

So she hurried and emptied her jug into the trough and kept running to the well to draw water. (24:20)

The **Shlah Hakadosh** notes the exceptional *kavod habriyos*, human dignity, evinced by Rivkah *Imeinu*. First, Eliezer drank from the jug, leaving over some water. Rivkah was now in a quandary concerning what to do with the remaining water. If she gave the water in the jug to the camels, it would indicate that she held animals and humans in the same esteem. If she poured it out on the ground, it would impugn Eliezer's dignity. This is where her wisdom came into play. She began to run with the jug, in such a manner that it would cause the water to spill out. Now, she could draw fresh water for the camels, all the while preserving Eliezer's dignity.

The centrality of *kavod habriyos*, both in *halachah* and *mussar*, ethical behavior, influences our daily decisions. Everything that we do must take into consideration the feelings of those around us. Sometimes we must be brutally honest with a person, but we must mull over the issue numerous times to be certain that the pros outweigh the cons. A human being is created in Hashem's Image. To impugn his dignity in any manner impinges upon our respect for him as a *tzelem Elokim*, and, by extension, on our respect for Hashem.

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, underscores the critical importance of *kavod habriyos*, noting this from the *halachah* of *meis mitzvah*, a deceased Jew who has no one to care for his internment. We must drop everything and see to the burial of the deceased. Why? Because the *neshamah*, soul, feels the humiliation as the corpse lies out in the field with no one to attend to its burial. Even the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, or a *nazir*, who is prohibited to defile himself to a corpse, must attend to the needs of a *meis mitzvah*. Everything is suspended when a Jewish corpse lies in shame.

If the Torah is so sensitive to the "feelings" of a deceased person, how much more so should we be sensitive to the needs of the living? Indeed, **Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl**, writes that a lack of human dignity is indicative of a deficiency in one's belief in Hashem. How could anyone who truly believes that Hashem created the world and that man is the *b'chir ha'yetzurim*, chosen pride of Creation, not accord the proper *kavod* to man? If one does not pay respect to the prince, then he has very little reverence for the King, as well.

As I mentioned, *kavod habriyos* plays itself out in *halachah* and *mussar*. **Horav Ovadiah Yosef, zl**, was once asked the following question by a *baalas teshuvah*, a recent returnee to ritual observance. She had just given birth to her first son. Under normal circumstances, this would call for a *pidyon haben*, redemption of the firstborn, which is performed when the child is thirty-days old. Her husband was under the impression that there would be a *pidyon haben*. After all – why not? However, unbeknownst to the husband, in her "earlier" non-observant life, the mother had been pregnant and had terminated her pregnancy. Her present child was not her first born – a piece of information she was not prepared to divulge to her husband. Her question: Was she permitted to have a bogus ceremony, so that her husband would not become aware of certain less than

honorable aspects of her past?

The *Rishon LeTzion* allowed her to have the ceremony and even to recite the *brachah*, blessing, despite the fact that it would be a *brachah le'vatalah*, unwarranted blessing. When concern was raised concerning the blessing, Rav Ovadiah replied emphatically, *Gadol kavod habriyos shedocheh lo saaseh beTorah*, "Great is human dignity that it override a prohibitive commandment in the Torah." This is certainly the case concerning *brachah le'vatalah*, an offense which is not Biblical.

The **Tchebiner Rav, zl**, once called his daughter with an unusual request. He was sending a young woman from Tchebin, who was to meet a young man for potential matrimonial purposes. (I am sure the word "date" was not used.) He would like the woman to meet the young man from her (his daughter's) home. His daughter quickly agreed. She would be happy to host the *pegishah*, meeting. Her father then made one more request. The young lady came from a very poor family, and he was certain that she would not present herself in the latest style or finest quality clothing. He requested of his daughter that she, too, wear something economical and simple, so as not to make the young woman feel ill at ease. The greater one is, the more demanding he is of a person's dignity.