



SCHECHTER

Making our Parents Proud

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As children, we want to please our parents (even adolescents, though they would never admit it). We seek their guidance; we disobey them in order to see if they care; we often push them away in order for them to bring us close.

Parents are not supposed to play favorites with their children. We are to love each of our children equally. We have to nurture the relationship that we have with each, without alienating one of the others. For some of us, this is more difficult or easy than for others.

We want what's best for our children. We want for them not to make the same mistakes in life that we made. We would gladly change places with them when they are sick and we would give them whatever they need to be happy.

Yet, when we were kids, we made mistakes; we got sick, we weren't always happy. But we turned out okay.

This past week, I had the opportunity to attend a lecture by [Wendy Mogel](#), Ph.D., author of [The Blessing of a Skinned Knee](#), and her newest book, [The Blessing of a B Minus: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Resilient Teenagers](#). In her lecture, Dr. Mogel asked, "How many of you got straight A's? How many of you didn't make stupid choices?" No one raised their hands. While we want perfection from our children, we need to be realistic in our expectations. We need to allow our kids to be excellent – in the areas in which they excel.

As children, many of us played the game of asking one parent for something and when we didn't like the answer, we would ask the other hoping for a different answer. For some of us, we knew which parent would give the answer that we wanted and we would not ask the other parent. I see it every day in my own children who think that I don't know what they are up to.

As parents, we must have a united front. Both parents, even divorced parents and parents in blended families, need to be on the same page.

This is not what happens in this week's parsha, Toldot. I cannot imagine how our Patriarch, Yaakov (Jacob) must have felt, seeing how his father, Yitzchak (Isaac) treated his twin brother Esav (Esau). Esav was a hunter and had a close relationship with his father, closer than that of Yaakov. Yaakov dwelled in tents, staying close to his mother, Rivka (Rebecca), as opposed to Esav who was not close with his mother. I wonder if Yaakov was

jealous of the relationship that his father and brother had. I wonder if Esav had the same jealous feelings about Yaakov's relationship with Rivka.

I am lucky. I have two parents whose love and devotion I feel on a daily basis. I still strive to make my parents proud. I work hard to make sure that I have a strong relationship with each of them (as well as their spouses). I get nervous when I know that I need help, not wanting them to be disappointed in what I have done.

We need to see the strengths in our children (as well as the weaknesses). Our children need to know that we are there for them, even when they might not want us around.

Yaakov did not feel the love from his father. Esav did not feel it from his mother. It is a flaw in our patriarchs and matriarchs. We began to see this flaw with Avraham who sent away his first son, Ishmael. We will see it with Yaakov and how he favors Yosef (Joseph) and Benjamin (Benjamin) and causes jealousy among the other children. And here we have it with both Yitzchak and Rivka.

Perhaps Esav would have turned out differently if he had not been spurned by his mother. As parents, we need to support our children, even when we disagree with their actions.

As we learn in the coming weeks in our Torah readings, Yaakov has an internal struggle with his relationship with his parents and with his brother. He also struggles with his relationship with God, wondering if his prayers are reaching God and if God's answers are reaching him. It takes Yaakov being away from his family to realize the importance of them.

Society today is much different than it was a generation ago. We are much more mobile. The internet, video-conferencing and free long distance, have changed the relationship possibilities that many families experience.

During the past week, two close friends (not related to one another) lost a parent. One friend lived in the same city as her mother and worked together in the family business. She was with her mother as she passed away. Another friend had moved around for the past 15 years and had not lived in the same city as his father. The two shared a passion for family and for Judaism. My friend flew to be with his father during his last week of life, rarely leaving his bedside.

Both found comfort in their parent. Both were enriched by being with their parents at the time of their passing.

We want our parents to be proud of our actions. We want them to be proud of how we raise our children, how we live our life. Though we might not realize what their guidance does for us, though we as parents might feel that our children don't always appreciate us, it is our duty to support them.

As Dr. Mogel shares, "...demonstrate empathy while avoiding entanglement in their disappointments. Be curious and kind, but alarmed... If you are asked for help directly, use leading questions that suggest your faith in (their) ability to mobilize (their)

resources... Do your best to let (your child) provide the answers on (their) own.” (The Blessing of a B Minus, page 99).

Rivka did not do this. She had a prophecy that had told her that Yaakov, not Esav was to be the inheritor of God’s promise to Yitzhak. She saw Yaakov’s pain in his relationship with his father, yet she set in motion a plan to gain his father’s blessing.

We cannot solve all of our children’s problems for them. We need to give them the tools to solve them on their own and then to support them even when they fail (not to bail them out, but to support them).

My hope for my friends, as it is for each of you, is that we be able to see how proud each of our parents are of us and to appreciate the enormity of the task of being a parent.

In memory of Chazzan Hyman Gisser and Zina Kohn, may their memories be for a blessing.

AS A FAMILY:

- Tell your kids that you are proud them.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff.
- Call your parents to tell them that you love them (model the behavior for your children).
- Help your children excel at what they are excellent.
- Make special time with each of your children individually.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK’S PARSHA, TRY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. How long does it take from the time that Yitzhak marries Rivka, to the time that she becomes pregnant?
2. What does the name Esav mean? Why does he receive this name?
3. What does the name Yaakov mean? Why does he receive this name?
4. Why does Esav sell his birthright to Yaakov?
5. What does Yitzhak do when a famine occurs? How is this similar to what Avraham did?
6. Who does Esav marry? How did his parents feel about his spouses?
7. How does Rivka help Yaakov trick Yitzhak?
8. What blessing does Yaakov receive?
9. What blessing does Esav receive?
10. Why does Yaakov run away?
11. How does Esav try to get back in the good graces of his parents?