadeh* explains that it was this realization which caused Esav to spurn the *bechora*. Esav did not think that allowing others to live was a worthwhile accomplishment and therefore disregarded the *kavod* that went along with it. Our *parsha* offers valuable insights into the prevalence of opportunities for *hakaras hatov* in our daily lives.



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A Nice Vort

The Significance of a Name

Written by Jacob Mellman, Syms '20

Esav is privately asked by Yitzchak to hunt for some food so that he can receive a *bracha*. While Yitzchak is instructing Esav, Rivka eavesdrops on the conversation. Yaakov is then approached by Rivka with a proposal to steal the *bracha* that Yitzchak intends to give Esav. Yaakov seizes the opportunity with minimal deliberation. Why does Yaakov react so compliantly? Were the *brachos* that enticing, or was there another motive?

Esav, upon hearing from Yitzchak that Yaakov tricked him and stole Esav's *bracha*, proclaims, "*Hachi kara shmo Yaakov, vaye'akveini zeh pa'amayim es bechorasi lakach v'hinei ata lakach birchasi*" (Bereishis 27:36). However, if one looks back at the beginning of the *parsha*, one clearly sees that Yaakov doesn't trick Esav into giving over the *bechora*, rather Yaakov purchases it. Esav knows it was a sale, so why does he claim that Yaakov took the *bechora*?

In explaining the significance of Yaakov's name, Netziv looks to the *passuk* "*V'yado ochezes b'akeiv Esav*" (Bereishis 25:26). He explains that Yaakov grabbing Esav's heel is Yaakov's mission against Esav. Just like holding onto a person's heel prevents them from progressing, Yaakov was trying to hold Esav back. Yaakov wanted to steal the *bracha* because part of his essence was preventing Esav from gaining power and strength. Therefore, Yaakov never had a doubt once the situation arose whether he was going to follow through with his mother's plan; rather, upon hearing the request, he realized this needed to get done.

This can also explain the other encounter between Esav and Yaakov, which angers Esav only after Yaakov steals the *bracha*. Esav only cares that the *bechora* was taken from him by Yaakov because at this point, Esav realizes Yaakov is invested in preventing him from becoming great. Only once Esav connects these two events, does he realize Yaakov's name really embodies who he is: holding onto Esav's ankle, "*Vaye'akveini zeh pa'amayim*" (Bereishis 27:36).

We see from here that every person's name has an important impact on their character. For some, it is more obvious what their personal definition is. Yaakov was able to capitalize on the situations that he was presented with, so much so that Esav was even able to recognize Yaakov's namesake. If we too can work towards recognizing the significance of own name on who we are, we will be able to use it to our advantage to better enhance our lives and affect the future.

Major Machloksim in the Parsha

Written by Josh Kaufman, RIETS

In *parshas Mishpatim* (23:7) we are told, "Distance yourself from uttering falsehood." With this as their backdrop, the *meforshim* debate the ethicality of Yaakov's response to his father's question, "Who are you, my son?", to which Yaakov famously responded, "I am Esav, your son" (Bereishis 27:18-19). Doesn't it seem as if Yaakov isn't telling the truth?

- **Rashi:** Yaakov communicated to Yitzchak two separate points. The first was "*anochi*," I am who I am, and I have brought you this food to eat. And the second point was that, while I am Yaakov, "Esav is your first-born." Indeed, both statements are accurate. Ibn Ezra adds that "*anochi*" was uttered inaudibly, whereas "*Esav b'chorecha*" was announced aloud. Clearly, Rashi assumes that we need to reassess truth and falsehood more broadly. All of this notwithstanding, Yaakov still did all he could in order to distance himself from pure dishonesty.
- **Ohr HaChaim:** Because Yaakov legally acquired the birthright from Esav he was justified in stepping into Esav's shoes as the firstborn and possessor of the birthright. Therefore, Yaakov calling himself Esav is absolutely truthful vis-à-vis the birthright and everything that goes with it. The statement "I am Esav, your son," in this sense, is absolutely true.

If we believe in the power of a name as a tone-setter and its effect on one's destiny, then significant thought must be invested into the name-calling decision. It is not surprising, then, that we find a distinction between Esav and Yaakov when it comes to how they were named.

- **Kli Yakar:** When it comes to Esav, the Torah describes the process as, "And they called his name Esav," whereas when it comes to Yaakov it says, "And he called his name Yaakov." The difference between their naming seems to be that while a group of people were responsible for giving Esav his name, only one person was responsible for Yaakov's.
- **Rashi:** Esav's name is what he was called by people who perceived only his exterior which was as hairy as a grown man. That fabricated name defined who he was and his future: a man of the field. However, when it came to naming Yaakov Avinu, society would not be the name-callers, but only those of the most elevated stature. There is a further *machlokes* in the *meforshim* about who exactly gave Yaakov his name. Rashi and Ibn Ezra suggest it was Yitzchak. Baal Haturim thinks it was Avraham, and Rashi in his first explanation says it was Hashem Himself.

Foursquare

Immediately after the Torah informs us that Esav's two new wives were a source of "*moras ruach*" (loosely translated as resentment), Yitzchak proceeds to bestow a blessing on his older son. If Yitzchak was so greatly disturbed by the women whom Esav chose to marry and the lifestyle they represented, how could he deem his son worthy of such a blessing? Netziv explains that "*moras ruach*" is not the pure, unadulterated hatred capable of fracturing a relationship. Instead, it connotes a surface level disappointment cushioned by feelings of love and affection underneath. To the average onlooker, Esav was indeed less worthy of Yitzchak's blessing than Yaakov. Yitzchak, though, looked past the outer surface and saw Esav for the person he was capable of being.

Steven Stein, Y.C. '20

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The *passuk* in *Toldos* notes, "There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Avraham" (Bereishis 26:1). Netziv asks why the Torah juxtaposes two stories which happened more than 100 years apart and seemingly have very little to do with each other? He answers that the impetus was the same for both famines. During both Yitzchak's lifetime as well as Avraham's, the people had lost sight of the hand of Hashem in their everyday lives, and therefore Hashem had to do something drastic and bring a famine so they would remember *hashgachas Hashem* in their everyday lives. Hopefully we can learn to see the *yad Hashem* in our everyday lives without the supernatural assistance of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Shimon Cohen, Y.C. '20

In response to her pregnancy pains, Rivka seeks divine treatment from Shem (Rashi; Bereishis 25:22). But how does his answer – that she has twins – ease her labor pains? Why is Rivka so content with the response? Rashi explains that her 'pain' was that she felt the same thing while passing both the *beis medrash* and the house of idol worship: churning! Rivka's pain was actually the knowledge that her child was inclined toward two opposing lifestyles. Thus, Shem's answer eases her pain: It isn't one indecisive child, but two passionate children! One may be drawn toward sin, but at least he does it with his whole heart! Uncertainty is paralyzing, and a person should strive for *yishuv hada'as* (clarity of mind) so that he can passionately pursue his goals.

Eitan Schmeltz, Y.C. '22

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How is it that Yaakov and Esav turned out so differently after growing up in the same home? The Torah tell us that Esav was called "Esav" because he was hairy. Rashi comments that he was a physically developed person at birth. Many explain that this physical reality was perhaps reflective of his spiritual reality. From birth, Esav's essence was "*asui*"—made, complete. He felt that he was satisfied with who he was without a need to grow. Yaakov's essence was "*aivev*"—he felt that he was at the "heel"—at the bottom of where he could be, which constantly motivated him to grow. What differentiates *Bnei Yaakov* from *Bnei Esav* is this *midah* of being a *mevakesh*— holding onto the desire to grow in our *avodas Hashem*.

Yitzchak Kaminetsky, Y.C. '20

Bottom Line Halacha

Three Steps Back After *Shemoneh Esrei*

Written by Efraim Tepler, Y.C. '19

The simple explanation for the three steps after *Shemoneh Esrei* is that we walk backwards just as a slave departs from his master. Rav Hai Gaon adds that since *tefillah* is in place of the *avodah*, we walk backwards just as the *kohanim* walked backwards from the *mizbe'ach* to the ramp (including "*ekev b'tzad gadal* - heel next to big toe" like the *kohanim* - *Orchos Chaim*)

Why specifically *three* steps? *Orchos Chaim* says it represents the three *mil* that *Bnei Yisrael* distanced themselves from *Har Sinai*. Rabbeinu Manoach says it is derived from the *passuk* by the *ma'aseh merkava* - "*v'ragleihem regel yeshara* - [the angels'] feet are a straight foot." The plural language implies two, and the singular implies one, for a total of three. Magen Avraham provides a fascinating source based on a Gemara in Sanhedrin (96a). The Gemara relates that Merodach Baladan (King of *Bavel*) sent a letter of greeting to the recently healed King Chizkiyah. Nevuchadnezzar, at that time a scribe in the palace, was incensed because Chizkiyah's name was mentioned before Hashem. He tried chasing the messenger but was stopped after three steps by the *malach*, Gavriel. His reward for these steps was allowing him to destroy the *Beis Hamikdash*. Accordingly, we take three steps back after the *Amidah* and pray for the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Sugya from the Parsha

Honoring Your Parents

Written by Eitan Hain, Y.C. '21

In *parshas Toldos* we read the story of Rivka and Yaakov deceiving Yitzchak to ensure Yaakov received the first-born blessing over his older brother Esav. One way to analyze the events of the story and better understand the actions of each party is through the lens of the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*.

What constitutes *kibbud av v'eim*? As number five in the Ten Commandments, Ramban (Shemos 20:12) emphasizes that this commandment is the transition from *bein adam l'makom* to *bein adam l'chaveiro*. He broadens the scope of *kavod* by equating the level of *kavod* we must show our parents with the *kavod* we must have for Hashem. According to this perspective, the obligation to respect one's parents is rooted in a *bein adam l'makom* source, thereby connecting the first half of the *dibros* to the second half. Furthering this idea, Ibn Ezra (Shemos 20:12) and the *Sefer Ha-Chinuch (mitzvah 33)* explain that the *mitzvah* is rooted in gratitude for bringing us into the world. Ibn Ezra, based on the *Gemara Kiddushin (30b)*, groups parents with God as the trio that bring children into the world and the same gratitude we show to Hashem, for giving us life, must be shown to our parents.

Was Yaakov's trickery a violation of *kibbud av*? Before we answer that, one must understand the complex family dynamic at play here. Ramban (Bereishis 27: 4) explains that Rivka had been looking for a way to ensure Yaakov would be the recipient of the blessing. The opportunity presented itself when Yitzchak sent Esav on a task. Following Yitzchak's commandment to Esav, Rivka commands Yaakov to prepare a meal to Yitzchak's liking and wear fur to trick Yitzchak into thinking Yaakov was Esav. Yaakov questions this plan and is fearful Yitzchak will uncover the plot and curse him (Bereishis 27:11-12). Yaakov must choose: disregard his father by obeying his mother, or revere his father and disregard his mother's orders? Yaakov enters his father's tent and is asked, "Who are you, my son?" Yaakov responds, "It is me, your eldest son, Esav (Bereishis 27:18-19)" Yaakov's trickery was more than lying - he capitalized on his father's deficiency. Seforno (27:4) states that Yitzchak requested Esav hunt in the field to help Esav fulfill *kibbud av* and become worthy of the *bachor*. Yaakov took advantage of Yitzchak in a vulnerable state. Yaakov surely violated his duty to revere his father with this act! The *Sefer Ha-Chinuch (mitzvah 33)* states that not fulfilling *kibbud av* is a *bitul ase*, how much more so when you blatantly disrespect your parent!

The *Gemara Kiddushin (31a)* can help us resolve this issue. The *Gemara* asks two connected questions regarding *kibbud av*: Which parent do we respect more and which do we fear more? These two questions are answered by interpreting two separate *psukim* in the Torah, one discussing reverence and the other respect: "You shall each revere his mother and his father (Vayikra 19:3)," and "Honor your father and your mother (Shemos 20:11)." The *Gemara* concludes that one must show greater respect to his/her father because the father precedes mother in the *passuk* in Shemos. However, since mother is written before father in Vayikra, one must show greater reverence to his/her mother. Yaakov was giving Rivka the higher level of reverence that she naturally deserved. He wasn't disrespecting his father, rather revering his mother.

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