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Special Standing

“*Mi'pnei seivah takum ve'hadarta pnei zaken* – you shall rise before the aged and you shall respect the elderly.” (*Vayikra 19:32*) You can find these words prominently displayed at the front of buses in Israel; it is a mitzvah that reminds us to appreciate seniors. Let us look at the details and try to understand it from different angles.

The classic interpretation, as noted in *Sefer Hachinuch*, is that an elderly person, even one who is not a scholar, has amassed much wisdom and is thus worthy of respect. Life experience tends to impart a particular sagacity; when we encounter someone advanced in age, we can take the opportunity to value their richness of character and learn from what they have been through.

The *Zohar Hakadosh* flips the command around, understanding it as an exhortation to the elderly person himself. Upon approaching the later years of life, one should “stand” and take an accounting of what he has done and what more he wishes to accomplish. *Shaarei Teshuva* bemoans one who has reached middle age and ignores his waning strengths, unaware of his duty to improve and do *teshuvah*.

Old age is a gift. It allows us to focus on what is important and use our energies for

things of importance and purpose. It is a time that often affords particular clarity as to one's core values and beliefs.

A sobering idea is quoted in the name of the Maggid of Vilna. Imagine if Eliyahu Hanavi would come to a cemetery and tell the people that they have exactly twelve hours to live again in this world. We can imagine how the people would spend their time! It is doubtful that they would sit and talk politics or discuss the latest fashions. More likely they would use the time for Torah, mitzvot, chesed, and meaningful interactions with family. Continues the Maggid, what if we have more than twelve hours? How should we spend that time? And no one really knows how much time they have, let us contemplate that and use our time to live wisely.

Life offers the opportunity to learn from others and learn from our encounters. May we use the gift of our days to continue finding inspiration and growing. ■

ARE YOU UNCERTAIN OF HOW TO HANDLE THAT NEW INHERITANCE?

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