

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Machlah Roiza *bas* Yitzchok *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

A Unique *Yeshivah*

PARSHAS VAYEITZEI 5776

An exposition regarding Torah study and honoring parents: Which is supreme?

At the end of the previous *parshah* and the beginning of this week’s *parshah*, Rashi supplies much chronological information regarding the life of Ya’akov Avinu. Ya’akov is later beset by the tragedy of his beloved son Yosef, who went missing for a total of twenty-two years. This was considered a punishment of sorts for Ya’akov, who had neglected the mitzvah of *kibbud av va’eim* (honoring one’s father and mother) during the many years of his separation from them. However, between his extended stay in the *yeshivah* of Shem V’Eiver, his sojourn in the house of Lavan, and his journey homeward, Ya’akov had been away from his parents for a total of thirty-six years; why, then, was he only held accountable for a twenty-two-year period? What happened to the other fourteen years in which he was not involved with caring for his parents?

Based on the teaching of Chazal, Rashi explains that he was not held responsible for the fourteen-year period he spent studying Torah; as the Gemara states (*Megillah 16b*): גְּדוֹלַת תְּלִמוּד – “Torah study is greater than (the mitzvah of) honoring one’s father and mother, for our forefather Ya’akov was not punished on behalf of all of those years he was in the House of Eiver.” It was only for the years of his stay with Lavan and his travels that he required expiation.

Aborted Mission

At first glance, this idea seems to square with another familiar teaching. As stated in the Mishnah in Peah (1:1):

אֵלּוּ דְּבָרִים שְׂאֵדָם אוֹכֵל פְּרוּמִיָּהוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַגֵּזֶה וְהַקֶּרֶן קִיָּמַת לוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. כְּבוֹד אָב וְאִם, וּגְמִילוּת חֲסִדִים, וְהַבָּאָת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ וְתִלְמוּד וְתוֹרָה כְּנֶגֶד כָּלֵם.

“These are the things for which a person (who fulfills them) merits to ‘eat’ from the ‘fruits’ (of his reward) even in This World, but the principal remains for him (to enjoy) in the World to Come: **Honoring one’s father and mother**, acts of kindness, bringing peace between a man and his fellow – and **Torah study outweighs them all.**”

However, R’ Ya’akov Kamenetsky (*Emes L’Ya’akov*) wondered about the parameters of this rule: To what extent does Torah study supersede the mitzvah of honoring one’s parents? Let us say, for instance, that a boy’s parents sent him to the store on an errand to purchase an item for their use. On the way, the boy suddenly gets an idea to divert his path and go instead to learn in the *beis medrash* (study hall). While Torah study is considered the greater mitzvah, surely the Torah does not sanction one to simply disregard one’s parents’ command in the manner illustrated above. In what way, exactly, was Ya’akov’s case different? Why was he effectively exempted from the mitzvah during the years he learned in the *Yeshivah* of Shem and Eiver – especially given the fact that he was held accountable for the subsequent years in which he lived with Lavan!

To elucidate this issue, R' Ya'akov focuses on another curious aspect of Ya'akov's sojourn in this particular place of study. He points out that this was by no means Ya'akov's first introduction to intensive Torah study. Firstly – based on the chronology provided by Rashi – we know that at the time he “enrolled” in Yeshivas Shem V'Eiver, Ya'akov was already sixty-three years old! And Ya'akov had already learned extensively from the greatest Torah sages of the time – none other than his grandfather Avraham and his father Yitzchak (*cf. Yoma 28b, Rambam Hilchos Avodas Kochavim 1:3*)! Why all of a sudden at this point did Ya'akov feel the need to study specifically in the *yeshivah* of Shem V'Eiver, to the extent that it superseded the need to care for his parents!

Mission Accomplished

What, in fact, was the “curriculum” of this Torah institution? Exactly what brand of study was taught by Shem and Eiver?

R' Ya'akov explains that these figures shared a unique experience: they had both lived in the midst of a most corrupted environment and yet emerged with their spiritual mettle intact. Shem, the son of No'ach, had been surrounded by the wicked generation of the Flood; Eiver's contemporaries were involved with constructing the Tower of Bavel. This, then, was the singular “subject” they had to impart: how to withstand the pull of a corrupted society and still remain loyal to Hashem.

And this was a lesson that was crucial to Ya'akov at just this time. He had been instructed by his parents to travel to Lavan's house to find a wife. Ya'akov knew what kind of unfriendly spiritual environment existed there. He desperately needed to learn the secrets of enduring the trial of being thrust into such potentially devastating surroundings. And so he went to learn this expertise from Shem and Eiver, the masters themselves.

This, R' Ya'akov concludes, is why Ya'akov was not held accountable for neglecting *kibbud av va'eim* during his years in that *yeshivah*. This is not simply an instance of Torah study “superseding” the obligation of honoring parents. Rather, *Ya'akov's sojourn in the yeshivah of Shem V'Eiver was itself a fulfillment of his parents' very command*. What would happen, for example, if a father dispatched his son to buy a *lulav* and *esrog* for him to use over the *yom tov* of Sukkos. On the way to the “*shuk*” (four-species marketplace), the boy suddenly realizes that he is not sufficiently proficient in the laws of the four species. How will he secure a kosher *lulav* and *esrog* for his father? He therefore stops off in a *beis medrash* to study the relevant *halachos*. Would this be considered a neglect of his mission? On the contrary – he is doing his utmost to fulfill his father's wishes in the most optimal fashion! He was sent to secure an appropriate set of four species for his father, and he is taking those measures that enable him to do exactly that. His study of the *halachos* is not a diversion from the mission, but rather, a manifestation of its fulfillment.

And this was the case with Ya'akov, as well. His parents had sent him to the house of Lavan, with the obvious hope and charge that he remain upright and loyal to Hashem. Fully aware of the enormity of the challenge, Ya'akov went to do whatever he could to fulfill this mission – and that required an extended stopover in the *yeshivah* of Shem V'Eiver.