

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [295]

From This Age Onwards, He Must Say "Blessed is He, Who Freed Me from the Punishment of This One."

(Insights into Genesis Rabbah 63:10)



Background to Our Story

Jacon and Esau



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_and_Esau

The [biblical Book of Genesis](#) speaks of the relationship between fraternal twins Jacob and Esau, sons of [Isaac](#) and [Rebecca](#). The story focuses on [Esau's](#) loss of his birthright to [Jacob](#) and the conflict that ensued between their descendant nations because of Jacob's deception of their aged and blind father, Isaac, in order to receive Esau's birthright/blessing from Isaac.

This conflict was paralleled by the affection the parents had for their favored child: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob." Even since conception, their conflict was foreshadowed: "And the children struggled together within her; and she said, if it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."

Midrash



Midrash (מדרש) is an interpretive act, seeking the answers to religious questions (both practical and theological) by plumbing the meaning of the words of the [Torah](#). (In the [Bible](#), the root d-r-sh [דרש] is used to mean inquiring into any matter, including occasionally to seek out God's word.) Midrash responds to contemporary problems and crafts new stories, making connections between new Jewish realities and the unchanging biblical text.

Midrash falls into two categories. When the subject is law and religious [practice](#) (halacha), it is called [midrash halacha](#). [Midrash aggadah](#), on the other hand, interprets biblical narrative, exploring questions of ethics or theology, or creating homilies and parables based on the text. (Aggadah means “telling”; any midrash which is not halakhic falls into this category.)

The Bar Mitzvah Blessing – “Baruch Sheptarani”

ברוך שפטרני

After a *bar mitzvah* boy completes his first *aliyah*, his father recites the following. See commentary.

בְּרוּךְ (אֱתָהּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם), שִׁפְטָרְנִי מֵעֲנָשׁוֹ * שְׁלֹזָה.

BAR MITZVAH BLESSING

After a *bar mitzvah* boy completes his first *aliyah*, his father recites the following. See commentary.

בְּרוּךְ *Blessed is the One (are You, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe)
Who has freed me from the punishment* due this boy.*

תּוֹרַת מוּסָגִים TORAH MUSINGS

By: Rabbi Ari Enkin

The “Baruch Sheptarani” blessing which a father recites upon his son reaching Bar Mitzvah is unique among the blessings which are reserved for distinctive occasions. [1] This blessing is essentially the father’s declaration-of-release from any further responsibility for his son’s wrongdoings. For his first thirteen years, a boy is under the spiritual aegis and responsibility of his parents, but from his Bar-Mitzvah onwards, he is an independent man in the eyes of God. As we will see, the “Baruch Sheptarani” is of interesting origin and development.

The Torah teaches that when a boy reaches thirteen he begins to mold for himself a reputation and his character traits are then clearly distinguishable. It was at this age that Yaakov turned to the path of Torah and Eisav turned to the path of idolatry. [2] From here the Midrash derives that a father is to recite the “Baruch Sheptarani” at his son’s Bar Mitzvah as from this time onwards a child is independently going to pursue the paths he chooses. [3]

As a general rule only blessings which originate in the Talmud are to be deemed official and authoritative.[4] As such, since the “Baruch Sheptarani” blessing originates in the Midrash and not in the Talmud, some authorities suggest that it be recited without directly mentioning God’s name.[5] Furthermore, there is reason to believe that reciting this blessing was never intended to be obligatory, but rather, optional or advisory in nature.[6] There is also a view that God’s name should be omitted from the blessing out of consideration that the father may not have properly raised his son and is therefore unworthy to even recite it at all.[7] Other authorities dismiss these concerns and rule that the blessing is to be recited with God’s name just like all others.[8] Yet others favor the compromise of reciting the blessing, along with God’s name, but in Aramaic, rather than in the original Hebrew.[9]

The blessing is commonly recited after the Bar-Mitzvah boy has had his first Aliya to the Torah[10] though some authorities suggest that it be recited after the boy has led a service in the synagogue.[11] Some fathers postpone reciting the blessing until the Shabbat following the Bar-Mitzva day.[12] There are also those with the custom to recite the blessing when the Bar-Mitzvah boy dons his Tefillin for the first time after turning thirteen.

[13] There is also a view that the blessing should be recited at the Bar-Mitzvah meal.[14] In some communities, the "Baruch Sheptarani" blessing was actually not recited at a boy's Bar-Mitzvah, but rather, it was deferred until he turned twenty.[15] The recitation of the blessing is also seen as an official mechanism for publicly informing the community that one's son has become Bar-Mitzvah.[16]

A father may recite this blessing at the Bar-Mitzvah of his adopted son.[17] In the event that a Bar-Mitzvah boy's father has passed away the blessing may be recited by a grandfather.[18] It is not customary for the blessing to ever be recited by a mother or grandmother.[19] In the event of twins celebrating their Bar-Mitzvah, the blessing is recited for each boy separately.[20] The Bar-Mitzvah boy need not actually be present with the father recites the "Baruch Sheptarani" nor is the presence of a minyan truly essential.[21] It is interesting to note that hosting an elaborate meal in honor of a Bar-Mitzvah is an essential component of the ceremony.[22]

The blessing is generally not recited upon a girl reaching her Bat Mitzvah. This is because the blessing is directly related to a father's educational responsibilities towards his son. It is also noted that the halacha specifically states that the blessing is to be recited for one's "son", which can be understood to indirectly exclude daughters. Indeed, there is actually no true obligation for parents to educate their daughters, though it is highly recommended. [23] It appears, therefore, that this blessing has little relevance to the spiritual development of a girl. [24]

Nevertheless, other authorities argue that although there may not be an official obligation to educate girls, in our day and age even girls receive a proper Torah education. In fact, there are halachic authorities who insist that the obligation to educate one's children to keep mitzvot applies equally for sons and daughters. [25] According to this approach the blessing may be recited for one's daughter, as well. [26]

[1] O.C. 225:2

[2] Bereishit 25:27;Rashi

[3] Bereishit Rabba 63:10

[4] Darkei Moshe O.C. 225

[5] Rema O.C. 225:2, Bnei Banim 2:18

[6] Cited in: www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/sinay/baruh-2.htm

[7] Bnei Banim 2:18. Also, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch related that Rabbi Schneur Zalman did make this blessing reciting G-d's name upon the Bar-Mitzvah of his son....For more on Chabad and "Baruch Sheptarani" see:www.sichosinenglish.org/books/bar-mitzvah/04.htm#n32

[8] Gra O.C. 225:3, Chayei Adam 65:3, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 61:5, Aruch Hashulchan 225:4, Siddur Baal Hatanya, Tashbetz 390. Note: There are other blessings as well which do not originate in the Talmud but have been accepted as all others, such as the morning blessing "sheasa li kol tzarki" among others.

[9] Leket Yosher O.C. p.90

[10] Magen Avraham 225:2

[11] Mishna Berura 225:6

[12] Piskei Teshuvot 225:6

[13] Moroccan custom cited in: www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/sinay/baruh-2.htm

[14] Divrei Malkiel 4

[15] Cited at: <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/sinay/baruh-2.htm>

[16] Kaf Hachaim 225:10

[17] Pri Megadim O.C. 225:20

[18] Maharsham 8:33, cited in Piskei Teshuvot 225:4

[19] Piskei Teshuvot 225:4

[20] Piskei Teshuvot 225:4

[21] Piskei Teshuvot 225:6

[22] Mishna Berura 225:6

[23] Nazir 28b

[24] Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 225:5

[25] Tosfot Yesheirim Yoma 82a, cited in: <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/sinay/baruh-2.htm>

[26] Yabia Omer 6:29


The Text: Genesis Rabbah 63:10

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים (בראשית כה, כז) רַבִּי לֹוֹי אָמַר מִשָּׁל לְהִדָּס וְעַצְבוּנִית שֶׁהָיוּ גְדָלִים זֶה עַל גַּבֵּי זֶה, וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהִגְדִּילוּ וְהִפְרִיחוּ זֶה נוֹתֵן רִיחוֹ וְזֶה חוֹחוֹ, כִּךָּ כָּל י"ג שָׁנָה שְׁנֵיהֶם הוֹלְכִים לְבֵית הַסֵּפֶר וְשְׁנֵיהֶם בָּאִים מִבֵּית הַסֵּפֶר, לְאַחַר י"ג שָׁנָה זֶה הָיָה הוֹלֵךְ לְבֵתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת וְזֶה הָיָה הוֹלֵךְ לְבֵתֵי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים. אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר צְרִידָה אָדָם לְהִטָּפֵל בְּבָנוּ עַד י"ג שָׁנָה, מִיִּכָּן וְאֵילָף צְרִידָה שִׁיאֲמַר בְּרוּךְ שֶׁפִּטְרָנִי מִעֲנִשׁוֹ שֶׁל זֶה.

..."...And the youths grew up and Esau became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Jacob was a wholesome man, abiding in tents" (Genesis 25:27).

Rabbi Levi made an analogy to a myrtle and wild rosebush which grew next to each other; when they had grown, one gave forth scent and the other thorns. So too with these, for thirteen years they both went to school and came back from school, but after thirteen years this one went to houses of study (*batei midrashot*) and this one went to houses of idol worship (*batei avodat kochavim*).

Rabbi Elazar said, until thirteen years a person is obligated to take care of his son; from this age onwards, he should say "Blessed is He, who freed me from the punishment of this one."

 **Explaining the Story** - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

- ?** Why are parents obligated to take care of their young children?
Answer 1 _____
Answer 2 _____
Answer 3 _____
Answer 4 _____
- ?** Why is a person obligated to take care of his children until they are thirteen years old?
- ?** What would you say should be today's age for such an obligation?
- Bonus ?** What is the meaning of "taking care of one's children" in the context of our story?

? Why does our story imply that until the age of thirteen you can't really say too much about how people will turn out when they grow up?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Extra Bonus ? According to our story, why did Jacob go to houses of study and Esau to houses of idol worship?

? How do you understand the expression: "Blessed is He, who freed me from the punishment of this one"?

? Why does our story say that "from this age onwards, the father should say "Blessed is He, who freed me from the punishment of this one"?

Bonus ? What is our story's perspective on parenting? What can we learn from our story about life's challenges in general?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! It is our obligation and responsibility to work hard and do our best to make a difference. Then, we have to let go.



Our short teaching is about understanding the difference between the variables that are up to us to control and the ones that are not. According to the midrash, Isaac and Rebecca gave Esau and Jacob the same education, tending to their needs. Yet, the two young men turned out different and went off to diametrical opposite directions. While the expression "Blessed is He, who freed me from the punishment of this one" may sound harsh, the message of our story is that once we do our job, raising our children to be good people, or taking care of whatever we need to take care of, we must let go, since there are variables that don't depend on us. As long as it is up to us to make a difference, we must do so. Then we shouldn't dwell on what we can't change, since it is going to sadden and frustrate us, and moreover, prevent us from continuing to make a difference wherever we can and should.