

HONORING OTHERS PART 1

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

We have thus far discussed the commandments to honor and fear our parents. There are other people towards whom we are also commanded to show an extra degree of respect.

The authorities discuss whether there is an obligation to honor one's older siblings. Everyone agrees that one must honor the oldest brother, but there is a disagreement as to whether one must honor the oldest sister and indeed any older sibling.

We are also obligated to honor our grandparents, parents-in-law and step- parents. However, the honor we must show to a step-parent is different from the other cases. With regard to grandparents or in-laws we must honor them because we owe them a certain degree of respect due to their direct connection to us. However in the case of a step-parent the requirement to honor them is only for the sake of our natural parent who has now remarried. For example, if a person's father remarries the child should honor the step-mother because it pleases the father. If, however, the father passes away, the requirement to honor the step-mother no longer applies. Similarly if the father says that the child does not need to honor the step-mother then the child does not have to do so. This is not the case with regard to the other relatives mentioned here - even if the parents die or say that the child need not honor them, one is still obligated to do so.¹

In all these aforementioned cases one is not required to honor the relative to the same degree as his parents, rather there is a general requirement to speak respectfully to them. The laws such as the prohibition to say the first name or to sit in their special seat do not apply with regard to these people.

It should be noted that there is a general requirement to treat ALL people with a degree of honor and to avoid speaking in a disrespectful manner. However, the people mentioned above deserve an extra level of honor due our connection to them.

¹. We mentioned earlier that a parent cannot instruct us to transgress commandments, so if, for example, the parent tells the child not to honor his grandparents it is as if he is instructing him not to observe a command.