

In the presence of an old person shall you rise and you shall honor the presence of a sage. (19:32)

In the *Talmud Kiddushin* 32b, a *Tannaic* dispute is presented concerning a *zakein ashmai*, iniquitous elder, whether if one must honor him or not. *Rashi* is the one who defines *ashmai* as iniquitous. *Tosfos* disputes this, since it is a *mitzvah* not to respect an iniquitous elder. Such a person warrants disrespect. Therefore, *Rabbeinu Tam* explains *ashmai* to mean a boor, an ignoramus, one who is otherwise unworthy of respect. Nonetheless, since when are we enjoined to respect an ignoramus, simply due to his advanced age? One must earn respect, be worthy of the reverence accorded him by others. True, age is a blessing, and one who is blessed deserves respect, but age without character/intellectual spiritual refinement should not warrant respect.

In his *Aznaim LaTorah*, the *Lutzker Rav*, *Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl*, quotes the *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, who posits that, as one ages, his *taavos*, physical desires and passions, naturally decrease. He no longer has the physical ability to carry out his passions. As his physical drive diminishes, however, another *taavah*, desire, emerges and begins to rapidly increase: *kavod*, esteem. Yes, as one ages, his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, for *kavod* seems to gain speed almost irrationally. We have all seen it. Individuals who throughout their youth and middle age years never sought public acclaim, always remained in the background, suddenly push their way to center stage. They now want attention, are offended easily, become upset if they are not accorded the respect which they now feel they deserve. Perhaps this is part of the aging process, but it is a desire that is very real – and, in some situations quite overpowering.

Halachah states that, if someone was once wealthy and has suffered bankruptcy, such that he is now financially challenged, we must help him to achieve the lifestyle to which he had been accustomed. If he had had a chauffeur-driven car, with a footman, we must provide these for him. That is how far *tzedakah*, charity, extends. We must provide what he is missing. For a wealthy man – survival is insufficient. He is used to luxuries. Thus, for one who requires *kavod*, esteem, for his age-related ego, it is a sensible request. A *zakein ashmai*, ignorant old man, needs *kavod* – although he is undeserving.

When we reach out to help someone – or vice versa – they reach out to us for help, we must alleviate their pain, even if it is self-imposed. If a person suffers from *mizrach vant* syndrome to the point that, if he is not given a seat on the eastern wall of the *shul*, he will be deeply insulted and hurt – we must give it to him. It does not hurt us, and it certainly helps him – so, why not?