

# TALMUD TORAH 6:1

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

**1.** It is a Mitzva to show deference (\*Hiddur\*) to any \*Talmid Hakham\* (lit. - "student of a sage" - general usage is "scholar"), even if he is not your teacher, as it says: "You shall rise before the aged, and show \*Hiddur\* in the presence of a \*Zaqen\* " (Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 19:32a); \*Zaqen\* (which literally means "old person") [is an acrostic for] \*Zeh Qanah Hokhmah\* (This one has acquired knowledge).

From what point are we obligated to stand "in his presence"? When he is within four \*Amot\* (1 Amah = btwn. 18-24") - until he passes from his presence.

**Q1:** General question about this chapter: How is the honor due scholars different, conceptually and practically, from that due one's teacher?

**YE** (Yitz Etshalom): This may be subject to a dispute between R and the (anonymous) author of Sefer haHinuch. Note that R introduced the honor for one's teacher (TT 5:1) as "similar to" - and more stringent than - honor/awe due parents. It would seem that R sees one as the extension of the other (based on the \*Kal vaHomer\* reasoning outlined in 5:1). Conversely, the Hinuch (#257) in addressing the Mitzva of honor for scholars, adds the following: "...regarding the honor of the teacher [incumbent] upon the student, there is a great addition over the honor that you are obligated towards any other scholar..."; we see that he sees the honor for your own teacher as a "more serious form" of honor for scholars - and not an extension of filial responsibility towards parents. Therefore, we may understand the practical differences between these two relationships, according to the Hinuch, as "stronger forms" of honor/awe.

According to R, however, it is clearly a different story. Note that R does not allow for \*Mechila\* (forgiving) the honor for a scholar, however he does allow (5:11) for such \*Mechila\* when it comes to teacher. R does not prescribe honor for scholars in a bathhouse etc. (Halakha 2, below), however, such a parameter is not mentioned in connection with honor for teacher. One way of explaining these differences is as follows:

Honor for teacher is an extension of honor for parents - it is a personal relationship with that parent/teacher and what they have done for you which obligates that honor/awe. Their role in bringing you into this world, through this world and to the World to Come (see 5:1) create a permanent obligation of gratitude. Therefore, just as parents may forgive that honor - in specific circumstances or for specific forms of honor - so may the teacher. Since it is a "debt" which you owe the parent/teacher, they may forgive that debt. In addition, that debt exists in any situation - even a

bathroom etc. Also, once we see the teacher/parent, we must stand up, as their contribution plays a central role in who we are at all times - and it is honor for their person which we are expressing, which is manifested as long as they are within eyesight.

Honor for scholars is an extension of honor for the Torah, as the Gemara (Kiddushin 33b) infers: If we stand up for her [the Torah's] students, we certainly should stand up for her [a Sefer Torah]! R himself, in the "Koteret" (introductory heading) of Hilkhhot Talmud Torah, refers to the Mitzva of "Honoring her [the Torah's] teachers and scholars". Therefore, we are honoring the scholar as a medium for honoring Torah - it is not the personal relationship with this scholar that motivates the honor, rather what he represents in and of himself. Therefore, there is no room for \*Mechila\* - it is not his honor, therefore he hasn't the right to forgive it. It is also inappropriate to show this honor in a place where the Mitzva of Talmud Torah may not take place - such as a lavatory/bathhouse. This also explains why we only stand up when he is within 4 Amot (as opposed to "as soon as you see him" - which is the case for teacher/parent - see also MT Mamrim 6:3) - since 4 Amot is considered a person's "personal space" (see BT Bava Metzia 10a) - that scholar has now brought Torah into your personal space and you must stand up in recognition of that. There is one additional explanation to the "4 Amot" rule - whereas standing for your own teacher is an expression of your personal debt of gratitude, the honor accorded a scholar is also a public statement, as the Hinuch explains - "...so that others will see and become inspired..." - this is only efficacious when the scholar is close to you and others see the connection of your standing and his stature. [special thanks to Tzvi Pittinsky for his contributions.]

**Q2:** When the Rabbis expound upon a word - such as \*Zaqen\*, turning it into something other than the "normal" meaning - what happens to the "normal" read? Are we still obligated to stand up for an old person who is not a scholar? Or does the exegetical read overrule the "straight" read?

**YE:** Regarding the practical question of rising in honor of an older person who is not a scholar, R codifies (TT 6:9) that we even rise for a non-scholarly senior citizen (based on the Gemara in Kiddushin 32b). The Hinuch explains that even such a person has gained much life-experience and that is a form of wisdom which is also worthy of respect.

As to the general question of exegetical "reads" overruling "straight" text, this is a fairly complex issue. Several interesting points in that regard: In the Gemara (Yevamot 24a), we read that even though in the rest of the Torah \*ein miqra yotze miydei p'shuto\* (the import of a verse is not subverted from its simple meaning) - in this one case (of the child of a Levirate marriage taking on the name of the dead brother), it is subverted to the exegetical meaning. That would seem to indicate that in every other case, we always adopt the simple reading of the text (in addition to the exegetical interpretations). This, however, is not so clear.

For example, in the Torah (Shemot [Exodus] 22:1-2, in the case of burglary, we read: "If a thief is found breaking in, and is beaten to death, no bloodguilt is incurred; but if it happens after sunrise,

bloodguilt is incurred." (In other words, if the burglar is challenged by the homeowner who preemptively kills him NOT IN SELF-DEFENSE, the homeowner is innocent. But if this confrontation took place during the day, he is guilty.) The Talmud (BT Sanhedrin 72a) interprets the phrase "if it happens after sunrise" as meaning "if it is clear as day that the burglar intends no harm, do not kill him, otherwise, kill him".

Rambam (MT Geneva 9:8) rules according to this exegesis to the exclusion of the simple meaning: The homeowner is innocent for killing him whether the confrontation took place during the day or at night (in 9:10 he cites the exception of the burglar who you know will not become violent). RABD (9:8) challenges R's ruling as follows: "...even though the Sages interpreted 'if it happens after sunrise' metaphorically - if the matter is clear to you as sun that he is not a physical threat etc. nevertheless, \*ein miqra yotze miydei p'shuto\* (the import of a verse is not subverted from its simple meaning) - i.e. during the day he is not allowed to kill him..."

Seemingly, we have a dispute between Rambam and RABD regarding this exact issue. [Thanks to Shlomo Kapustin for pointing me to this Rambam/RABD].

Minchat Hinuch (#232) raises another interesting possibility: In the Torah, we are warned not to "Place a stumbling block before a blind person" (Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 19: 14). The Sages interpreted this in various ways: in Torat Kohanim, it is understood to be a warning against fraud, since the defrauded person is "blind" in this matter. In BT Avodah Zarah 6b, it is expanded to include abetting another to violate a transgression. Minchat Hinuch raises the question that, since the Sages explained this prohibition in a non-literal fashion, would someone violate this prohibition if he were to place a rock in front of a blind person? His discussion, as well as the sources he cites, are well worth reading for anyone interested in pursuing the issue.

**Q3:** Why do we stand up when he is four Amot away? (Why not from when we see him - or when he can see us?)

**YE:** See answer to Q1 above.

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