



One Step at a Time

Adapted from a Shmuess by Rabbi Stulberger

Parshas Toldos

By Elan Perchik

In Parshas Toldos, we are introduced to the life and times of Yaakov and Eisav. At wrestle with each other even before the moment of birth, the struggle of Klal Yisroel and Eisav's descendents continues to this very day. Nevertheless, although Eisav was known for his wickedness, there was one virtuous quality which he greatly excelled in: *Kibbud av va'em*.

The Midrash relates that the great Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel bemoaned the fact that he did not live up to the standards of honoring his father as Eisav did. It was this one particular mitzvah in which Eisav stood out in spectacular terms. While Eisav would put on special clothing when serving his father, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel would wear his regular clothing. It was to Eisav that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel looked and admired for performing this special mitzvah with utmost devotion.

Upon contemplating this Midrash, an obvious difficulty arises. If indeed Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel felt that his standards of *Kibbud av va'em* did not reach the likes of Eisav, why didn't he simply act like Eisav? He should have decided to put on his fanciest attire and serve his father in royal regalia. It was most certainly something he could do. Why wouldn't he wish to fulfill the mitzvah of *Kibbud av va'em* to the utmost just like Eisav did?

As it appears, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel understood something very fundamental: A person cannot simply act in a vacuum. As explained by the Baalei Mussar, when it comes to mitzvos, jumping to act in a way that is above and beyond one's spiritual level can be damaging. One must carefully think matters through before choosing any particular course of action. What will result if I do this? Is this something which will deepen my relationship with Hashem or hamper it? It may be a wonderful practice to undertake, but before reaching any conclusions, the resultant effects must be carefully contemplated.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel recognized that choosing to perform the mitzvah of *Kibbud av va'em* to the degree Eisav did could carry negative repercussions. He imagined what would happen if he chose to don his most precious articles of clothing. How would he react if some food splattered and stained his shirt? Would he heartily accept what happened or would there be a slight feeling of regret that he dressed up so nicely? Although undoubtedly Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel honored his parents to a degree beyond compare, he recognized that copying Eisav was not for him. Going above and beyond the standards he presently kept could perhaps backfire. What exactly he was concerned would result can only be

surmised, but arguably so, he understood that he was to gradually improve and not make quantum leaps.

This is a vital lesson we must all take to heart. While it is wonderful to always strive for greater heights and look to improve, everything must be done with premeditated consideration. Particularly when it comes to parenting, this is a concept needing consistent attention. At the same time we encourage our children to grow in Yiddishkeit, pushing them to do more than they can at the moment may be detrimental. We are to weigh the positives and the negatives and only then make a mature decision. Often times prodding our children to act a certain way will help them along; but often times it carries with it negative side effects. Ascending the ladder one rung at a time instead of jumping steps will insure that we reach the top as healthy and accomplished servants of Hashem.

Before the Beis HaLevi assumed the position of Rav of Brisk, he formulated a certain ruling pertaining to a questionable scenario arising in the laws of Kashrus. While the Shach, one of the authoritative commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch, was of the opinion that in such a case the piece of meat was deemed Kosher, the Beis HaLevi felt otherwise. After much halachic analysis, he felt in his own humble opinion that the meat should be deemed non-Kosher.

Some time later after the Beis HaLevi was appointed the Rav of Brisk he received a halachic question from the town butcher. After hearing of the situation, the Beis HaLevi realized that this query was exactly the one he disagreed with the Shach about. Considering this, he informed the man that in his opinion the piece of meat was not Kosher. "However," said the Beis HaLevi to the butcher, "I will compensate you for the loss from my own pocket. Considering that the Shach declares that it is Kosher, and he most certainly can be relied upon, you need not follow my own stringent ruling."

Such was the view of a Gadol. The Beis HaLevi understood full well that when answering a halachic question, not only is the very law to be taken into consideration, but as well the person asking it. If the other individual is not on the level of observing a more stringent ruling, then as long as he remains within the parameters of Torah law, he is doing just fine. In this scenario, as in many others, it was deemed that adopting a strict approach to the matter would be unwise. It is with this perspective that we are to make our decisions. Always thinking of the repercussions of our actions will insure that we continually climb up and up the ladder of spirituality as happy and healthy Jews.