

Sacred Aging: Getting Old and Being Old

- Are there any conversations about aging or getting old in the Hebrew Bible and/or Rabbinic texts? – Well of course there is!

Talmud Bavli, *Sanhedrin 17a*

Rabbi Yohanan says: They place on the Sanhedrin only men of high stature, and of wisdom, and of pleasant appearance, and of suitable age...

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן : אֵין מוֹשִׁיבִין בְּסִנְהֶדְרִי אֶלָּא בְּעָלֵי קוֹמָה, וּבְעָלֵי חֻכְמָה, וּבְעָלֵי מַרְאֶה, וּבְעָלֵי זְקֻנָּה...

Commentary on Talmud Bavli, *Sanhedrin 17a*

This does not mean that the judges must be extremely old, as such people are in fact unfit for the Sanhedrin. They simply must not be very young individuals who have not yet experienced the difficulty of raising children (*Rabbeinu Yitzhak of Dampierre*).

Leviticus 19:32

You shall rise (stand) before the aged and show deference to the old (to honor the face of the old); you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

מִפְּנֵי שִׁיבָה תִּקּוּם וְהִדָּרְתָּ פָנָי זָקֵן וְיִרְאתָ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Talmud Bavli, *Kiddushin 32b*

The Sages taught ... One might have thought that it is obligatory to stand before a simple (*ashmai*) elder. Therefore, the verse states: “elder,” and an “elder” means nothing other than a wise man, as it is stated: “Gather unto Me seventy men of the Elders of Israel, whom you know to be the Elders of the people” (Numbers 11:16).

Rabbi Yosei HaGelili says: An “elder (*zaken*)” means nothing other than one who has acquired wisdom. He interprets the word *zaken* as a contraction of the phrase *zeh kanna*, meaning: This one has acquired.

Elsewhere the word *kanna* is used in reference to wisdom, **as it is stated** that wisdom says: “**The Lord acquired me (*kanani*) at the beginning of His way**” (Proverbs 8:22).

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן : "מִפְּנֵי שִׁיבָה תִּקּוּם". יָכוֹל אֶפְיָלוּ מִפְּנֵי זָקֵן אֲשָׁמַאי – תִּלְמוּד לֹא מֵרָא : "זָקֵן", וְאֵין זָקֵן אֶלָּא חָכָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר : "אֶסְפָּה לִּי שְׁבַעִים אִישׁ מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל". רַבִּי יוֹסֵי הַגְּלִילִי אוֹמֵר : אֵין זָקֵן אֶלָּא מִי שֶׁקָּנָה חֻכְמָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר : "ה' קָנָנִי רִאשִׁית דְּרַכּוֹ".

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Commentary on Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 32b

According to Rashi, this term comes from the word for guilt, *ashma*, and is referring to an elderly sinner.

Most commentaries dispute this interpretation, explaining that if he is a sinner, one certainly is not obligated to show him any respect; rather, he should be disrespected and punished (*Tosafot*; *Rid*; *Nimmukei Yosef*).

According to these commentaries, the word *ashmai* comes from the term *shemama*, meaning wasteland, and refers to an ignoramus, who is devoid of Torah knowledge.

A third opinion combines these ideas and states that this individual has not learned Torah, and this is his sin (*Rabbeinu Hananel ben Shmuel*).

And, some explain the term *ashmai* according to the opinion of Isi ben Yehuda, is that one has to stand before any elderly person, including a gentile (*Sefer Haredim*).

Rambam Sefer HaMada, Hilchot Talmud Torah 6:9

We should stand before a very old individual, even if not a sage. Even a sage who is young is obligated to stand before an old individual of exceedingly advanced age. Nevertheless, one need not rise to full height, and need only show some token of respect.

Even an old gentile should be addressed with words of respect, and a hand should be extended for support, as [Lev 19:32] states: "Stand up before a white-haired." Every white-haired individual is included therein.

What does "age," "elderly," "old" mean? ...What is "old"? Is old a good thing?

Midrash Rabbah 65:9 & Genesis 24:1

Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. (Gen 24:1)

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וַיְהִי בְרָךְ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל:

R. Judah b. Simon said: Abraham requested the appearance of old age, pleading before God: Sovereign of the Universe! When a man and his son enter a town, none know whom to honor! But if You will crown the father with the appearance of old age, they will know who to honor.

Said the Holy One to Abraham: You have asked well, and so it will begin with you. We see that from the beginning of the Book until here old age is not mentioned, but when Abraham arose, the appearance of old age was granted to him: And Abraham was old, well stricken in age (Gen 24:1).

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...Is getting old a positive or negative development in Judaism?...

Pirke Avot 4:20

Elisha ben Avuyah said: He who learns as a child, what is he like? Like ink written on new paper. And he who learns as an old man, what is he like? Like ink written on blotted paper.

אֵלִישָׁע בֶּן אֲבוּיָה אָמַר, הַלּוֹמֵד יְלָד לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה, לְדִיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נֶיָר חֲדָשׁ.
וְהַלּוֹמֵד זָקֵן לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה, לְדִיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נֶיָר מְחוּק.

Rabbi Yose bar Yehuda of Kefar haBavli said: He who learns from the young, what is he like? Like one who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from his winepress. And he who learns from the aged, what is he like? Like one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.

רַבִּי יוֹסִי בַר יְהוּדָה אִישׁ כֶּפֶר הַבְּבִלִי אָמַר, הַלּוֹמֵד מִן הַקְטָנִים לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה, לְאוֹכֵל עֲגָבִים קְהוֹת וְשׁוֹתֶה יַיִן מִגֶּתוֹ. וְהַלּוֹמֵד מִן הַזְקֵנִים לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה, לְאוֹכֵל עֲגָבִים בְּשׁוּלוֹת וְשׁוֹתֶה יַיִן יָשׁוּן.

Rabbi said: Do not look at the jar, but at what is in it; there are new jars full of old wine, and old jars which do not contain even new wine.

רַבִּי אָמַר, אַל תִּסְתַּכֵּל בַּקִּנְיָן, אֲלָא בַּמָּה שֶׁישׁ בּוֹ. יֵשׁ קִנְיָן חֲדָשׁ מְלֵא יָשׁוּן, וְיָשׁוּן שֶׁאֵפֶלּוּ חֲדָשׁ אֵין בּוֹ :

Blessing 13 of the Weekday Amidah

עַל הַצְדִּיקִים וְעַל הַחֲסִידִים וְעַל זְקֵנֵי עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְעַל פְּלִיטַת סוֹפְרֵיהֶם,
וְעַל גְּרֵי הַצֹּדֵק וְעַלֵּינוּ, יְהִמּוּ נָא רַחֲמֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ...
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מְשַׁעַן וּמְבַטֵּחַ לַצְדִּיקִים.

On the righteous, on the pious, on the **elders** of Your people the House of Israel, and on the remnant of their scholars, and on the righteous converts and on ourselves – may Your compassion be aroused, Adonai, our God...

Blessed are You, Adonai, Support and Assurance of the righteous.

Proverbs 16:31

The hoary head is a crown of glory, it is found in the way of righteousness.

עֲטֹרַת תְּכַפָּאֶרֶת שִׁיבָה בְּדֶרֶךְ צְדָקָה תִּמְצָא:

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Midrash Rabbah 59:1

Rabbi Meir once went to Mamla. Seeing that the people there were all black-haired, he asked them: 'From what family are you: perhaps from Eli, of whom it is written, *And all the increase of thy house shall die young men* (I Sam. 2:33)?'

'Master, pray for us,' they beseeched him. '

'Go and engage in righteousness, and you will attain to old age,' he told them.

'What is the proof? *The hoary head is a crown of glory*, it is found in the way of righteousness.' Where do we learn this? From Abraham; because it is written of him, *To do righteousness* (Gen. 18:19), and he attained old age: AND ABRAHAM WAS OLD.

...So what is "old" in the Jewish Tradition?...

Talmud Ta'anit 5b

And Rav Naḥman said to Rabbi Yitzḥak: What is the meaning of that which is written: "And it came to pass when Samuel was old" (I Samuel 8:1)? And did Samuel really grow so old? But he was only fifty-two years old when he died, as the Master said in a *baraita* that deals with the Divine punishment of *karet*. One who dies at the age of fifty-two years is not considered to have suffered the premature death of *karet*, as this is the age of the death of Samuel of Rama. This shows that Samuel died at the relatively young age of fifty-two.

Rabbi Yitzḥak **said to Rav Naḥman that Rabbi Yoḥanan said as follows: Old age sprang upon Samuel**, which caused him to appear older than his actual age, **as it is written: "I regret that I made Saul king" (I Samuel 15:11).**

וְאָמַר לִיה רַב נַחֲמָן לְרַבִּי יִצְחָק: מַאי דְכָתִיב "וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר זָקֵן שְׁמוּאֵל" וּמִי סִיב שְׁמוּאֵל כּוֹלֵי הָאִי? וְהָאֵל בְּרַחֲמֵי שָׁמַיִם וּשְׁתֵּי הָהוּא, דְּאָמַר מָר: מֵת בְּחַמִּישִׁים וּשְׁתֵּי שָׁנָה – זֶהוּ מֵיתָתוֹ שֶׁל שְׁמוּאֵל הָרַמָּתִי!
אָמַר לִיה: הֵכִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: זָקֵנָה קִפְצָה עָלָיו, דְּכָתִיב "נַחֲמָתִי כִּי הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת שְׁאֻל".

...some people have years and other people have old age; you can have advanced years (*like in the midrash*) without old age and you can have old age without advanced years. Some can even **feel** young even though they have reached advanced years...

Talmud Bavli Niddah 9a..."a woman never tells her age!"

WHO IS REGARDED AN OLD WOMAN?

ANY WOMAN OVER WHOM THREE ONAHS HAVE PASSED NEAR THE TIME OF HER OLD AGE.

What is to be understood by NEAR THE TIME OF HER OLD AGE? Rab Judah replied: The age when her women friends speak of her as an old woman; and R. Simeon replied: when people call her mother in her presence and she does not blush. R. Zera and R. Samuel b. Isaac differ: One says, [When she is called mother] and she does not mind, and the other says, And she does not blush. What is the practical difference between them? The practical difference between them is the case of one who blushes but does not mind.

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Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you.

כִּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוֹן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 31a

The Sages taught that it is stated: “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12) and it is stated: “Honor the Lord with your wealth” (Proverbs 3:9).

In this manner, **the verse equates the honor of one’s father and mother to the honor of the Omnipresent**, as the term “honor” is used in both cases.

תָּנוּ רַבָּנִן: נֹאמַר “כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ”, וְנֹאמַר “כִּבֵּד אֶת ה' מִהוֹנֶךָ” –
הַשְׁוָה הַפְּתוּב כְּבוֹד אָב וְאִם לְכָבוֹד הַמְקוּם.

Leviticus 19:3

You shall each *revere* his mother and his father, and keep My sabbaths: I the LORD am your God.

אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת־שַׁבָּתִי תִשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Rambam, *Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim 6:1*

Honoring one's father and mother is a positive commandment of great importance, as is fearing one's father and mother.

The Torah equates the honor and fear of one's parents with the honor and fear of God Himself. Exodus 20:12 states: "Honor your father and your mother," and Proverbs 3:9 states: "Honor God from your wealth."

Similarly, with regard to one's father and mother, Leviticus 19:3 states: "A person must fear his mother and father," and Deuteronomy 6:13 states: "And you shall fear God, your Lord."

Just as He commands us to honor and fear His great name; so, too, He commands us to honor and fear our parents."

Rambam, *Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim 6:2 (selected from)*

A father is mentioned before a mother with regard to honor and a mother is mentioned before a father with regard to fear to teach that they are both equal with regard to fear and honor.

Sacred Aging: Getting Old and Being Old

Rambam, *Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3 (selected from)*

What is meant by honoring them? One should bring them food and drink, clothe them and cover them from their resources. If a father does not have financial resources and a son does, the son is compelled to sustain his father and his mother according to his capacity¹. He should bring him out and bring him home and serve him in all the ways one serves a teacher. Similarly, he should stand before him as one stands before a teacher.

Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin, 31a

The Sages raised a dilemma before Rav Ulla: How far must one go to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother?

Rav Ulla said to them: Go and see what one gentile did in Ashkelon, and his name was Dama ben Netina². Once the Sages sought to purchase merchandise from him for six hundred thousand gold dinars' profit, but the key for the container in which the merchandise was kept was placed under his father's head³, and he was sleeping at the time. And Dama ben Netina would not disturb his father by waking him, although he could have made a substantial profit.

Rav Yehuda says that Shmuel says: They asked Rabbi Eliezer: How far must one go to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother?

Rabbi Eliezer said to them: Go and see what one gentile did for his father in Ashkelon, and the name of the son was Dama ben Netina. Once the Sages wished to purchase precious stones from him for the ephod of the High Priest for six hundred thousand gold dinars' profit, and Rav Kahana taught that it was eight hundred thousand gold dinars' profit. And the key to the chest holding the jewels was placed under his father's head, and he would not disturb him.

¹ The commentaries dispute the *halakha* in a case where the father lacks funds but the son has money. All agree that the son has to pay to support his father in this situation, and he is pressured and shamed into doing so. Nevertheless, most authorities maintain that this assistance falls within the category of charity. Others claim that it falls under the category of honoring one's parents. According to this opinion, this particular situation is not discussed by the Gemara, and the Gemara is discussing a situation where the father has money.

² This gentile is praised several times in different sources, which indicate that he was one of the most respected residents of Ashkelon, where he served as a member of the city council. He was apparently very wealthy and was highly regarded in his city and elsewhere. Many incidents involving Dama ben Netina are related that depict the honor and reverence he had for his parents.

³ The early commentaries note that even according to the opinion that a son is not required to spend money to honor his parents, this was not a case of spending money but of forgoing a profit, and therefore, Dama ben Netina was correct in his decision. Furthermore, one is not permitted to trouble a parent even for the smallest amount of money (*Tosefot Tukh; Tosefot HaRosh*).

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The next year the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave Dama ben Netina his reward, as a red heifer was born in his herd, and the Jews needed it. When the Sages of Israel came to him he said to them: **I know, concerning you, that if I were to ask for all the money in the world you would give it to me. But I ask only that money that I lost due to the honor of Father.**

Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin, 31a

Rav Asi had an elderly mother. She said to him: I want jewelry, and he made jewelry for her. She said to him: I want a man whom I can marry, and he said to her: I will seek one for you. She said to him: I want a husband who is as handsome as you. At this point, he realized that she was senile, and that he would be unable to fulfill all her requests. Therefore, **he left her and went to Eretz Yisrael.**⁴

Rav Asi **heard that she was following him to Eretz Yisrael. He came before Rabbi Yoĥanan and said to him: What is the *halakha* with regard to leaving Eretz Yisrael to go outside of Eretz Yisrael?** Rabbi Yoĥanan **said to him: It is prohibited.**

Rav Asi further asked: If one is going **to greet his mother, what is the *halakha*?** Rabbi Yoĥanan **said to him: I do not know.** Rav Asi **waited a little while, and then came back to him. Rabbi Yoĥanan said to him: Asi, you are evidently determined to leave**⁵. **May the Omnipresent return you in peace,** and he said no more.

Rav Asi **came before Rabbi Elazar,** because he did not know how to interpret Rabbi Yoĥanan's statement. **He said to Rabbi Elazar: God forbid, perhaps he is angry with me that I wished to leave? Rabbi Elazar said to him: What exactly did he say to you?** Rav Asi **said to him: May the Omnipresent return you in peace.** Rabbi Elazar **said to him: If it is so that he was angry, he would not have blessed you.** Rabbi Yoĥanan certainly gave you permission to leave.

In the meantime, while he was traveling to meet her, Rav Asi **heard that her coffin was coming,** i.e., his mother had died and her coffin was being brought to Eretz Yisrael. **He said: Had I known I would not have left,** as after his mother's death he was not obligated to leave Eretz Yisrael to honor her.

⁴ It is prohibited to leave Eretz Yisrael to go abroad other than for certain objectives, i.e., to study Torah, to marry, to rescue one's money from gentiles, or to conduct business. One should return as soon as he completes his task (Rambam *Sefer Shofetim, Hilkhos Melakhim* 5:9).

⁵ According to Rashi, Rabbi Yoĥanan thought Rav Asi wanted to return to Babylonia, which is why he said: May the Omnipresent return you in peace, i.e., return to your original location in peace. Many commentaries are surprised at this interpretation (see *Tosefot Rabbeinu Yitzhak of Dampierre*). The Maharit explains that there is no prohibition against leaving Eretz Yisrael for a short period. He explains that Rav Asi was a priest, concerning whom there is a particular prohibition against entering the ritually impure lands outside of Eretz Yisrael.

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Rambam, *Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim 6:10*

When a person's father or mother lose control of their mental faculties, their son should try to conduct his relationship with them according to their mental condition until God has mercy upon them. If it is impossible for him to remain with them because they have become very deranged, he should leave them, depart, and charge others with caring for them in an appropriate manner.

Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin, 32a

The Gemara further suggests: **Come and hear: They asked Rabbi Eliezer how far one must go in honoring his father and mother. Rabbi Eliezer said to them: Such that the father takes a purse and throw it into the sea in front of his son, and the son does not embarrass him. And if you say that the son honors him from the money of the father, what difference does it make to the son? Why would the son care if his father throws away his own purse? The Gemara answers: This is referring to a son who is fit to inherit from him.** Since the son thinks that the money will eventually belong to him, he has cause for anger.

Rambam, *Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim 6:8*

... a person is forbidden to lay a heavy yoke on his sons and be particular about their honoring him to the point that he presents an obstacle to them. Instead, he should forgo his honor and ignore any affronts. For if a father desires to forgo his honor, he may.

Rambam, *Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim 6:15*

A person is obligated to honor his father's wife even though she is not his mother throughout his father's lifetime, for this is included in honoring his father. Similarly, he should honor his mother's husband throughout her lifetime. After her death, however, he is not obligated to honor her.

Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin, 32a

Elazar ben Matya says: If my father says: Give me water, and there is a mitzvah for me to perform at the same time, I set aside the honor of my father and perform the mitzvah, as my father and I are both obligated in the mitzvah. Isi ben Yehuda says: If it is possible for this mitzvah to be performed by others, let it be performed by others, and he should go and attend to the honor due to his father, as the honor of his father is his obligation alone.

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Talmudic Commentaries on “Father says, give me water” from Steinsaltz Koren Talmud Bavli

In a case where one's father says to him: Give me water to drink, and at the same time he must perform a second mitzvah whose time will soon elapse, if it is possible for the second mitzvah to be performed by other people, he should honor his father's request. If he already began to fulfill this second mitzvah, he should complete it, as one who is engaged in one mitzvah is exempt from performing other mitzvot (Rema).

If there is no other person available who can perform the second mitzvah, he should do it and not honor his father. If he can perform the mitzvah later, he should honor his father first (Rema, citing Rabbeinu Yeruham).

Rambam, Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim 6:13

The following laws apply when a person's father tells him: 'Draw water for me,' and he has the opportunity to perform a mitzvah. If it is possible for the mitzvah to be performed by others, they should perform it and he should concern himself with honoring his father. For we do not negate the observance of one mitzvah, because of the observance of another mitzvah. If there are no others able to perform the other mitzvah, he should perform the mitzvah and neglect his father's honor. For he and his father are obligated to perform the mitzvah.

Torah study surpasses honoring one's father and mother.

Psalm 71:9

Do not cast me off at old age; when my strength is used up, do not abandon me!

אַל־תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי לָעֵת זְקֵנָה כְּכֹלֹת כְּחִי אֶל־תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי:

Proverbs 23:22

Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

שְׁמַע לְאָבִיךָ זֶה יִלְדְּךָ וְאַל־תִּבְוֹז כִּי־זְקֵנָה אִמָּךְ:

Proverbs 20:29

The beauty of young men is their strength, and the glory of the old is gray hair.

תִּפְאָרֶת בַּחֲוִירִים כָּהֶם וְהִדָּר זְקִנִּים שִׁיבָה:

Proverbs 17:6

Grandchildren are the crown of their elders, and the glory of children is their parents.

עֲטָרַת זְקִנִּים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְתִפְאָרֶת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם:

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Pirke Avot 5:21

He used to say: At the age of five, (one is ripe) for Bible; at ten, for Mishnah; at thirteen, for Mitzvot; at fifteen for Talmud; at eighteen, for Chuppah; at twenty, for pursuit; at thirty, for vigor; at forty, for understanding; at fifty, for counsel; at sixty, to be an elder; at seventy, for grey hair; at eighty, for strength; at ninety, to be bowed down; at one hundred, is as one who has already died and crossed over and disappeared from the world.

הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, בֶּן חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים לְמִקְרָא, בֶּן עֶשֶׂר לְמִשְׁנָה, בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ עָשָׂר לְמִצְוֹת, בֶּן חָמֵשׁ עָשָׂר לְתַלְמוּד, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂר לַחֲפָה, בֶּן עֶשְׂרִים לְרִדּוֹף, בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לַכַּחַת, בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה, בֶּן חֲמִשִּׁים לְעֶצָה, בֶּן שִׁשִּׁים לְזִקְנָה, בֶּן שִׁבְעִים לְשִׁיבָה, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנִים לְגְבוּרָה, בֶּן תִּשְׁעִים לְשׁוּחַ, בֶּן מֵאָה כְּאֶלוּ מֵת וְעָבַר וּבָטַל מִן הָעוֹלָם :

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

¹ A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven:

² A time for being born and a time for dying, A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted;

³ A time for slaying and a time for healing, A time for tearing down and a time for building up;

⁴ A time for weeping and a time for laughing, A time for wailing and a time for dancing;

⁵ A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces;

⁶ A time for seeking and a time for losing, A time for keeping and a time for discarding;

⁷ A time for ripping and a time for sewing, A time for silence and a time for speaking;

⁸ A time for loving and a time for hating; A time for war and a time for peace.

Genesis 27:1-4

When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am." And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die."

¹ וַיְהִי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהֶיךָ עֵינָיו מִרְאֵת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־עֶשָׂו בְּנוֹ הַגָּדֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנְנִי :

² וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא זָקֵנְתִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי :

³ וְעַתָּה שְׂאֵנָא כְּלִיד תִּלְיֵךְ וְקִשְׁתְּךָ וְצֵא הִשָּׂדֶה וְצוּדָה לִי (צִידָה) [צִידָה] :

⁴ וַעֲשֵׂה־לִּי מִטַּעַמִּים כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתִּי וְהִבֵּיָאָה לִּי וְאֹכְלָה בְּעִבּוֹר תִּבְרַכְךָ נַפְשִׁי בְּטָרֶם אָמוּת :

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Talmud Bavli 152a

And even Barzilai the Gileadite said to David: “Today I am eighty years old, can I discern between good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?” (II Samuel 19:36). The Gemara explains: “Can I discern between good and bad”; from here we derive **that the minds of the elderly change** and they no longer discern properly. **“Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink”**; from here we derive **that the lips of the elderly crack and whither**. **“Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women”**; from here we derive **that the ears of the elderly become heavy**.

Rav said: Barzilai the Gileadite was a liar and he merely wanted to avoid joining David upon his return to Jerusalem, for an eighty year old man is not usually this debilitated. **For there was a particular maidservant in the house of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi who was ninety-two years old, and she would taste the food that was cooking in the pots.** Rava said: Barzilai was speaking the truth, but **Barzilai the Gileadite was steeped in promiscuity, and anyone who is steeped in promiscuity is overtaken by old age** before his time. **It was taught** in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Yishmael, son of Rabbi Yosei, says: As Torah scholars grow older, wisdom is increased in them, as it is stated: “With aged men is wisdom; and length of days brings understanding”** (Job 12:12). **And as ignoramuses grow older, foolishness is increased in them, as it is stated: “He removes speech of men of trust and takes away the understanding of the age”** (Job 12:20).

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 32a

The Sages taught: One who became ill and tended toward death, they say to him: Confess, as all those executed by the courts confess. Even if he is dying of natural causes, it is worthwhile for him to consider his death atonement for his sins.

Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 1:1, Rambam

If a person transgresses any of the mitzvot of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command - whether willingly or inadvertently - when he repents, and returns from his sin, he must confess before God, blessed be, He as [Numbers 5:6-7] states: "If a man or a woman commit any of the sins of man... they must confess the sin that they committed."

This refers to a verbal confession. This confession is a positive command.

How does one confess: He states: "I implore You, God, I sinned, I transgressed, I committed iniquity before You by doing the following. Behold, I regret and am embarrassed for my deeds. I promise never to repeat this act again."

These are the essential elements of the confessional prayer. Whoever confesses profusely and elaborates on these matters is worthy of praise.

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Commentary from Steinsaltz *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 32a*

They also say to him: Many people have confessed and survived, and many have not confessed and died. As a reward for confessing, you live, and anyone who confesses has a portion in the World-to-Come. If one is unable to verbalize his confession, he may confess in his heart. If he does not know how to confess, he is told to say: My death shall be atonement for my sins (Rambam *Sefer HaMadda, Hilchot Teshuvah* 1:1, *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah* 338:1).

Ecclesiastes 9:8

Let your clothes always be white, and your head never lack oil.

בְּכָל־עֵת יִהְיוּ בְּגָדֶיךָ לְבָנִים וְשֶׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשְׁךָ אַל־יִחָסֵר:

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 153a

We learned there in a *mishnah* that **Rabbi Eliezer says: Repent one day before your death. Rabbi Eliezer's students asked him: But does a person know the day on which he will die? He said to them: All the more so this is a good piece of advice, and one should repent today lest he die tomorrow; and by following this advice one will spend his entire life in a state of repentance. And King Solomon also said in his wisdom: "At all times your clothes should be white, and oil shall not be absent from upon your head"** (Ecclesiastes 9:8), meaning that a person always needs to be prepared.

Similarly, **Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai said** the following story as a **parable** to this lesson: The situation is comparable to a king who invited his servants to a feast and did not set a time for them to come. The wise among them adorned themselves and sat at the entrance to the king's house. They said: Is the king's house missing anything necessary for the feast? Certainly the king could invite them at any moment. The fools among them went to attend to their work and said: Is there such thing as a feast without the toil of preparing for it? While the feast is being prepared, we will attend to other matters.

Suddenly, the king requested that his servants come to the feast. The wise among them entered before him adorned in their finest clothes, and the fools entered before him dirty. The king was happy to greet the wise ones and angry to greet the fools. The king said: These wise servants who adorned themselves for the feast shall sit and eat and drink, but these fools who did not adorn themselves for the feast shall stand and watch. There is a similar outcome for people who think that their day of death and judgment is far away and do not prepare themselves for it.

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TaNaKh 1 Chronicles 23:1

When David reached a ripe old age, he made his son Solomon king over Israel.

וְדָוִד זָקֵן וְשִׁבַּע יָמִים וַיִּמְלֶךְ אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן־וְעַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

A Man in His Life by Yehuda Amichai, transl. Chana Block and Stephen Mitchell

A man doesn't have time in his life
to have time for everything.
He doesn't have seasons enough to have
a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes
Was wrong about that.
A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.
And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest
what history takes years and years to do.
A man doesn't have time.
When he loses he seeks, when he finds
he forgets, when he forgets he loves, when he loves
he begins to forget.
And his soul is seasoned, his soul
is very professional.
Only his body remains forever
an amateur. It tries and it misses,
gets muddled, doesn't learn a thing,
drunk and blind in its pleasures and its pains.
He will die as figs die in autumn,
Shriveled and full and sweet,
the leaves growing dry on the ground,
the bare branches pointing to the place
where there's time for everything.

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