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maamarim
given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Seuda Shlishis and Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas Kedoshim 5768

In *Parshas Kedoshim* (וי"ט:ל"ב) the Torah commands us:

מִפְּנֵי שִׁיבָה תִּקּוּם וְהִדְרַת פָּנֵי זָקֵן וְיִרְאַת מַאֲלִיקִיךָ אֲנִי ה' - Stand up before those of white hair and honor the face of the elderly, and you shall fear your G-d I am Hashem.

In *Maseches Kidushin* (ל"ג.) the *Gemara* elaborates on the details of the *Mitzva*.

“Isi ben Yehuda says מִפְּנֵי שִׁיבָה תִּקּוּם applies to anyone with white hair. R. Yochanan said that the *halacha* is like Isi ben Yehuda. R. Yochanan used to stand up before elderly non-Jews. He said, עדו עלייהו דהני - How many experiences must they have gone through”

Rashi explains that הרפתקי refers to the events, tragedies, miracles and wonders that they must have gone through.

It follows that if we are obligated to honor elderly non-Jews, *kal va'chomer* we must honor any elderly Jew, even if he is an *am ha'aretz* - an ignoramus.

It's possible to reveal a deeper aspect of this *mitzva*. By honoring the elderly *am ha'aretz*, we inspire him to seek out ways to learn more about Torah and *mitzvos*. The opposite would certainly be true. Scorn and derision would drive him away, ensuring not only that he would remain ignorant, but also that he would continue to transgress the *mitzvos* of the Torah.



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I once asked someone who lives in *Chutz La'aretz* and deals with non-Jews on a daily basis, if they honor the elderly in the same way that Jews do. He replied that they certainly provide for the needs of the elderly. However, those acts of kindness aren't motivated by honor for the elderly, but rather by pity. The same communities often have societies that alleviate the suffering of animals, because their suffering causes people to feel pity for them.

The attitude of Jews toward the elderly is different. The Torah commands us not only to feel *rachmanus* for the elderly and to assist them in every way possible, but also to honor them because of their life experience.

Regarding this concept of life experience, I had the privilege of learning a wonderful lesson from the Gerrer Rebbe, the *Beis Yisrael zy"l*. In 5736, the Rebbe went to Chaifa in the summer, and I accompanied him on his pre-dawn walk. He spoke with me at length about the Ponovozher Rav *zt"l*. He praised the Rav's rhetorical abilities and told me about a very powerful *drasha* that the Rav delivered at the dedication of the orphanage that he founded for children who survived the Holocaust.

The Rav quoted the *Gemara* (חגיגה י"ד):

"When Rav Dimi arrived, he said, 'Yeshaya cursed Yisrael with eighteen curses, and he wasn't satisfied until he said, **יִרְהַבּוּ הַנַּעַר בִּזְקֵן** (ישעיהו ג:ה) - The young man will act haughtily before an old man.

The Rav asked, "Why would that particular curse satisfy Yeshayahu? In the previous seventeen curses, he already told *Am Yisrael* that they will lose all physical and spiritual support, and that they will be ruled by fools. (See the *pesukim* for the entire range of קללות). What is so significant about the curse that the young will act with arrogance toward the old?"

He answered the question by referring to the above *Gemara* which related that R. Yochanan used to stand up for the elderly of the nations because they have experienced so much in their lives. The Rav said that today, there are young boys who have experienced the horrifying events of the Shoah and have somehow survived the seven levels of *Gehinnom*. If any of those boys stand before an elderly man who didn't experience the Shoah,



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they can unequivocally declare that they have experienced more in their few years than the old man has in all the decades of his life.

If we had some means of measuring the suffering that these children have undergone, we would discover that they suffered more than an entire generation of old men. Therefore, even though the norm is for the young to stand up for their elders as an expression of respect for their life experience, in this case, the elderly need to stand up and honor the young boys who have experienced so much suffering. This is what the *navi* meant by ירהבו נער בזקן. Rashi explains, יתגדל הנער על הזקן. The young boy will feel greater than his elders. In our case, this behavior would be justified.

This was the final horrifying curse that Yeshayahu decreed upon Am Yisrael. It wasn't simply that the younger generation will be "*chutzpadik*". The curse was that young boys will experience such incomprehensible suffering, that their elders will be required to stand up for them. They will be forced to admit that unfortunately, these children have far more life experience than they do.

Baruch Hashem, in our generation neither we nor our children have had to experience such horrors. Nevertheless, we must realize that there are young children among us who have undergone horrible experiences. However, outside observers usually can't identify those who have suffered. Therefore, we should do our best to honor and value each person we encounter, young or old. This goes beyond simply having *rachamanus*. We must actually honor them, realizing that by doing so we perform a *mitzva* that is derived from מפני שיבה תקום, for they may have already experienced a lifetime of suffering.

We are now in the period of *sefiras ha'omer*, when we remember that the *talmidim* of R. Akiva died because they didn't treat each other with respect. This is certainly an appropriate time to do our utmost to honor others.

ולהרבות באהבה באחדות וברעות בינינו



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