

## Then Yaakov rent his garments and placed sackcloth on his loins; he mourned for his son many days. (37:34)

*Rashi* teaches that *yamim rabim*, many days, amounts to a period of twenty-two years. This time frame coincides with the twenty-two years that Yaakov *Avinu* was away from home, thereby preventing him from properly carrying out the *mitzvah* of *kibud av v'eim*, honoring one's father and mother. While we certainly are not in a position to understand the underlying reason for Yaakov's behavior, there is clearly a powerful lesson to be derived from here. This is despite the fact that Yaakov's decision to leave home was originally suggested, encouraged and approved by his mother, Rivkah *Imeinu*. Yet, Yaakov is held accountable for his lack of *kibud av v'eim*. This demonstrates the value and significance of this *mitzvah*.

An indication of this significance may be derived from none other than Terach, the father of Avraham *Avinu*. When we peruse the list of generations from Noach until Avraham, we note that in giving names to their offspring, the only one who cared to name his son after his father was Terach, Avraham's father, who was the son of Nachor and who named his son Nachor. No other person saw fit to eternalize his father's name by naming his son after him, except for Terach. I wonder if this is not why Terach, who, despite being an idol worshipper, merited to father Avraham, the individual who was blessed by Hashem to become *av hamon goyim*, the father of many nations. Naming a child after a parent demonstrates one's respect for the parent and his affinity with the past. The past plays a pivotal role in shaping the present and determining the future.

A reverence for the past allows one to study and learn from the highs and lows of a previous generation. This guides him to avoid the same errors in his own life. It also helps to set a standard upon whose foundation he is inclined to build the future. To disregard, with complete disdain, the events preceding the present and the lives of one's forebears is not only foolish, it is downright disrespectful.

As we see from the above, Yaakov *Avinu*, whose lack of *Kibud av v'eim* was inadvertent, was still punished, even though he was following his father's and mother's wishes. *Kibud av v'eim* is a complex *mitzvah*, one which seems to be the result of common sense, yet is Divinely decreed. A human being is the product of earthly parents and a Heavenly Father, with each one contributing a component to his creation. The mere fact that Hashem selected to partner with one's parents is sufficient reason for the *mitzvah* of *Kibud av v'eim*.

**Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita**, quotes the famous anecdote that is often included upon blessing one with longevity. "You should live many years and see your children doing to you what you did to your parents." He quotes his father, *shlita*, who would apply this interpreting the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* 128:6, *U'rei banim l'vanecha, shalom al Yisrael*. "And may you see children born to your children, peace upon *Yisrael*." He explains that when one is privileged to see his grandchildren, peace abides between father and son. Why? When the son/second generation, sees how his

son/third generation, acts towards him, he begins to realize how his own father must have felt years earlier, when the son was still a youth. This sense of *deja vu* will create a sense of remorse over one's own actions and a renewed respect for his father, the grandfather. This catalyzes a heightened sense of peaceful coexistence between the generations.

Once we begin to appreciate the incredible reward due to one who properly fulfills the mitzvah of *Kibud av v'eim*, we can develop an understanding of the punishment due to he who does not carry out this mitzvah, or worse – deprecates his parent, denigrates the mitzvah of *Kibud av v'eim*. Who knows, asks Rav Gamliel, if much of the adversity one sustains throughout life is not the result of his lack of *Kibud av v'eim*? Look at Yaakov Avinu. He experienced twenty-two years of mourning for a lost son, just because he was not there for his parents – and his separation from them was at their behest! Clearly, Yitzchak Avinu forgave him. Nonetheless, he was punished. How careful must we be in observing this precious mitzvah.

The reward for *Kibud av v'eim* is unparalleled, as would be suggested from the above observation that Terach fathered Avraham because he named his son after his father. I just returned from being *menachem aveil* a dear friend who had just lost his father. A Holocaust survivor, who suffered untold tribulations in Europe, he came to these shores and built a Torah community in the Pacific Northwest. The *shul*, *mikvah* and day school may all be attributed to his efforts, as he and his wife were *moser nefesh*, dedicated their lives, to perpetuating the Torah life they knew in Pre-World War II Europe. They raised a beautiful family of *banim u'bnei banim oskim ba'Torah*, four generations of commitment to Torah, its scholarship and dissemination. I commented that I marveled at the incredible *z'chusim*, merits, the *niftar*, deceased, had amassed during his life. These merits will surely sustain him in the *Olam Ha'Emes*, World of Truth.

His son responded with a frightening exposition he had heard quoted in the name of **Horav Don Segal, Shlita**. We both felt it was worth publicizing, with the hope that it would serve as an eternal *z'chus* for the *neshamah* of his father, *Reb Dov ben Meir, zl*. Rav Segal gives an unexpected depiction of *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. Once a person leaves this world he is an *omeid*, standing still, since he is unable to move forward. Movement is for the living. Whatever positive deeds we have performed in our lives will be reckoned for us, but, once we “arrive” in the World of Truth, there is no longer any movement. This may be compared to a long line of people, almost frozen from the bitter cold, who are standing in single file, in the frigid tundra of Siberia. The bitter cold and howling wind envelops them as the line moves slowly. They are all waiting to enter the one community post office. Each one waits to see if he has received any mail. Does anyone care, or am I forgotten?

As they inch closer to the postal window, their hopes are high with anticipation. Perhaps I received a letter, a package, a warm coat. As each one steps up to the window, he might be lucky to have received a letter, another, a small box, yet another, a fur coat. Likewise, it is with life – or its aftermath. We move as the result of our children. A son who recites *Kaddish* will earn his father a letter. He stood in the frigid cold for hours, but at least he obtained a letter. The next one was even

more fortunate: His son studied *Mishnayos*, *Gemorah*, thus enabling the father to receive a large box filled with goodies. The father whose son not only recited *Kaddish*, studied *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, but even undertook upon himself to perform a special *mitzvah*, to endeavor to carry out a special act of *chesed*, kindness, has hit the Heavenly jackpot; he receives a fur coat.

There is one other *neshamah*, that of he whose son did nothing: no *Kaddish*, no learning, no *mitzvos*. He sustained the arctic chill, and, upon stretching out his hand to receive something – anything – a letter, a package, anything, he received “nothing,” relegated to returning “home” with nothing. His son did not bother, so the father will not receive anything. We carry our parents on our shoulders. When they are gone, they are gone. We are their only link to reward. As I said, it is a disquieting analogy, but clearly inspirational.

One more story – this one daunting, but no less inspirational. *Rav Chaim of Worms* was himself a great *tzaddik* who lived during the fifteenth century. He was blessed with three brilliant sons: the eldest, Betzalel, followed by Yaakov and Helman. A father’s dream, these young men exemplified the epitome of devotion to Torah scholarship. People would observe how fortunate *Rav Chaim* was to have his three sons follow in his footsteps.

The community of Worms regrettably did not offer the young men an opportunity to achieve the outstanding Torah scholarship which they sought. Thus, they appealed to the father that they be allowed to travel to Poland to study under one of its preeminent Torah leaders, *Rav Shlomo Luria*, *zl*, reverently known as the *Maharshal*. The father understood his sons’ yearning and gave permission for the younger two – Yaakov and Helman – to leave immediately for Poland. He insisted, however, that Betzalel remain at home. “You are my eldest and, while I might be overstepping my rights as a parent to ask this of you, I still implore you to remain at my side here in Worms.” What is a son to do when his father asks? He says yes, and he is happy about it. This was *Rav Betzalel*’s nature.

A few years passed, and the brothers returned to Worms, accomplished scholars, having imbibed Torah at the feet of the *Maharshal*. While *Rav Betzalel* was overjoyed with the return of his brothers, he was even more enraptured with the knowledge they had accumulated. He was truly happy for their success in Torah. He regretted his lost opportunity and would, at times, ruminate out loud, conveying his sadness at not having been given the opportunity to study Torah on an elevated level.

His son’s emotion did not escape *Rav Chaim* who felt bad for him: “How sad it is that my son is so despondent over his lost opportunity to have studied under the *Maharshal*. How can I appease him, make things better? He served me so well. He doesn’t deserve to be unhappy.”

*Rav Chaim* said to his son, Betzalel, “In reward for your noble act of remaining home and serving me, at great cost to yourself, I would like to grant you a blessing. I cannot pay you back for your exemplary *Kibbud av*, but I can entreat Hashem on your behalf that you be blessed with four sons

that will illuminate the Torah world with their scholarship and righteousness.”

And so it was that the father's blessing was realized. To *Rav Betzalel* were born four sons: *Rav Chaim* who became Chief Rabbi of Friedenberg and the distinguished author of *Sefer HaChaim*; *Rav Sinai*, *Rosh Yeshivah* in Mehrine; *Rav Shimshon*, Chief Rabbi of Kremenitz. The fourth and most distinguished son was *Rav Yehudah*, the legendary *Maharal m'Prague*, a name which, until this very day is synonymous with the highest levels of Torah scholarship. All of this was as a result of the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av v'eim*.