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**Sichos in English Classics 28**

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**Torah:  
The Beauty  
of the Elderly**



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## IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

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At the Shloshim of R' Yonah Avtzon A"H, Director of Sichos in English, a resolution was taken to reprint the original weekly Sichos in English publications.

To fulfill this, a weekly booklet including a translation of a *farbrengen* as it was first published will be distributed. Our intention is to reprint the entire set in the near future.

Following the Sichos we will include an addendum with pictures, notes, and insights into the process of its publication.

These weekly publications can be sponsored to honor a loved one, a Yortzeit or a simcha by contacting us at **sichosinenglish@gmail.com**. If you would like to receive this weekly publication to your email, then please use the above email address as well, or you can sign up to receive it on WhatsApp at 917-868-6509.

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# TORAH:

## THE BEAUTY OF THE ELDERLY

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*The following essay is based upon the words of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shlita, at the Farbrengens (Chassidic gatherings) — of Shabbos Parshas Eikev, 20 Av; Motzoei Shabbos Eikev; Shabbos Parshas Re'ey; Rosh Chodesh Elul 5740. The fact that the Rebbe Shlita felt it necessary to speak at length on this subject on four separate occasions demonstrates the seriousness of the problem and how important he feels it is to rectify it by establishing Torah-study groups for the elderly. It is our fervent hope that the publication of this essay will call attention of the wider English-speaking public to this problem and its suggested solution.*

In recent decades, a tendency has developed to view age as a serious handicap. Anyone past fifty is liable to be considered “a bit past it,” and family and friends explain that he isn’t as young as he used to be and should start taking things easier.

Soon the older man starts getting subtle hints that he’d better consider retiring himself honorably now, before it will have to be done for him. Especially if there’s an ambitious young man on his heels eager to elbow him out of his position and hinting to the boss that the old boy has lost his touch. A younger person is considered more capable and cheaper, too, starting out at a lower salary. If the older man must be kept, they’ll do him the favor of giving him some minor niche in the company hierarchy, perhaps even asking his advice occasionally, but of course doing just the opposite.

When retirement age finally arrives, he has come to accept second-class status as a fact of life. The popular view of old people as incompetent and useless has influenced him to the extent that he feels superfluous and a burden to those around him. This has a

negative effect psychologically: he gets depressed and resentful, with a resultant harmful effect on his physical health.

Soon he is sent off to a nursing-home and his children do him a favor and take a half-hour off from golf or the beach to visit him. They constantly remind him, of course, how much it costs them to support him at the nursing-home. Once a year comes Fathers Day and after sending out his secretary to buy a fancy tie, the son speeds off to the nursing-home to present it to his father: "See, Dad, I didn't forget you!" After not more than a half-hour of his valuable time wasted, he speeds back to his own affairs where he can continue with a clear conscience till next year, when he'll buy another tie with an even fancier pattern.

This attitude is even justified in the name of progress. As technology advances, and automation reduces the need for workers in many fields, some become superfluous and need to be laid off. What better than to retire those closest to retirement age, giving them the rare benefit of taking things easy even earlier than usual.

Most unfortunate is the fact that society thereby turns its back on the tremendous stock of hard-learned experience older people possess. They have been through various trials and tribulations, have learned ways of coping with many of life's toughest problems, and can be an invaluable source of sage counsel to younger people lacking this experience. This is true in the family and community; it is also true in business and industry. The older man has learned things the hard way: he built up the business, developed new methods, learned from his mistakes the correct way to get things done.

Such a priceless store of knowledge is acquired only over the course of many years. Here is a man well-qualified to train and advise younger colleagues, who has often experienced similar problems to those they are now encountering and learned how to utilize the situation to best advantage. By heeding his sound advice (without even asking too many questions, since it is backed up by his many years of experience), they can avoid costly mistakes.

But instead of utilizing this valuable asset to the full, instead of showing gratitude for his years of faithful service to the company

and for training the younger workers (perhaps even his own sons and nephews) and showing them the ropes, society now takes the misguided attitude that it is better to replace him with someone younger, who is often unfamiliar with the most elementary fundamentals of the job. Quality is sacrificed for the doubtful advantage of youth.

Retired people, who are growing in number as life-expectancy increases, soon assimilate society's view of them as useless and superfluous, especially if they were forcibly retired to make way for younger men. If they don't enter an old-age home, they root around aimlessly between one meal and the next, between activities at the senior citizens' center and maybe a little shopping or a stroll down the block. Otherwise they are at a complete loss to know what to do with themselves.

In the nursing-homes, too, the problem is just as bad. The staff are at their wits' end to find new activities and original ways of keeping the old people pleasurably occupied.

It is great pity that this attitude has become so deeply engraved in the country's mentality. All strata of society, up to and including the government of the country, could benefit immeasurably from the collective experience and expertise of these elder people. Perhaps the full burden of work should indeed be alleviated for them as their strength ebbs and health sometimes fails. But to retire them completely from active life is both unkind to them and shortsighted for society.

Younger men who share this attitude would be well-advised to consider the likely consequences. In the present century, trends, especially undesirable ones, tend to gain momentum more and more rapidly, just as jobs that used to take days and years can now be done in a fraction of the time. There is a strong possibility that those who are now young will be called old by the next generation at least ten years earlier than the age at which they now consider their own predecessors old!

In fact this is alluded to in the Fifth Commandment: "Honor your father and mother so that your days may be lengthened upon the earth that the L-rd your G-d gives you." If you want your own

days lengthened, in respected and useful contribution to society, then honor and respect your own elders now.

That one of the first Ten Commandments given to the Jewish People at Mt. Sinai, and engraved upon the Two Tablets of stone, is respect for elders, is a mark of its prominent place in the Torah. The Torah viewpoint on this is totally opposite to that of modern society. Longevity and old age are considered in the Torah one of the greatest possible blessings. “Many years bring wisdom” (*Iyov* 32:7), says the Biblical verse. “The older elderly scholars get, the more settled their minds become,” says the Talmud (End *Kinnim*). Members of the Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme Court and governing body during the Biblical and Mishnaic eras) would normally have to be aged over seventy. The Torah (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 244:1) tells us to rise before old people aged seventy or older, even if they are not Torah-scholars, out of respect “for the trials and tribulations they have undergone” (*Talmud Kiddushin* 33a).

The concept of retirement simply does not exist in the Torah. From birth till his last moment, the Jew is permanently enlisted in the “Armies of G-d,” for he is “created to serve his Master” and cannot resign his post. On the contrary, the later years of life, free of pressures to provide for a growing family, free from the hustle and bustle of the business world, are an excellent opportunity for intensified Torah-study. Now one can finally make up for time lost during the younger years.

One who is forced to retire, instead of wallowing in resentment, should reflect on the true reason for this having happened to him. The company’s reasons are not important. There can be no doubt that the Creator, who guides and controls the world, has placed him in a situation where his extra leisure time may be utilized to the fullest.

When he was in the world of cutthroat competition, business was often not conducted in the most ethical manner. He was constantly subject to temptation to encroach upon the domain of others, to slander and to deal dishonestly, and other vices enumerated in Jewish Civil Law (*Choshen Mishpat* — Section IV of *Shulchan Aruch*).

Now, instead of burdening his mind with supervising his subordinates or flattering the directors, instead of racking his brains for ways to make more money or keep the business afloat on non-existent foundations, he can truly be his own boss and devote several hours a day to Torah-study. Fortunately his health is still good, and he will probably find that his mind has mellowed over the years and that he understands the subject-matter better than would a younger person.

To facilitate Torah-study among the elderly, it would be a good idea to create a suitable framework by establishing special Torah-study groups with fixed times of study, where older people could learn in the companionship of others of similar age. Subjects of study should be chosen in consultation with the participants in accordance with their level of knowledge, and should also include the weekly Torah-portion which can unite all such groups throughout the world. The groups should gather for study before or after one of the three daily prayers, and a charity-box should be placed upon the table at the time of study (and, better still, in addition, a free-loan fund founded in conjunction with the study-group). Thus would all groups be united in a worldwide community based on the “Three pillars upon which the world stands: Torah, *Avodah* (prayer) and *Gemilus Chassadim* (charitable deeds).”

It would also be advisable to give the study-groups an attractive name to encourage older people to join. A good name would be “*Colel*” — the name given these days to institutions of learning for young men after marriage. These groups should also be given the extra name of “*Tiferes Zekenim*” (Beauty of the Elderly), reminiscent of “*Tiferes Bachurim*” groups established in Soviet Russia with the assistance of the Previous Rebbe זצ”ל in the 1920’s, to enable those unable to enroll in the underground Yeshivos to continue their Torah-study on a part-time basis. Also, since this proposal was initiated on 20 Av, anniversary of the passing (in 1944) of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneerson\* (Rav of Yekaterinoslav in the Ukraine till 1939), who bravely dedicated his life, in face of tremendous difficulties and dangers, to advancement of Torah-study for those of

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\* Father of the present Lubavitcher Rebbe, *Shlita*.

all ages including the elderly, it would only be fair to add his name, too - *Colel Tiferes Zekenim Levi Yitzchok*. However, since the main intention of this proposal is to increase Torah-study, the name is not of prime importance.

It would encourage greater and more regular attendance, if a weekly or monthly monetary allowance would be provided — it would stimulate a greater sense of obligation among the participants. But again, this is not essential, but depends upon local circumstances — whatever is considered most likely to have the best results.

Old-age homes, where the staff are so desperately seeking new ways of keeping the old people occupied and happy, are especially suitable for introducing these Torah-study groups.

Similar groups should be founded for women, *not* called “*Colel*” but under the name “*Tiferes Chochmas Noshim*” (Beauty of the Women’s Wisdom). Although the duty of Torah-study does not apply to women in the same way as it does to men, yet there has never been a more appropriate time to foster Torah-study among them as the present. Women possess qualities of kindness, gentleness and sympathy in greater measure than men. They are eminently well-suited to influence other women, including younger women and even girls, to come closer to Torah and Mitzvos. They should study the laws of those Mitzvos that apply to women, especially *Kashrus* and *Taharas Hamishpachah*, and also the weekly Torah-portion and basic concepts of Jewish belief. Then in addition to their aforementioned native qualities, they will be armed also with a wealth of Torah explanation that can add further force to their arguments. This can be used to help those to whom they speak to establish their households upon the foundations of Torah Judaism and to avoid practices that run contrary to its spirit. They can also encourage their children or grandchildren to give their own children a Jewish education and can even help to avoid potential cases of intermarriage.

Implementation of this proposal will contribute considerably toward removing older people’s feelings of inferiority to others. Instead of depression at their “sorry” lot, they have the choice of



making their later years truly “golden years” by filling them with Torah-content — developing their feelings and deeds of kindness and charity towards others, and particularly Torah-study. And Torah has the unique quality that once one delves into it, one comes to truly appreciate its depth and to enjoy studying it.

An old person can then be a respected member of the community, studying Torah on a daily basis with others of similar age and thoroughly enjoying every minute of it. He will feel confident to approach a younger man experiencing problems and, with a friendly pat on the back, explain how he went through similar rough times and learned not to despair. At the same time, he can tell him a suitable saying of our Sages or a story from Talmud or Midrash, and encourage him to view things optimistically. In this role the older man will certainly feel better than when he was embroiled in the heat of the business-world and had no time for other people.

The main point to bear in mind in all this is to increase Torah-study among all Jews, particularly the elderly. We must also foster a new approach towards old people, for they have unnecessarily been made to suffer, through no fault of their own, by the modern short-sighted attitude towards the aged.

Our Sages tell us (*Yalkut Shimoni, Eichah* 1034) that when one studies Torah, G-d Himself, Giver of the Torah, repeats the same Torah passage opposite him. And when the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, the Midrash tells us that G-d appeared to the Jewish people as a “kindly, white bearded patriarch, full of mercy.”

An old person invited to enter one of these Torah-study groups should visualize how G-d Himself stands opposite him, repeating the same words of Torah that he says or hears, and that G-d is also the “Ancient of Days,” sharing with him the attribute of oldness that so becomes Him. May they, too, realize how old age can be made becoming and respected, as our Rabbis translate the word “Zaken” (old) — “Zeh Shekanah Chochmah” (one who has acquired wisdom) — by studying Torah and acquiring its wisdom, and using it to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.



# ADDENDUM

## Behind the Scenes of Sichos in English

### The First Essays

This week we bring you a letter written to the Rebbe by Rabbi Yonah Avtzon in the early days of SIE, in regards to essays that were being published in that time, including the essay we bring you this week on "Torah: the beauty of the elderly".

נת' רח"ה.  
ודבר בעתו -  
בחדוש כסלו - הוא הודש הגאולה,  
ובימים שבין יו"ד-וי"ט בו.  
אוכיר עה"צ.

### SICHOS IN ENGLISH

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ס"ק של חתומה

כ"ק אמת' שלי"ק

ב"ס

In the last half year Sichos In English has begun putting out Kuntreisim in typeset form on issues that the Rebbe Shlita has spoken on. Beginning with a series of pamphlets on the topic of "family planning" we have since published Torah: The Beauty of the Elderly (on the topic of Tiferes Zekanim) and just recently we have published a Kuntres on Education, Intermarriage and Complacency (concerning Conventions).

Due to the overwhelming interest into these Kuntreisim we are planning to publish many other Kuntreisim on the different issues that the Rebbe Shlita addresses. At the present time we are in the midst of preparing a Kuntres based on the farbrengen of 6 Tishrei for print.

This past Erev Shabbos I went to print the Kuntres, Education, Intermarriage and Complacency to give out on Shabbos in Shul. At the printer I met the Rav of Merkoz HaTorah who immediately recognized me as a Lubavitcher. He asked me what I was doing at a printer an hour before Shabbos, and I told that I had come to print a Sichah of the Rebbe Shlita to give out on Shabbos. After inquiring about which particular Sichah was being printed, he asked for a copy for himself. Glancing through the Kuntres he was overwhelmed to see in English a Sichah on such a crucial issue that he immediately gave me his address to send him all the Sichos that were published in the past and to mail him the Sichos in the future.

We have been trying to make these Kuntreisim compatible to the Jewish English speaking public; with the hope that when we have 20-30 Kuntreisim we would put out a special book on these vital issues. We would like to ask the Rebbe Shlita's advice if we should now look into the distributing market to see what kind of demand there might be for such a Sefer, and if it would be permissible to consider working together with a publisher on such a project; or if we should only talk with those who have a direct connection in publishing Lubavitch Seferim. We would also like to ask the Rebbe Shlita's advice, if we should only work on Kuntreisim from current Sichos of the Rebbe Shlita or if we could also give out Kuntreisim on issues that the Rebbe Shlita spoke about in the past.

In regard to monetary matters: When Sichos In English started 3 years ago all the work was done voluntarily, thus we were able to meet our budget through subscriptions and small contributions. With the growth of the organization we saw that the only way we could strive higher was through paying writers, editors, typesetting Kuntreisim, giving out Ma'amarim (Bosi L'Gani, Issa B'Medrash Tehillim, Lecha Dodi, etc.), notwithstanding any financial burdens. At the present time our subscription covers a minor fraction of our budget and the bulk of which, comes from dedications and donations. With our deficit ever-growing we ask the Rebbe Shlita for his blessings on this matter; thus enabling us to engage more writers and ultimately give out Seferim on many different works of the Rebbe Shlita.

י"ב | י"ג | י"ד | י"ה | י"ו | י"ז | י"ח | י"ט | כ' | כ"א | כ"ב | כ"ג | כ"ד | כ"ה | כ"ו | כ"ז | כ"ח | כ"ט | ל' |

The Rebbe responded with the words:

נת' ות"ח.  
ודבר בעתו -  
בחודש כסלו - הוא חודש הגאולה,  
ובימים שבין יו"ד-וי"ט בו.  
אזכיר עה"צ.

**It has been received and many thanks.**

**And it is in its appropriate time. As it is the month of Kislev,  
which is the month of redemption, and in the days between the  
10th and 19th of the month.**

**I will mention it at the resting place of my father in law.**

## **Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*whose teachings and example are a never-ending source of life for all mankind. May we continue in his paths, and complete the mission with which he has charged us: to make the world conscious of the imminent Redemption and to prepare an environment in which this ideal can be realized.*



**ולעילוי נשמת**

**ר' יהודה ב"ר משה ע"ה**

**קימבל**

**נפטר י"ט מנחם אב תשל"ז**



**נדפס ע"י משפחתו שיהיו**



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