

Honoring Grandparents
Aryeh Lebowitz

- I. *Introduction.* In this week's parsha (perek 46) Ya'akov sets forth on his journey to Egypt to see his long lost son, Yoseph. The Passuk tells us that as he set out on his journey, he brought karbanos to "the God of his father Yitzchak". Rashi notes that the passuk does not refer to the God of Avraham, but only the God of Yitzchak. The Medrash (94; 5) deduces from here that one is obligated to honor his father more than his grandfather. The clear implication of the Medrash is that one does have a special obligation to honor his grandparents. We will now examine whether all authorities agree that such an obligation exists. We will also examine the nature and scope of this obligation.
- II. *Opinion Of the Mahari"k.* The Mahari"k (shoresh 44) writes that a grandson who is saying kaddish for his grandfather may not take precedence over a son saying kaddish for his father. The logic behind this ruling is that one says kaddish in fulfillment of the mitzvah of honoring parents, and there is no source for any obligation to honor grandparents. The Mahari"k does acknowledge that the accepted custom is to show more honor to grandparents than to other older people, but he maintains that this is purely a nice custom with no root in Halacha.
- III. *Opinion of the Rema.* The Rema (Y"D 240; 24) cites the opinion of te Mahari"k and disagrees with it. He maintains, based on the above mentioned medrash, that one is obligated to honor his grandparents, but one is obligated to honor his parents more than his grandparents. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his glosses on Shulchan Aruch (ibid.), cites the Responsa Eliyahu Zuta who explains the opinion of the Rema to mean that when one is standing in the presence of both his father and his grandfather, his father must take precedence. However, when one is standing only in the presence of his grandfather, he must honor him in the same way that he is obligated to honor his father.
- IV. *Maternal Grandparents.* The Gemara (Sotah 49a) relates the following story: Rav Ya'akov was raised in the home of his maternal grandfather Rav Acha bar Ya'akov. When the child got a bit older, Rav Acha bar Ya'akov asked him to bring him a cup of water. Rav Ya'akov response was that "I am not your son" (and therefore not obligated to fetch you a cup of water). The Yad Avraham and Be'ur Ha'Gra (on Shulchan Aruch ibid.) both point out that this gemara cannot serve as a proof to the opinion of the Mahari"k because a distinction may be drawn between paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents. Even the Rema, who maintains that one is obligated to honor paternal grandparents, may agree that there is no obligation to honor maternal grandparents. In support of this view, they both cite a Medrash that even though we normally assume that sons of sons are considered like your own sons, sons of daughters are not considered to be like your own sons. (See Torah Temima here who proves at length that the Talmud Bavli disagrees with this assertion and maintains that there is no distinction to be made between the sons of your sons and the sons of your daughters). However, the Ben Ish Chai and the Aruch Hashulchan (240; 44) maintain that there is no distinction to be drawn between paternal and maternal grandparents. The Aruch Hashulchan writes that the refusal of Rav Ya'akov to bring water to his maternal grandfather is not indicative of the absence of an obligation to honor him. Rather, as Rashi explains on that gemara, he merely meant to tell his grandfather that the level of honor he must show him is not equal to the level of honor he must show his father.