



Respecting One's Father from Afar
Parshas Vayetzeh

Gaby studied at Migdal Ohr over four decades ago. His father was a fisherman who worked on Lake Kinneret. The family suffered from abject poverty, which took its toll on the children.

While wandering through Migdal Ha'Emek at night "searching for souls," I came upon the 11-year-old boy in a place he should not have been at. I brought him with me and set him on the path of education, which the family did not object to. No one cared about him, or where and even if he went to school.

Gaby was very successful in his studies, and when it came time, we threw him a wonderful Bar Mitzvah party. However, for some reason, the father declined the invitation. I decide to talk to him.

I met him on Yom Kippur eve. The students had concluded the Shacharis prayers and I gave them each a jar of honey and asked their forgiveness. Gaby began to cry. "Rabbi, I am a sinner."

I was startled. What had he done that I was not aware of?

I calmed him down and invited him to my house for the pre-Yom Kippur meal. He repeatedly accused himself of crimes. Why do you say this? I inquired. "Since enrolling in Migdal Ohr I have not spoken to my father, and I transgress the commandment to honor thy father on a daily basis," he lamented.

I told him that I was sure his father respected his choices, and that no other one of his siblings respect his parents like he did.

I decide to go meet his father. The father received me with cold hostility. We spoke of a few meaningless issues, and then I asked him what he thought about the possibility of his son going to study at a yeshiva in Bnei Brak.

"I trust you, do what you think is best for him," he replied.

"You see? Father loves you," I told Gaby after the visit. You will become a great Torah scholar, I promised him.

In one of my discussions with Gaby I talked about our Patriarchs and the way they came to know G-d. Yaacov has such an encounter on the way from Israel to the home of Lavan the Aramite.

"And Yaacov awakened from his sleep" – our Sages explained that for the past 22 years he had studied and had not slept, and this was the first time he had done so.

Did Yaacov not know that his father was waiting for him? How did he allow himself to study for 22 years? What about respecting one's father?

Our teachers explain that Yaacov knew the true way to show respect for his father, and that was by following in his steps. When a son follows in his father's footsteps, there is no greater show of respect than that.

When Yaacov was following his father's teachings he was learning the value of self-sacrifice and complete dedication as exemplified in the Akeda, the binding of Yitzchak. Yaacov learned these positive traits from his father.

Implementing these traits, he went to the Beis Midrash to study for 22 years. He decided to dedicate himself to G-d and sacrifice his life for him - this was the greatest show of respect he could show his father.

Gaby's father never displayed love towards his son. However, it became apparent that Gaby suffered from taunts by his siblings when he was home as they ridiculed his religiosity.

Gaby suffered greatly and fell into despair. He had little contact with the yeshiva faculty and did not share with them his personal challenges. I was told by the Bnei Brak yeshiva that they felt they were about to lose him, and so I decided to visit him and show him support.

I found a broken person. He told me that he studied well at the yeshiva, but when he went home he suffered greatly, and his siblings' actions made him want to leave the world he was in. He felt torn and was contemplating his future.

I told him: "Gaby, you must not leave the yeshiva. You need to stay in Bnei Brak and forget your home for now." I called friends from the city who took him under their care.

What about respecting one's parents? He asked again. I smiled to him and reminded him of our earlier understanding - Your studying in the yeshiva is the true respect you are showing your parents, so do it with great fervor.

He stayed in yeshiva.