

HONORING ELDERS & SCHOLARS

מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן

A basic outlook of traditional Jewish consciousness has always been the honor and respect befitting for the wise and the elderly. The great sages are called the “eyes” of the generation, and the elders are those that we look towards as a link in the chain of our tradition going all the way back to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It’s no wonder, then, that the Torah speaks in such strong terms about the severity of being lax in ones reverence towards these individuals, even going so far as to attribute the destruction of Jerusalem due to disrespect towards its great scholars [Shabbos 119b].

The mitzvah of showing deference towards the wise and the elderly is perhaps even more distance from us in contemporary times, where attitudes of ‘advancement’ and ‘enlightenment’ are deeply engrained within the prevailing societies. Chazal foresaw this downfall a long time ago and warned the near the end of days disrespect towards the elders would run rampant [Sotah 49b].

Respecting the elderly and the wise is one of the 613 Commandments, and it behooves us perhaps now more than ever to study this beautiful Mitzvah’s basic parameters and conceptual underpinnings.

In this learning session we’ll explore the following issues:

- **What is included in the Mitzvah of respecting the elderly and the wise?**
- **What is it, exactly, about wise people that is deserving of respect?**
- **What is it, exactly, about elderly people that is deserving of respect?**
- **What about a person who’s simply a ‘great guy’, even though he’s not old or wise?**
- **Should a young Torah-scholar stand for an old but simple person?**

1 – BASIC SOURCES OLD & WISE

Source 1. Vayikra 19:32

<p>You shall rise before the aged and show deference the elderly; you shall fear your God: I am Hashem.</p>	<p>מִפְּנֵי שִׁיבָה תִּקּוּם וְהִדַּרְתָּ פְּנֵי זָקֵן וַיְרֵאתָ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה</p>
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This verse seems to require from us some action and/or behaviour towards elderly people. There are, however, several concepts which obviously need to be clarified:

- What is the definition of “aged” (שיבה) exactly; how old is that?
- What does it mean to ‘rise’ exactly?
- What does it mean to show deference (והדרת)?
- What is the difference between “שיבה” and “זקן”? Are they two different people?
- What is the connection to the end of the verse “and you shall fear your G-d...”?

Although the Talmud, as well as the classic medieval commentators, explain all these concepts with beautiful finesse, in this learning session we’ll try to focus our attention to some of the main conceptual issue. Let’s begin:

Source 2. Kiddushin 32b

<p>The Sages taught with regard to the verse: “<i>Before the aged you shall stand</i>”: One might have thought that it is obligatory to stand before even a simple elder, therefore, the verse states: “<i>zaken</i>,” and a “<i>zaken</i>” means nothing other than a wise man, as it is stated: “<i>Gather unto Me seventy men of the Elders of Israel</i>” (Bamidbar 11:16).</p> <p>Rabbi Yosi HaGelili says: An “elder (<i>zaken</i>)” means nothing other than one who has acquired wisdom. [He interprets the word <i>zaken</i> as an acronym of the phrase <i>zeh kanna</i>, meaning: This one has acquired]. Elsewhere the word “<i>kanna</i>” is used in reference to wisdom, as it is stated that wisdom says: “<i>The Lord acquired me [kanani] at the beginning of His way</i>” (Mishlei 8:22).</p> <p>Isi ben Yehuda says that the verse: “Before the aged you shall stand,” indicates that even any aged person is included in this mitzva, not only a Sage.</p> <p>(Question): Seemingly, the opinion of Rabbi Yosi HaGelili is the same as that of the first tanna, (as they both say that an elder is a Torah scholar. What does Rabbi Yosei HaGelili add)?</p> <p>(Answer): There is a difference between them regarding one who is young and wise. The first tanna maintains: One who is young and wise is <i>not</i> included in the mitzvah, and Rabbi Yosei HaGelili maintains even one who is young and wise is included.</p>	<p>ת"ר מפני שיבה תקום יכול אפילו מפני זקן אשמאי¹ ת"ל זקן ואין זקן אלא חכם שנאמר אספה לי שבעים איש מזקני ישראל (במדבר יא, טז)</p> <p>רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה שנאמר ה' קנני ראשית דרכו (משלי ה, כב)...</p> <p>איסי בן יהודה אומר מפני שיבה תקום אפילו כל שיבה במשמע</p> <p>רבי יוסי הגלילי היינו תנא קמא איכא בינייהו יניק וחכים ת"ק סבר יניק וחכים לא רבי יוסי הגלילי סבר אפילו יניק וחכים</p>
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¹ זקן אשמאי – נחלקו הראשונים מה היא אשמאי וז"ל התוס': פ"י בקונטרס אשמאי רשע ועם הארץ וקשה דהיכי קאמר איסי בן יהודה דשיבה משמע אפילו זקן אשמאי והלא מצוה אפילו להכותו לבזותו לזלזלו לכך פר"ת אשמאי לשון שוממין כמו פתחי שמאי דמנחות (דף לג:): כלומר בור ועם הארץ כדמתרגמינן והאדמה לא תשם וארעא לא תבור (בראשית מז:ט)

The Gemara proceeds to explain the reasoning of each one of the sages (i.e. why each one maintains their position, how they respectively read the verse according to their opinion, and how they refute the other positions), but for our purposes what's necessary to know is as follows:

- ➔ There are 2 directives described in this verse: 'standing' ("קימה") and 'honoring' ("הידור").
 - 'Standing' means to rise to one's full height²
 - 'Honor' includes all forms of honor: speaking respectfully, tending to needs, not contradicting them, not sitting in their seat, etc.³
 - 'Standing' is a specific, proactive commandment (היובית); i.e. one is obligated to stand up when in the presence of one of these individuals
 - 'Honoring' is a general commandment (קיימית) that one fulfills by doing anything which displays honor/deference; it also obligates a person to refrain from doing anything which is disrespectful towards these people⁴

- ➔ To whom does the biblical mitzvah of rising and giving honor apply?
 - According to the **Tanna Kama** (1st opinion) – Specifically one who is old⁵ and wise⁶
 - According to **R' Yossi haGelili** – Also to one who is young and wise
 - According to **Isi ben Yehudah** – Also to one who is old and ignorant (i.e. not wise)

Let's summarize this in clear visual format:

² כדאיתא בגמ'...

³ כ"כ הח"ח להלכה בפתיחה, עשה ח' וז"ל בהג"ה ומאוד יפלא לי על הראשונים וטור שולחן ערוך יורה דעה, שלא העתיקו מה שכתבו בתורת כהנים מה הוא הידור. וז"ל התורת כהנים: איזו הידור לא ישב במקומו ולא ידבר במקומו ולא יסתור את דבריו, והובא זה ברש"י בחומש ומה שנוכח בקידושין ל"ב לענין מורא אב היינו אפילו אם אביו איננו זקן וחכם וצע"ג עכ"ל

⁴ יש פרטים הרבה בגדרי קימה והידור אבל אכמ"ל, עכ"פ חילוק זה שכתבתי בנוגע היובית וקיימית האריך בספר הנפלא לרעך כמוך מאת הרב דוד אריאב שליט"א עיין קונטרס הביאורים התם סי'טז

⁵ "Old" means 70 according to most halachic authorities, including the Shulchan Aruch. The Ari Z'l, however, maintains that the age is 60.

⁶ "Wise" means specifically in Torah-knowledge, as well as possessing the traits of *Yiras Shamayim* and respect towards Mitzvoths [שו"ע רמג ג: ת"ח המזלזל במצוות ואין בו יראת שמים הרי הוא כקל שבציבור]

<i>Is one required to rise for the following individual?</i>			
AGE	WISDOM	WISE (חכם)	IGNORANT (אשמאי)
	OLD (שיבה)	YES All opinions	NO Tanna Kama & R' Yossi YES Isi ben Yehudah
	YOUNG (יניק)	NO Tanna Kama YES R' Yossi & Isi ben Yehudah ⁷	NO All opinions

The practical halacha follows Isi ben Yehudah.⁸

Therefore, what emerges is that there is a mitzvah to rise **and**⁹ honor both an elderly person even though he is not wise, *as well as* for a wise individual even though he is not old.

We'll now proceed to explain each one of these individuals independently, followed by an analysis as to what to do when the two come in contradiction to each other.

⁷ שיטת יסי בן יהודה לגבי יניק וחכם בעצם נחלקו בזה הראשונים אבל רש"י ורמב"ן ורמב"ם כולם ס"ל שהוא מודה לר' יוסי הגלילי בזה וכן נקטינן להלכה בשו"ע

⁸ קדושין לג., שו"ע יו"ד סי' רמ"ד ס"א

⁹ כדאיתא בסמ"ג במצות עשה י"ג וזה לשונו, וצריך לומר דתקום והדרת קיימי אשיבה שהוא כל שיבה ואזקן ולכן נכתבו בין שניהם ולא כתב תקום מפני שיבה מפני זקן תהדר ואם כן מצונו שציונה תקב"ה. גימיה והידור לשניהם עכ"ל

2 – THE VALUE OF AGE LIFE WISDOM

What is the value of old age? What is it, exactly, that we are honoring?

In other words, according to the other opinions, the emphasis of rising & honoring is clearly associated with the persons wisdom and Torah-knowledge, and this is something that we could appreciate to be worthy of honor. But Isi ben Yehudah holds that the mitzvah applies to someone who is simply just old, that is, even though they are an ignoramus. Why? Why should such an individual be honored; what is it exactly about them that we are showing honour towards??

What do you think?

The Gemera itself alludes to the intrinsic value of old age:

Source 3. Kiddushin 33a

Rabbi Yochanan himself would stand before Aramean, [i.e., gentile, elders]. He said: How many ‘experiences’ have occurred to these individuals!	ר' יוחנן הוה קאי מקמי סבי דארמאי אמר כמה הרפתקי עדו [עברו] עלייהו דהני
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What are these “experiences” that R’ Yochanan was referring to, which are befitting of respect? Rashi explains:

Source 4. Rashi

‘experiences’ – occurrences and hardships, as well as having witnessed many miracles and wondrous things	הרפתקי - מקראות וצרות וראו נסים הרבה ומופתים
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An elderly person certainly has some great wealth under their belt: **life experience** – they have lived through challenges, gained much experience as to how to navigate this world, and they’ve seen the hand of the Creator (‘miracles’!) guiding the experiences of their years. *That’s* worthy of honor!

The classic Sefer haChinuch takes us one phenomenal step deeper:

Source 5. Sefer haChinuch #257

The commandment to honor sages: To honor sages and to rise in front of them, as it is stated "Before an elder rise" - and Onkelos translated [it as], "Before one who understands the Torah rise" - "and honor the face of the aged (zaken)." Chazal explained (Kiddushin 32b), "A <i>zaken</i> is only one who has acquired wisdom." And the reason that the verse expressed, the sage, with the language of "aged," is because <i>the young sage has seen with his wisdom that which the aged has seen from his many years.</i>	מצות כבוד חכמים - לכבוד החכמים ולקום מפניהם שנאמר מפני שיבה תקום. ותרגם אונקלוס: מן קדם דסבר באוריתא תקום. והדרת פני זקן פרשו זכרונם לברכה אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה, וזה שהוציא הכתוב החכם בלשון זקן, הטעם מפני שהבחור החכם ראה בחכמתו מה שראה הזקן ברב שניו.
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<p>It is from the roots of the commandment [that it is] since the main [purpose] of man being in the world is wisdom, so that he can recognize his Creator. Therefore, it is fitting to honor someone who has attained it; and through this, others will be aroused to it. And from this root, Isi ben Yehudah explained in the Gemara in Kiddushin that even a simple aged one - meaning to say that is not wise - is included in this commandment, such that it is fitting to honor him. Because from his many years, he saw and understood some of the works of God and his wonders. And as a result of this, he is fit for honor. And that is what Rabbi Yochanan said there in Kiddushin, "The law is like Isi ben Yehudhah"; and that which they said (Sanhedrin 85a) [that it is] on condition that he is not a man of sins; as if so, he has prevented himself from honor.</p>	<p>משרשי המצוה. לפי שעקר היות אדם נברא בעולם הוא מפני החכמה, כדי שיכיר בוראו, על כן ראוי לבני אדם לכבד מי שהשיג אותה, ומתוך כך יתעוררו האחרים עליה. ומזה השרש פרש איסי בן יהודה בגמרא בקדושין שאפילו זקן אשמאי, כלומר שאינו חכם, הוא בכלל המצוה שראוי לכבדו, מפני שברב שניו ראה והבין קצת במעשי השם ונפלאותיו, ומתוך כך ראוי לכבוד, והינו דאמר רבי יוחנן שם בקדושין הלכה כאיסי בן יהודה, וזה שאמרר (סנהדרין פה.) בתנאי שלא יהיה בעל עברות, שאם כן מנע עצמו מכבוד.</p>
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What a phenomenal explanation! The Sefer haChinuch establishes two fundamental idea's

1) The Common-Denominator

The reason that the Torah phrased the 'wise individual' at the end of the verse as a "זקן", as opposed to the more standard term 'חכם', is to convey to us that the young/wise and the old/ignorant actually share the same underlying quality: life-wisdom.

- a. The Old/Ignorant's life-wisdom was achieved through experience, whereas
- b. The Young/Wise's life-wisdom was achieved through Torah-study!

In other words, *they've arrived at the same destination, but through two different routes!!*¹⁰

2) The Value of Wisdom

'Wisdom' is of value because it allows one to come to a recognition and consciousness of his Creator. Given that this 'G-d consciousness' is the very purpose of life itself (!), it's certainly understandable why one would be required to honor one who has achieved this knowledge!!

¹⁰ כענין זה ממש כת' הכלי יקר על הפסוק אבל הוסיף שעכ"פ ודאי יש חילוק ביניהם וז"ל אבל מ"מ זקן זה שקנה חכמה והשתדל בה כי הדבר הקנוי מורה על השתדלות הקונה שטרם בה לקנותה והוא השכל הנקנה לאדם, ודאי הוא ראוי יותר לכבדו מן השיבה שבאה לו החכמה מעצמה כי רוב ימים ידברו בחכמה עכ"ל. ויש להעיר שלכאורה מעלת חכמת התורה על חכמת השיבה הוא מטעם טהרת מקור החכמה כידוע מכמה וכמה מקורות וא"כ צ"ע תיפוק ליה משו"ה ולמה נקט הכלי יקר טעם אחר

3 – THE VALUE OF WISDOM

Our understanding of the precise value of wisdom, and the honor that is accorded for it, needs to be qualified in lieu of the following Gemara:

Source 6. Kiddushin 33b [Rashi in small font]

<p>A dilemma was raised before them: Regarding one who is both a man's son and his teacher, what is the halacha as to whether that son must stand before his father?</p> <p>(The Gemara answers): Come and hear, as Shmuel said to Rav Yehuda: “Sharp one, stand before your father!” Although Rav Yehuda was a great Torah scholar and taught his father, he was still required to stand before him.</p> <p>(The Gemara rejects this proof): Rav Yechezkel is different, as he was a <u>man of good deeds</u>, and even our Master Shmuel himself would stand before him.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">איבעיא להו בנו והוא רבו הבן רבו של אביו מהו לעמוד מפני אביו</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ת"ש דאמר ליה שמואל לרב יהודה שיננא קום מקמי אבוך ואע"ג דרב יהודה רביה דרב יחזקאל אבוה הוה כדאמרי' לעיל (קדושין לב) אבא לא תתנייא הכי</p> <p style="text-align: center;">שאני רב יחזקאל דבעל מעשים הוה דאפילו מר שמואל נמי קאים מקמיה</p>
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Chazal seem to be indicating here an **additional** quality or type of individual that one is required to honor: a person of good deeds – a ‘*ba'al ma'asim*’. Where does this come from, though; this was not on our chart from earlier?! Since when is there a mitzvah to rise and give honor to one who does good deeds?!? The Ran (Rabbeinu Nissim of Girona) provides us with a foundational explanation:

Source 7. Ran [קדושין דפי הרי"ף יד.]

<p>It appears to me that regarding anyone who is unanimously recognized as a man of action (and this undoubtably would include Rav Yechezkel), we are obligated to stand for such a person. <i>For the whole reason that the Torah obligates in the first place to stand for a wise person is only because his wisdom brings him to action!</i> Rather, the reason that the Torah did not specify “action”, as it did “wisdom” (i.e. “זקן”), is because ones accomplishments in action are not as readily visible to others as much as his superior accomplishments of his wisdom.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">נ"ל שכל שמוחזק בבעל מעשים ואין ספק בעינינו כרב יחזקאל עומדין מפניו שלא צותה התורה בחכם אלא מפני שחכמתה מביאה לידי מעשים אלא שלא פרשה תורה במעשה כמו שפרשה בחכמה לפי שאין הכשר המעשה גלוי כמו שיתרון הכשר החכמה נראה לכל</p>
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Powerful words! The entire concept of the value of ‘wisdom’ as we’ve been describing until now, (that is, the knowledge of G-d, whether it’s been attained through life experience or through study), has an absolutely critical caveat to it: the **wisdom must lead to action**; it has to transfer from the realm of the theoretical in to the realm of the actual.

- Therefore, one who’s ‘walking the walk’, and actually applying their wisdom in an active capacity, is certainly befitting of honor!
- A genuinely ‘wise’ person – a Torah-scholar – then, is one whom we can be rest assured is not only ‘talking the talk’, but ‘walking the walk’ to, and applying their wisdom into their actions: they don’t just have G-d consciousness in their mind, they live it through their actions!

4 – AGE VS WISDOM

Until now we've clarified that underlying value of both age and scholarship is the wisdom that brings one to a recognition of G-d, which manifests itself in the practical realm of one's actions.

What about a scenario where there is a conflict between the two categories of people? When it's young/wise vs old/ignorant, who takes precedence (i.e. who rises for the other)?

What do you think?

Source 8. Rambam, Laws of Torah Study 6:1,9

<p>1. It is mandatory to respect every Torah scholar even though he is not one's teacher, for it is said: "You shall rise up before the elderly and honor the face of the old man". The old man herein spoken of is, the old man who acquired wisdom.</p> <p>9. For one who is old and distinguished in age, though not a scholar, it is obligatory to rise up; even a young scholar should rise before an old man distinguished in age; but the obligation is not to rise before him in full height, only enough to honor him. It is proper to honor even the aged Kuthean (ie non-Jews) and to give him a leaning hand, as it is said: "You shall rise up before the elderly", the inference being that it includes all elderly people.</p>	<p>א. כל תלמיד חכם מצוה להדרו ואף על פי שאינו רבו שפאמר "מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן". זקן זה שקנה חכמה.</p> <p>ט. מי שהוא זקן מפלג בזקנה אף על פי שאינו חכם עומדין לפניו. ואפלו החכם שהוא ילד עומד בפני הזקן המפלג בזקנה. ואינו חייב לעמד מלא קומתו אלא כדי להדרו. ואפלו זקן פותי מהדרין אותו בדברים ונותנין לו יד לסמכו שפאמר "מפני שיבה תקום" כל שיבה במשמע:</p>
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Source 9. Tur, Yoreh Deah 244

<p>The Rambam said "For one who is old and distinguished in age, though not a scholar, it is obligatory to rise up; even a young scholar should rise before an old man distinguished in age; but the obligation is not to rise before him in full height, only enough to honor him. It is proper to honor with words even the aged Kuthean and to give him a leaning hand". In truth, I do not know why he said that one's not required to stand for the aged at his full height, for the obligation towards both is derived from the same verse, and, therefore, just as there is an obligation to rise before the wise individual at ones full height, so too one should be required to do so for an elderly person.</p> <p>Perhaps (the resolution is that) the Rambam did not say that one needn't stand to his full height only regarding a young-scholar: since there is an obligation to act towards him also with honor, therefore, he should not 'degrade' himself by</p>	<p>ל' הרמב"ם מי שהוא זקן מופלג בזקנה אע"פ שאינו חכם עומד לפניו ואפ"י חכם שהוא ילד עומד בפני הזקן המופלג בזקנה ואינו חייב לעמוד כדי קומתו אלא כדי להדרו ואפ"י זקן נכרי מהדרין אותו בדברים ונותנין לו יד לסמכו ע"כ ואינו יודע למה כתב שאינו חייב לקום מפני הזקן כדי קומתו. דהא מהך קרא ילפינן זקן וחכם וכמו שצריך לקום מפני חכם מלא קומתו כך צריך מפני הזקן</p> <p>ואפשר שלא אמר שא"צ לעמוד לפני הזקן מלא קומתו אלא ילד חכם שכיון שצריכין לנהוג בו ג"כ כבוד אין לו</p>
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<p>rising for an elderly person. Instead, he should display at least some form of honor (i.e. rising slightly). Regular people, though, are certainly required to rise to their full height in front of the elderly.</p> <p>This same logic would seem to apply also in the case of two sages, or two elderly people, that is, that one needn't rise (fully) for the other, rather, display at least a degree of honor (i.e. rise slightly).</p>	<p>להתבזות לקום מפני הזקן אלא שיעשה לו הידור אבל כל אדם צריך לקום מפני הזקן מלא קומתו</p> <p>והכי מסתבר נמי בשני חכמים או בשני זקנים שאין אחד צריך לקום מפני חבירו אלא יעשה לו הידור</p>
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The Tur, based on the Rambam, creates for us a compromise of sorts regarding two individuals to whom both of which honor is befitting: they should perform at least some display of honor towards the other. In this regard, rising slightly, says the Rambam, is sufficient.

5 – WISDOM: THE TRUE ACQUISITION

We saw earlier that Chazal say that “זָקֵן” stands for “זֶה שֶׁקָּנָה חֲכָמָה” – One who has acquired wisdom. The obvious question is, though, that the word “חכמה” seems to be missing; all it says is “זה קנה” – ‘one who has acquired’...one who has acquired *what*? Where is the allusion to the acquisition of ‘wisdom’??

What do you think??

The famed Steipler Gaon, R’ Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky *zt’l*, answers this question with such clarity, power, and beauty, that his holy words will require practically no elaboration:

Source 10. Birkas Peretz, Parshas Kedoshim

On the verse “You shall rise in front of the aged”, the Gemara in Kedushin 32b teaches “R’ Yossi haGelili says an ‘elder (zaken)’ means nothing other than one who has acquired wisdom,” and Rashi explains that ‘zakken’ is an acronym for ‘zeh kanna’ (he who has acquired), but the word ‘chochma’ (wisdom) is not alluded to, therefore R’ Yossi haGelili continues with the verse “*The Lord acquired me [kanani] at the beginning of His way*”, that is, we see from this verse that the language of ‘kinyan’ is used in the context of wisdom, so too, regarding the acronym of ‘he who has acquired’ the implication is towards one who has acquired wisdom.

However, ostensibly, if the explanation is because the language of acquisition is found regarding wisdom, we find many other things where the concept of acquisition also applies! For example, regarding Sheis, Chava says, in the verse “*I have acquired a son*”! Also, regarding a field, the verse says, “*the field which Avraham acquired*”! Also, regarding tangible goods, the verse says, “*or if he shall acquire from the hand of one of your nation*”!

It seems, though, that we can explain according to that which is said in the Gemara, Nedarim 41a “ABAYE SAID THAT WE HAVE A TRADITION: A POOR PERSON IS ONLY ONE LACKING IN WISDOM. IN THE WEST, (ERETZ YISRAEL), THEY SAY: ONE WHO HAS THIS (ATTRIBUTE, I.E. WISDOM) IN HIM HAS EVERYTHING IN HIM. ONE WHO DOES NOT HAVE THIS IN HIM, WHAT IS IN HIM? IF HE ACQUIRED THIS, WHAT ELSE IS LACKING? IF HE HAS NOT ACQUIRED THIS, WHAT HAS HE ACQUIRED?” We see from this Gemara, that the acquisition of all other things has no significance and is as if they are non-existent. Therefore, it goes without saying that when the Torah commands one to rise and honor another because of their ‘acquisition’, this could only be referring to the acquisition of Torah (i.e. wisdom for life).

בפסוק מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן, בגמרא קדושין דל"ד ב' ת"ר כו' ריה"ג אומר אין זקן אלא שקנה חכמה פירש"י ז"ל דזקן הוא ל' נוטריקון, והנה תיבת "זקן" הוא נוטריקון "זה קנה" אבל תיבת חכמה אינו מרומז בו, ולפיכך ריה"ג מסיים שנאמר ה' קנני ראשית דרכו פי' ואשכחן לשון קנין גבי חכמה וה"נ הנוטריקון זה קנה המכוון הוא לקנין חכמה,

ולכאורה אם משום דכתיב לשון קנין גבי חכמה הלא אשכחן נמי עוד דברים דכתיב בהם קנין דגבי שת אמרה חוה קניתי איש וגבי שדה כתיב השדה אשר קנה אברהם וגבי מטלטלין כתיב או קנה מיד עמיתך.

ונראה דזה יתבאר ע"פ מה שאמרו בגמרא נדרים דמ"א אמר אביי נקטינן אין עני אלא בדעה במערבא אמרי דדא בי' כולא בי' דא קני מה חסר דא לא קני מה קני ע"ש, הרי דקנין של שאר דברים אין בהם חשיבות כלל וכמאן דליתנהו דמו ולכך פשיטא דכשאמרה תורה לקום ולהדרו מחמת קנינו אין זה אלא בשקנה קנין תורה

The explanation for this, (that is, regarding all other acquisitions except for wisdom the Gemara says “what has he acquired?!”) on the simplest level is that other acquisitions do not have genuine significance and value, as the verse (Koheles 1:3) says “*What real value is there for a man in all the gains he makes beneath the sun?*”

Moreover, regarding all other acquisitions there is no increased value to one’s essential being/self since they are things which are external to the person; the person himself remains unchanged entirely. This is not the case, however, regarding wisdom which is an acquisition in the essential self of the person.

Additionally, all acquisitions except for wisdom are not locked-in and absolute for one can never totally depend on them since they may be either taken away or lost, for who truly knows the turnings of the times. This is not the case, however, regarding one’s wisdom, for this is something that cannot be taken from a person as it is part of his essential being.

Moreover, after a person’s death he will leave of all his acquisitions to others, and what accompanies a person is only his Torah and good deeds which he merited to attain during his life, as it is taught in the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos, and his wisdom remains with him in the world of truth.

Lastly, given that the fundamental purpose for the very creation of the human being is only that he can serve G-d and occupy himself with His commandments, therefore, his acquisition of wisdom is his only true acquisition. Other acquisitions, on the other hand, relate only to this temporal world, and one’s holy soul did not descend from upon high for the transient existence on this world. Therefore, we are taught: “If he’s not acquired this (i.e. wisdom), then what has he acquired?”

וטעמא דעל שאר קנינים חוץ מדעה אמרי' מה קני, בפשוטו היינו משום שאין בהם חשיבות ויתרון וכמש"כ מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו וכו',

ועוד שאין מחמתן עילוי בגוף הגברא כי הם דברים חוץ ממנו אבל הוא בעצמותו לא השביח כלל בזה משא"כ החכמה שהוא קנין בעצמותו של אדם,

ועוד שכל קנינים לבד מקנין חכמה אינו קנין קבוע ומוחלט שהרי אינו בטוח בהם כלל כי שמא יגזלו אותם או יאבדו ממנו ומי יודע תהפוכות הזמן משא"כ החכמה שא"א בשום אופן לגזול ממנו כי היא עצם מעצמותו,

ועוד דלאחר פטירתו יעזוב הכל לאחרים ואין מלוין לו אלא תורה ומע"ט שזכה בהן בחייו כדתנן פ"ו דאבות וחכמתו תשאר אתו לעלמא דקשוט,

ועוד שעיקר תכלית בריאת האדם הוא רק עבודת השי"ת ולעסוק בתורתו ולכן קנין תורה זהו קנינו אבל שאר קנינים מעניני עוה"ז לא בשבילם ירדה נשמתו ממרומים ולכן אמרי' דא לא קני מה קני.

PRACTICAL SCENARIO'S

- 1) Is one *halachically* required to give up their seat on a bus in deference for an elderly individual?
- 2) Tom and Jerry are old pals who really enjoy each others company to just get together and have a good laugh. Tom realizes that Jerry can sometimes get a bit out of hand and end up saying things about people which are inappropriate. During one of their get togethers, Tom brings up Rabbi Sprinkelberg in conversation, speaking about all of the wonderful work the Rabbi does for the community. “Oh, let me tell you a thing or two about that Rabbi...” Jerry intercedes. *What halachic issues should Jerry be aware of when speaking about a respected Torah-scholar such as Rabbi Sprinkelberg?*
- 3) Ari is dropping off his kids at their summer camp, which is being run out of the basement of one of the local shuls, “Shomrei Yom Tov.” After having found a convenient parking spot, Ari brings his kids in, and is back in his vehicle in less than a minute, only to be greeted by an irate individual, who happens to be the gabbai of the shul: “Who do you think you are parking in the Rabbi’s parking spot?!” Ari tries to defend himself “I was only going in for a minute!” The incensed individual responds “Would you sit in the Rov’s seat too for a minute?” *Did Ari in fact do the wrong thing to use the Rabbi’s parking spot even if only for a minute?*
- 4) David and his wife Chaya are walking with their two kids in a double stroller on their way to Chaya’s parents’ home for a Yom Tov meal. As they cross under a bridge where the pedestrian walkway has become so narrow that there’s barely enough room to push the stroller through, Dave notices an older gentleman approaching from the other side of the walkway. He realizes that there is simply not enough room for the pass-by: they can either signal to the elderly person to wait a moment for them to pass, or they’ll have to turn back and wait for their turn. *What should they do?*
- 5) While Aaron is waiting in line at the grocery store, he turns around to see none other than one of his beloved *Rabbeim* standing in the line behind him! After an exchange of pleasantries, Aaron considers to himself whether he is required to allow his Rebbi to go in front of him in line or not. *Is he required to allow his Rebbi to take his spot in line?*
- 6) Brad has had a later start than others in his Jewish learning and finds himself in Yeshiva’s Aish Sameach for his first semester of intensive full-time learning. On the first Thursday of the term, as the Rosh Yeshiva enters the study hall to give a shiur, Brad notices everybody around him rise to their feet, and remain standing until the Rosh Yeshiva begins his speech. “Am I supposed to do the same thing as well? I don’t know how I feel about that...”, wonders Brad. What is the halacha: *is Brad (or anyone else, for that matter) halachically required to stand up for the Rosh Yeshiva as he enters?*