

HONORING OTHERS PART 2

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In addition the obligations to honor various family members, there are commandments that instruct us to give extra respect to certain people: The Torah says: "Rise before an elderly person and stand before a wise man." ¹ We learn from here two commandments:

1. To stand up before an elderly person: The Torah teaches us that people that have reached a certain stage in life are deserving of a certain level of honor. The reason for this is that they have accrued a large amount of life experience and this in and of itself is worthy of respect. A person is halachically defined as elderly at seventy, however there are opinions that even a 60 year old should be put in this category and should be honored. The main law in this regard is to stand up when an elderly person passes by within a distance of four amos (about two metres). One need only stand up when the elderly person first enters the room and leaves for the day, but there is no need to stand up every time he or she passes by. If the elderly person prefer that people do not stand for them then one is exempt from this commandment.
2. To stand up before a Torah scholar (talmid chacham). A person who has learnt a significant amount of Torah is deserving of a higher level of respect. The main law with regard to the Torah scholar is also that one must stand up when they enter and leave the room if they pass within a distance of four amos. There are a select number of people who are described as gedolim (great men) who are extremely learned and guide the generation. For such people one must stand as soon as he enters a room even from a distance greater than four amos. If the Torah scholar says that people need not stand for him then one is exempt from doing so.

In each society, different values are emphasized - in some societies wealth may be the indication of success. In the Judaism's eyes the value of knowing and living Torah greater than anything else. For this reason we are commanded to give extra respect for a person who has devoted his life to learning and fulfilling the Torah. It should also help instill in each of us a desire to emulate such a person.

¹Parshas Kedoshim, 19:32.