

## RESPECT FOR OTHERS

**In this Beit Midrash, we will discuss the question of how one should behave towards people that are different from us, towards a person who is the “other” for us.**

**In what ways are people different? Why did God create people that are so different from one another? What basic respect is every human being entitled to? What are the criteria according to which we should respect other people?**

### **Babylonian Talmud, Taanit, 20**

Our Rabbis taught: A person should always be soft as a reed rather than hard as a cedar. It once happened that Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, riding a donkey along a riverbank. He was exceedingly happy and very proud of himself for having learned so much Torah.

He happened to encounter a man who was extremely ugly.

The man said to him: “Peace be unto you, my teacher.”

But the Rabbi did not return his greeting. He said to him: “Worthless person, how ugly you are! Are all the people of your town as ugly as you?”

The man answered: “I don’t know, but why don’t you go and tell the craftsman who made me: ‘How ugly is this vessel that you made?’”

When the Rabbi realized that he had sinned, he got off the donkey and prostrated himself before the man and said to him: “I have sinned toward you, forgive me!”

The man said to him: “I will not forgive you until you go to the craftsman who made me and say to him: ‘How ugly is this vessel that you made!’”

Rabbi Elazar walked behind the man until he arrived in his town. The people of his town came out to greet him, saying: “Peace be unto you teacher, teacher, master, master!”

“The man asked them: ‘Whom are you calling teacher, teacher?’”

They said: “This man who is following you.”

He said to them: “If this man is a teacher, may there not be many like him in Israel!”

“Why?” they asked.

He said to them: “Because he did such-and-such to me.”

They said to him: “Even so, you should forgive him, for he is a man who is great in Torah.”

He said to them: “For your sakes will I forgive him, provided that he does not make a habit of behaving this way.”

Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon immediately entered and expounded: “A person should always be soft as a reed and should not be hard as a cedar.”

- Do you think that Rabbi Elazar should have behaved in this way?
- Why didn't the ugly man forgive him right away?
- What is the analogy that Rabbi Elazar drew? What is the message?
- In what ways is the ugly man different from Rabbi Elazar? (Note all the different ways that you can think of.)
- What can we learn from the story about how we should treat people who are different from us?

**Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 17:**

"I am a human being and my friend is a human being (he has a heart like mine to distinguish between good and bad).

I work in the city and he works in the field.

I get up early to do my work and he gets up early to do his work.

And if you say that I devote a lot of time to studying Torah, while he devotes very little time to studying Torah – for both of us, both the one that devotes a lot of time and the one that devotes less time – the most important thing is that we both direct our hearts to Heaven."

- What are the differences between the two human beings that the Talmud notes? How are they similar?
- What should the relationship between these two people be? How should they feel towards one another?
- In your opinion, what idea is the Talmud trying to convey?

<p><b>Mishna, Ethics of the Fathers, 4:25:</b> "Rabbi Eleazar Hakappar used to say: Jealousy, lust, and ambition remove a person from the world."</p>	<p><b>Mishna, Ethics of the Fathers, 4:1:</b> "Who is honored? He that honors his fellow human beings, as it is written (I Samuel 2:30) "For those who honor me will I honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt."</p>
	<p><b>Kahati commentary:</b> Because those that respect their fellow human beings bring respect upon themselves. As it says: "For those who honor me will I honor" – this is talking about God, so it is all the more so for human beings; for God, all of whose creatures were created only to honor Him, honors those that honor Him (God honors human beings), so this applies all the more so to human beings.</p>

- What type of honor is discussed in each of these sources?
- Discuss and try to define the kind of respect and honor we are required to show to other human beings.
- Who in your opinion is included in the definition of “human beings?”

**The Green Man** by Yonatan Gefen

If I happen to meet someone

That doesn't understand me or who thinks I'm a child,

If I happened to meet someone

That doesn't know how to laugh or cry,

If I meet someone like that,

I immediately tell him about the green man:

Once upon a time, in a green city, there lived a man, a green man. The green man lived in a green house with a green door and green windows. He had a green wife and two green children. And at night, he slept in his green bed and dreamed green dreams.

One fine green morning, the green man awoke. He put on his green shoes, a green shirt and green trousers. He put a green hat on his head and went out. The green man got into his green car and drove on a green road. On one side of the road, the green man saw a green sea, and on the other, lots of green flowers. It was a lovely day and the green man was happy; he sang green songs and smoked a green cigar with green smoke.

And then, the green man saw a blue man on the road.

The green man stopped his green car and asked the blue man:

“Hey, blue man, what are you doing here?”

“Me?” asked the blue man, “I'm from a different story.”

- To whom does Yonatan Geffen tell the story? Why?
- How does the green man feel towards the blue man?
- Would you want to live in a world that is all the same color, and in which everything you see and do looks exactly the same?
- Why in your opinion did God create a world in which people are so different from one another? What can this teach us?

**Mishna, Ethics of the Fathers, 1: 10**

“Rabbi Eliezer says: May the honor of your fellow man be as dear to you as your own.”

**Midrash Shmuel:**

“Just as you do not want others to show disrespect to you, so should you be careful not to show disrespect to others. And if you see someone insulting your friend, you should view this as if you yourself were insulted.”