

Chaim suddenly became very ill and was rushed to the hospital. Tragically, the doctors were unable to save him and he died. His soul went to heaven and pleaded before Hashem that his time shouldn't have come yet. "I have too many things to do!"

So Hashem listened to his arguments and said, "Okay -- you're going to live another 25 years. Back to earth you go."

Chaim fully recovered and when he left the hospital, he decided that this time around he was really going to live! First he went to a hair stylist and dyed his gray hair -- what he had left of it -- black -- and covered up his big bald spot with a toupee. Then he had botox injections to remove the wrinkles from his forehead. Finally, he decided that he was going to have the nose job that he always wanted.

As Chaim was walking out of the plastic surgeon's office, though, tragedy struck: He stepped off the curb, and was hit by a bus! He was killed immediately, and his *neshama* went back to heaven. Chaim was distraught, and demanded to know why Hashem had ended his life after he was promised another 25 years.

Hashem turned to the man and said, "Chaim, I'm so sorry! I didn't recognize you!"

Everybody wants to live a long time, but nobody wants to be old. Ever notice how we joke about getting old? It seems the older people are, the more they joke about it.

George Burns said, "Once you get to be one hundred, you've made it. You almost never hear of anyone dying who is over one hundred."

Bernard Baruch said, "To me, old age is always 15 years older than I am."

Bob Hope "I've discovered the secret of eternal youth. I lie about my age."

Why do we joke about old age? On a certain level, I think it's because the older we get, the closer we come to facing our mortality. And in Western society, that's a very uncomfortable thing to have to do. Fortunately for us, the Torah provides guidance on the meaning of aging, and how we should relate to those who are Senior Citizens -- otherwise known as 'The Chronologically Gifted'

The beginning of Parshas Kedoshim contains a verse which presents a very interesting juxtaposition of mitzvos: "Every man shall revere his mother and his father and you shall observe My Sabbaths -- I am Hashem your G-d." [Vayikra 19:3]. Rashi wonders about the connection between Shabbos observance and revering one's parents. He explains that Hashem is saying:

"Although you should (honor) & revere your parents, if your parents should say to you, 'Desecrate the Shabbos', do not listen to them. And so too it is with regard to other commandments." This is a basic and well-known halachic principle, a principle of Jewish law.

However, there's another message here as well. As Jews we believe that G-d created the world in six days and that on the seventh day He rested. Before Creation the world didn't exist and obviously people didn't exist -- but not everyone believes this. The Darwinian Theory suggests that human beings evolved, and rejects the "story of Creation" as spelled out in the beginning of the Book of Bereshis. And we, of course, reject Darwin's theory.

In the past 200 years, four individuals had a profound influence on the world: Darwin, Marx, Einstein & Freud. 3 of them were Jewishand one of them was wrong!

But what is a practical difference between Darwin's theory of evolution, and the Torah account of Creation?

One difference is: among older and younger people, who needs to honor who? Do older people need to honor younger people, or should younger people need to honor older people?

If you believe that man has evolved from the lower forms of life, then presumably the further one gets away from that first slime cell, the higher the form of life one would expect. And if man evolved from a monkey, then the first generations of men were not very far removed from monkeys. Later generations have "evolved more" than earlier ones. And therefore parents should honor their children.

But if on the other hand, -- as we believe -- the Almighty created the First Man (person), it follows that the First Man was the most perfect human being that the world has ever seen. He was without flaws because he was made by the Master of the Universe Himself. You can't improve on that! As we get further away from that First Man, man diminishes in stature. If we are going down, rather than up, it is clear that the younger generations need to honor the previous generations.

The story is told of a famous American rabbi named Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky. Rav Yaakov -- at the time of this story, already an older man -- was flying to attend a conference in Israel and on the flight was accompanied by one of his sons. As we all know, the trip to Israel is a long one, and on the plane Rav Yaakov's son waited on him hand and foot. There was a person on the plane sitting nearby who was astounded by the love, respect, and dedication the son was showing to his father. At one point, he said to Rav Yaakov "My children do not treat me like that. What is your secret in child-raising that your son treats you like a King?"

Rav Yaakov told him:

We teach our children that the further we are removed from Sinai, the further away from greatness they are. Therefore, our children understand that the older generation is a "better generation" and therefore they honor and respect us. "If your children do not act this way," Rav Yaakov told the gentleman on the plane, "perhaps it is because they feel that they are more advanced than you are and that on the contrary, you should honor them."

With this explanation the question we raised in the aforementioned verse is answered: "(Honor) revere your parents." Why? It is because "My Sabbaths you shall keep – I am Hashem your G-d." There is a link between these two parts of the verse. Since there was a Creation – which you testify to by observance of Shabbos on the seventh day of the week, then parents who are a generation closer to creation and to the original man who was created by the Almighty need to be revered by the younger generation!

What is old age for?

If you go to a shopping mall, you may try to find a certain store by looking at mall directory. How do you orient yourself to the directory? By looking for the arrow that says, 'You are here.' Grey hair serves two functions. When you see grey hair in the mirror, it communicates the message of: "The clock is ticking." When you see grey hair on others, it serves as a type of pointing arrow that says, 'Wisdom here!'

I joked before about calling senior citizens 'chronologically gifted.' Look up 'gifted' in your nearest thesaurus and you'll find such synonyms as talented, ingenious, superior, or well-endowed. Age plus gifted equals unparalleled knowledge and wisdom. And that's why we honor those who are older.

Today we have the privilege of joining with many friends and family who have come together to honor Marian Walters. Marian is a remarkable lady who has been blessed to achieve a remarkable milestone -- her 90th birthday. And Marian has led an astounding, remarkable life.

Marian was born in Manheim, Germany as an only child of loving parents. Marian's father ran a chocolate factory, so she was in the enviable position of getting all the broken chocolate. As time went on, however, things turned from good to bad, and then from bad to worse. The family business became boycotted by the Germans, despite Marian's father having served in the German army in WW1. Marian's parents were desperately seeking an opportunity to send her to Israel, Holland or England, but no real options existed.

Finally, they found a family in England willing to take Marian. So at the age of 16, on her birthday, Marian was sent off to England to live with a Jewish family named Freeman. Marian's mother couldn't bear to see her off, so only her father took her to the train station. Marian was on the last Jewish children's transport out of Europe. Her parents were killed in Auschwitz. As Divine Providence would have it, Marian would almost certainly not have survived if she went to Holland.

Marian came to England not knowing more than a handful of English words. With the Freeman family she worked full time as a housekeeper and nanny -- she didn't attend school -- and worked attending to their 3 children. (Marian has always remembered and appreciated the life-saving generosity of the Freeman family and stayed in contact with them over the years.) Marian learned English by listening each night to the BBC. She was lonely, and cried every night for a year.

Life was difficult for Marian. When we think of a typical 16 year old American girl today, her major concerns might be her clothing, her hair, what movie she'll be seeing this weekend, and getting her parents to send her to summer camp. For 16-year-old Marian, however, life was quite different. She lived through the trauma of the Blitz, with bombs falling every night. Unlike other children, because she was German, the English wouldn't let her go to the countryside.

Marian lost her parents, her home, and lived in a strange country with a different language for nine years. But Marian never became bitter...and never gave up.

Marian met her bshert, Kurt, also an only child from Germany, in England. They met on a Shabbos afternoon, later got married, and found their way to the U.S., in 1947. A 5 floor walkup in Brooklyn wasn't for the Walters family, especially with two young children. The JF & CS said there were too many Jews in Chicago, so it was suggested to Kurt and Marian that they go to a city named 'St. Louis.' So without knowing anyone, and to our great fortune, the Walters came to St. Louis. Marian worked side by side with Kurt in his business as together they raised Evelyn and Vivian and shared a wonderful, close marriage for 50 years.

Marian is a remarkably positive, kind, non-judgemental woman. A typical comment you'll hear about Marian -- she of the impeccable manners and pleasant disposition -- is, "Such a lady". From the cleaning lady to her immediate family, it can be truly said that everyone loves Marian.

In our remarks earlier this morning, we spoke of the importance of honoring the elderly. We need look no further than at Marian's extended family -- the Solomons and Zarkowskys -- to see this great mitzvah put into action. We have seen over the years here at Nusach Hari how Vivian and Alan, with great love, have treated Marian with honor befitting the dignified woman that she is. And the apple doesn't fall far from the trees of the Solomons and Zarkowskys: All of Marian's grandchildren bestow upon her great kavod and honor.

I'd like to conclude with the following story.

A woman of extremely advanced years was being interviewed for a television show. At one point, her interviewer asked, "What was life like in your day?"

With a coolly polite smile, the older woman said, "This is my day."

Marian -- this is your day! Mazel to to you on this milestone event. We thank you and your entire family for allowing us to celebrate with you this great simcha. Good Shabbos