

The Most Important Talmudic Passages
Class 4 – Honoring Parents, Personal Initiative vs. Obedience
Melton Gesher at JCC, October 31, 2012
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Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kidushin, page 31a – b

It was asked of Rav Ulla: How far does the honour of parents [extend]? — He replied: Go forth and see what a certain gentile, Dama son of Netinah by name, did in Ashkelon. The Sages once desired merchandise from him, in which there was six-hundred-thousand [gold denarii] profit, but the key was lying under his father's pillow, and so he did not trouble him. Rav Yehudah said in Shmuel's name: Rabbi Eliezer was asked: How far does the honour of parents [extend]? — Said he, Go forth and see what a certain gentile, Dama son of Netinah by name, did in Ashkelon. The Sages sought [to buy from him] jewels for the ephod, at a profit of six-hundred-thousand [gold denarii] — Rav Kahana taught: at a profit of eight-hundred-thousand — but as the key was lying under his father's pillow, he did not trouble him. The following year the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him his reward. A red heifer was born to him in his herd. When the Sages of Israel went to him [to buy it], he said to them, 'I know you, that [even] if I asked you for all the money in the world you would pay me. But I ask of you only the money which I lost through my father's honour.'

Now, Rabbi Hanina observed thereon, If one who is not commanded [to honour his parents], yet does so, is thus [rewarded], how much more so one who is commanded and does so! For Rabbi Hanina had said: He who is commanded and does [the command], is greater than he who does it though not commanded.

Rav Joseph said: Originally, I thought, that if anyone would tell me that the halachah agrees with Rabbi Yehudah, that a blind person is exempt from the precepts, I would make a banquet for the Rabbis, seeing that I am not obligated, yet I do them. Now, however, that I have heard Rabbi Hanina's dictum that he who is commanded and does [the command] is greater than he who does it though not commanded; on the contrary, if anyone should tell me that the halachah does not agree with Rabbi Yehudah, I would make a banquet for the Rabbis.

When Rav Dimi came, he said: He [Dama son of Netinah] was once wearing a gold embroidered silken cloak and sitting among Roman nobles, when his mother came, tore it off from him, struck him on the head, and spat in his face, yet he did not shame her.

Avimi, son of Rabbi Abbahu recited: One may give his father pheasants as food, yet [this] drives him from the world; whereas another may make him grind in a mill and [this] brings him to the world to come!

Rabbi Abbahu said: As an example, my son Avimi has fulfilled the precept of honour. Avimi had five ordained sons in his father's lifetime, yet when Rabbi Abbahu came

and called out at the door, he himself speedily went and opened it for him, crying, 'Yes, yes,' until he reached it. One day he asked him, 'Give me a drink of water.' By the time he brought it he had fallen asleep. Thereupon he bent and stood over him until he awoke. It worked out that [during that time] Avimi succeeded in coming up with a [nice] interpretation of A song of Asaph (Ps. LXXIX, 1).

Rav Ya'acov bar Abuha asked Abaye: 'I, for instance, for whom my father pours out a cup [of wine] and my mother mixes it on my returning from the house of study, what am I to do?' — 'Accept it from your mother,' he replied: 'but not from your father; for since he is a scholar, he may feel affronted.'

Rebbi Tarfon had a mother for whom, whenever she wished to mount into bed, he would bend down to let her ascend, and when she wished to descend, she stepped down upon him. He went and boasted thereof in the school. Said they to him, 'You have not yet reached half the honour [due]: has she then thrown a purse before you into the sea without your shaming her?'

When Rav Joseph heard his mother's footsteps he would say: 'I will arise before the approaching Shechinah.'

Talmud of the Land of Israel, Tractate Kidushin, chapter 1, halacha

A man once fed his father on pheasants (which were very expensive). On his father's asking him how he could afford them, he answered: 'What business is it of yours, old man; grind (i.e., chew) and eat!' On another occasion it happened that a man was engaged in grinding in a mill, when his father was summoned for royal service. Said his son to him, 'You grind for me, and I will go in your stead, the royal service being very hard.'