

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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**Stories with a Twist**

**[64]**

**My Son, Don't Be Upset...**

Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 84b

Revised: May 2025



**Background to Our Story**

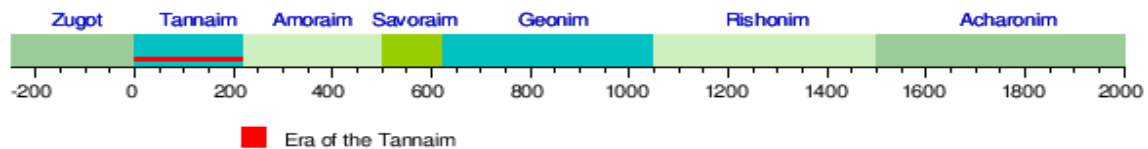
**Tannaim (Fourth Generation)**

**JewishEncyclopedia.com**

This generation extended from the death of Akiba (c. 140) to that of the patriarch Simeon b. Gamaliel (c. 165). The teachers belonging to this generation were: Meïr, Judah b. Ilai, Jose b. Ḥalafta, Simeon b. Yoḥai, Eleazar b. Shammua, Johanan ha-Sandalar, Eleazar b. Jacob, Nehemiah, Yehoshua ben Korcha, and the above-mentioned Simeon b. Gamaliel.



<http://www.wikipedia.org>



The Tannaim (singular, Tanna) were the Rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, from approximately 70-200 CE. The period of the Tannaim, also referred to as the Mishnaic period, lasted about 130 years. It came after the period of the Zugot ("pairs"), and was immediately followed by the period of the Amoraim.

The Mishnaic period is commonly divided up into five periods according to generations. There are approximately 120 known Tannaim.

The Tannaim lived in several areas of the Land of Israel. The spiritual center of Judaism at that time was Jerusalem, but after the destruction of the city and the Second Temple, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai and his students founded a new religious center in Yavne. Other places of Judaic learning were founded by his students in Lod and in Bnei Brak.

Many of the Tannaim worked as laborers (e.g., charcoal burners, cobblers) in addition to their positions as teachers and legislators. They were also leaders of the people and negotiators with the Roman Empire.

### **Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel II**



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Bava Batra II. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 70.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel II, who was head of the Sanhedrin following the bar Kokheva revolt. He was a member of the dynasty of Hillel the Elder, and his grandfather, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel the Elder, headed the Sanhedrin at the time of the destruction of the Temple and was one of the Ten Martyrs killed by the Romans.

### **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korhá**



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Berakhot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 98.

One of the elder tanna'im in the generation of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel II. Many commentaries (Tosafot and others) identify him as Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Rabbi Akiva, but others question this. Little is known of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korhá's personality, and relatively few statements of halakha or aggada were cited in his name. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korhá lived such a long life that he blessed Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi: May it be God's will that you reach half my days. Because he lived such a long life, he can be found in exchanges with Sages from several generations. By the end of his life, he was accepted and respected by all, the Sages of his generation sought his blessing and he would take the initiative to seek out others and offer them his guidance.

### **Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai**



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Berakhot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 43.

Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai is among the greatest tanna'im of the generation prior to the redaction of the Mishna. Rabbi Shimon was the preeminent student of Rabbi Akiva and he considered himself Rabbi Akiva's spiritual heir. Rabbi Akiva had a great deal of respect for his student and said: It is enough for you that I and your Creator recognize your strength. Rabbi Shimon's greatness was manifest in his mastery of both halakha and aggada, and his statements can be found on all topics in every tractate of the Talmud. Although halakha is not always ruled in accordance with Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai's opinion, especially in disputes with Rabbi Yosei and Rabbi Yehuda, nevertheless, with regard to several core issues, the halakha is ruled in accordance with his opinion. He had his own, unique method of deriving halakha from the Torah. He factors in the rationale of the verse and infers halakhic conclusions from Bible based on the spirit and purpose of the law.

Rabbi Shimon traveled to Rome as an emissary of the people, but he harbored profound enmity toward the Romans. Because he made no attempt to conceal his feelings, he was sentenced to death and forced into hiding for many years.

He was an ascetic by nature who was very exacting and was famous in his generation for his righteousness and his performance of miracles. There are many anecdotes related in the Talmud about miraculous acts that he performed. The Sifrei, a collection of halakhic derivations on Numbers and Deuteronomy, was developed in his study hall. He is also the primary character in the fundamental book of kabbala, the Zohar. His greatest students were Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, Rabbi Shimon ben

Yehuda, and his son, Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon, who was also among the most prominent tanna'im.

## **Shimon bar Yochai**



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shimon\\_bar\\_Yochai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shimon_bar_Yochai)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, (Shimon son of Yohai, Simon son of Yohai or Rashbi (Hebrew: "רשב"י, pronounced "Rash-bee", an acronym from Rabbi Shimeon bar Yochai.), was a famous rabbi who lived in the era of the Tannaim (scholars of the Mishnah) in the area of what is today Israel during the Roman period, after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. He was one of the most eminent disciples of Rabbi Akiva, and is attributed by many with the authorship of the Zohar, the chief work of modern-day Jewish mysticism. In addition, the important legal homilies called Sifre and Mekhilta are attributed to him. In the Mishnah, he is often referred to as simply "Rabbi Shimon."

According to the Talmud, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai criticized the Roman government and was forced to go into hiding with his son for thirteen years. They sheltered in a cave in nearby Peki'in where tradition states that next to the mouth of the cave a carob tree sprang up and a spring of fresh water gushed forth. Provided against hunger and thirst they cast off their clothing except during prayers to keep them from wearing out, embedded themselves in the sand up to their necks, and studied the Torah all day long.

According to historian Heinrich Graetz, Rabbi Shimon's anti-Roman sentiments led to his condemnation by Varna c. 161 CE. He escaped this doom and dwelt for some years in a cavern. Emerging from concealment, Rabbi Shimon settled in Tiberias and in other Galilean cities.

He acquired a reputation as a worker of miracles, and on this ground was sent to Rome as an envoy, where (legend tells) he exorcised from the emperor's daughter a demon who had obligingly entered the lady to enable Rabbi Shimon to effect his miracle.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai bore a large part in the fixation of law, and his decisions are frequently quoted. To him were attributed the important legal homilies called Sifre and Mekhilta, and above all the Zohar, the main work of the Kabbalah.

The fullest account of Rabbi Shimon's teachings is to be found in W Bacher's *Agada der Tannaiten*, ii. pp. 70-149. When the Talmud attributes a teaching to Rabbi Shimon without specifying which Rabbi Shimon is meant, it means Shimon bar Yochai.

Lag Ba'omer is traditionally regarded as his Yahrzeit (the anniversary of the death). Some dispute this.

Unlike other Yahrzeits, this one is widely known as a Yom Hillula, a day of celebration. This is based on the original text of *Shaar HaKavanot* by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, which refers to the day as Yom Simchato ("the day of his happiness"), rather than Yom SheMet ("the day that he died"). There is thus a very widely observed custom to celebrate on his yahrzeit, at Meron, the burial place of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son, Rabbi Eleazar ben Simon. With torches, songs and feasting, the Yom Hillula is celebrated by tens of thousands of people. This celebration was a specific request by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai of his students. It is a custom at the Meron celebrations, dating from the time of Rabbi Isaac Luria, that

three-year-old boys are given their first haircuts (called upshirin), while their parents distribute wine and sweets.

While it is widely accepted that Rabbi Shimon and his son were buried somewhere on Mount Meron, the building generally accepted as being his grave is an arched structure typical of crusader architecture.

### **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (also known as "Rabbi")**



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Sanhedrin Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem

Rabbi closed the tannaitic period with his arrangement of the Mishna. The son of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel II, and a seventh-generation descendant of Hillel the Elder, Rabbi Yehuda lived in 135–220 CE during the fifth, and last, generation of tanna'im. According to tradition, Rabbi Yehuda was born on the day of Rabbi Akiva's death, leading people to later proclaim: "the sun sets, and the sun rises" (Ecclesiastes 1:5). Indeed, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was a successor to Rabbi Akiva, who had begun to assemble the statements of the Oral Law into a format that later became the Mishna. During his youth, Rabbi Yehuda studied under the five great students of Rabbi Akiva: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda bar Elai, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar. In addition, he learned Torah from his father Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel. In an effort to collect all the statements of the previous generations, Rabbi Yehuda moved from yeshiva to yeshiva, obtaining most of his knowledge from Rabbi Ya'akov bar Krashai. The wide breadth of his learning and his position as Nasi, to which he was appointed at age thirty upon his father's death, gave him the standing to undertake the greatest Torah enterprise of the era, the compilation of the Mishna. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi surrounded himself with the most prominent Sages of his time, who assisted him in establishing the accuracy of the corpus he wanted to produce. Fortunately for him, the relative political calm of the time, and his favorable relationship with the Roman government, permitted the development of such an ambitious project. Due to his position as head of the community, the Mishna of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was universally accepted, and earlier and other collections of halakha were set aside. This phenomenon unified the nation, as all of the Jewish people began to study the identical corpus of Oral Law. Due to poor health in his later years, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi moved to Tzipori. His students were the Sages of the first generation of amora'im, including Rabbi Yoĥanan, Rabbi Ĥiyya, bar Kappara and Rav. The Gemara reports (Gittin 59a) that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was the first individual since Moses to have such a broad mastery of Torah, and his great scholarship led him to be referred to in the Talmud as simply: Rabbi, or: Our holy Rabbi.

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1. Talmud Yerushalmi, quoted in Tosafos, Sanhedrin 5a
2. Mishna Chagiga 2:2
3. A. Mischcon, Abodah Zara, p.10a Soncino, 1988. Mischcon cites various sources, "SJ Rappaport... is of opinion that our Antoninus is Antoninus Pius." Other opinions cited suggest "Antoninus" was Caracalla, Lucius Verus or Alexander Severus.
4. Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli), Tractate Bava Metzia 85a, Tractate Pesachim 49b; Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Kelaim 9, 32a-b.

### **Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon**

**JewishEncyclopedia.com**

Tanna of the second century. He was the son of Simon b. Yoḥai, and since he participated in many of his father's adventures, history and legend have woven an almost interminable tissue of fact and fiction concerning him (see B. M. 83b et seq.; Pesiq. x. 88b et seq.). His youth he spent with his father in a cave, hiding from the Roman persecutors of the Jews, who sought his father's life; and there he devoted himself to the study of the Torah (Shab. 33b: Gen. R. lxxix. 6, and parallel passages; compare Yer. Sheb. ix. 38d). After the death of Hadrian, when events took a somewhat more favorable turn for the Jews, father and son left the cave and returned to the busy world. Eleazar, grown too zealous during his protracted hermitage, often cursed those who devoted their time to things secular, and his father found it necessary to interfere, appeasing them and mollifying him (Shab. l.c.).

After Simon's death Eleazar entered the academy of the Patriarch Simon b. Gamaliel II., and became the colleague of the patriarch's son, Judah I., the compiler of the Mishnah; but no great friendship seems to have subsisted between these two scholars.

(see image) Medal Struck by the Amsterdam Community in Honor of Rabbi Eleazar ben Samuel.(In the collection of Albert Wolf, Dresden.)

Unlike his father, who hated the Romans and their rule, Eleazar accepted office under their government. In consequence thereof he grew very unpopular, and one of the rabbis remonstrated with him, saying, "Vinegar product of wine [= "Degenerate scion of a distinguished sire"], how long wilt thou continue to deliver the people of God to the hangman?" Eleazar, however, continued in office, excusing himself with the averment, "I but weed out thistles from the vineyard." His mentor answered that the weeding ought to be left to the proprietor of the vineyard—that is, that God Himself would visit punishment on the idlers and evildoers.

Later in life he regretted the part he had taken under the hated government, and is said to have imposed on himself the most painful penance. Still, fearing that the aversion engendered in his people by the aid he had rendered their persecutors would prompt them to deny him the last honors after his death, he enjoined his wife not to bury him immediately after dissolution, but to suffer his remains to rest under her roof. He died at Akbara, in northern Galilee, and his faithful wife carried out his injunction to the letter. Legend relates many miracles performed by the dead rabbi, one of which was that litigants plead their cases in the rabbi's house, and the verdict was pronounced from the mortuary chamber.

After many years his former colleagues resolved to bury him, but a new difficulty arose. The inhabitants of Akbara, believing that the sage's remains miraculously protected them against incursions of wild beasts, refused permission to remove the body. Ultimately, however, in compliance with the request of the rabbis people from the nearby town of Biria carried it off by stealth, and it was deposited at Meron beside that of his father (B. M. 84b). In consideration of his varied learning, his surviving colleagues cited the Scriptural verse (Cant. iii. 6), "Who is it that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?" and answered, "It is Eleazar b. Simon, who united in himself all noble qualities, he having been well versed in Scripture and in traditional law, and having been a [liturgical] poet, a leader in prayers, and a preacher" (Lev. R. xxx. 1; Cant. R. l.c.).

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## Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Bava Metzia. Koren publishers  
Jerusalem. Page 130.

Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, was a contemporary of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and was a distinguished scholar like his father, Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai. Rabbi Elazar's remarkable personality is the subject of numerous anecdotes. When Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, who was strongly opposed to Roman rule, was betrayed to the authorities by informers, Rabbi Elazar fled with his father and lived with him in a cave for thirteen years (*Shabbat* 33b). The two lived on the barest essentials and spent their time studying Torah.

During this period, Rabbi Elazar learned almost everything he knew from his father, who was his principal teacher, despite the fact that Rabbi Elazar occasionally disagreed with his halakhic rulings. Rabbi Elazar also learned from other scholars of his father's generation, including Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua, and Rabbi Meir.

## Evil Eye

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By Ariel Scheib

The Evil Eye (Ayin ha-Ra) is alleged to be able to harm or cast a curse on a person. Although the Evil Eye is not referenced in the [Bible](#), it is discussed in the [Talmud](#) and [Kabbalah](#). The Evil Eye is traditionally believed to be the reason for sickness, tragedy, and pain in the world. Nothing is spared from the evil influences of the eye. The most frequent cause of harm from the Evil Eye is jealousy. [Rabbis](#) warned people against unnecessary flaunting of wealth and admiration to avoid resentment from others.

Many superstitions evolved to ward off the Evil Eye or prevent it from harming them. However, many of these superstitions were variations of non-Jewish customs. Dating back to Talmudic times, Jews have been wearing charms around their neck to guard from the Evil Eye. Today, some Jews often wear a chai necklace (charm symbolizing the number eighteen) to guard themselves from harm. Furthermore, great lengths are taken to hide celebrations from the Evil Eye; for instance, double weddings are never permitted for fear of uttering too many blessings and tempting the Evil Eye. For [Ashkenazic](#) Jews, any blessing is normally lessened with the phrase "keyn ayen horeh" (without the Evil Eye) or abbreviated to "keynahora."

## Wooden Bench



## Students Studying While Sitting on the Ground



## The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 84b

דכי הווי יתבי רבן שמעון בן גמליאל ורבי יהושע בן קרחה אספסלי, יתבי קמיהו רבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון ורבי ארעא, מקשו ומפרקו. אמרי: מימיהן אנו שותים והם יושבים על גבי קרקע? עבדו להו ספסלי, אסקינהו.

אמר להן רבן שמעון בן גמליאל: פרידה אחת יש לי ביניכם, ואתם מבקשים לאבדה הימני? אמתוהו לרבי. אמר להן רבי יהושע בן קרחה מי שיש לו אב יתיה, ומי שאין לו אב ימות? אמתוהו נמי לרבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון.

חלש דעתיה. אמר קא חשביתו ליה פותי

עד ההוא יומא, פי הוה אמר רבי מילתא – הוה מסייע ליה רבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון; מכאן ואילף, פי הוה אמר רבי יש לי להשיב, אמר ליה רבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון: כד וקד יש לה להשיב, זו היא תשובתה. השתא היקפתנו תשובות חבילות שאין בהן ממש.

חלש דעתיה דרבי.

אתא אמר ליה לאבוי. אמר ליה: בני, אל ירע, שהוא ארי בן ארי, ואתה ארי בן שועל.

When Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korhā, the leading Sages of the generation, were sitting on benches teaching Torah along with the other Sages, the youthful pair Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would sit before them on the ground.

These two young students would engage in discussions with the Sages, in which they would raise difficulties and answer them brilliantly. Seeing the young scholars' brilliance, the leading Sages said: From their waters we drink, i.e., we are learning from them, and they are the ones sitting on the ground? Benches were prepared for Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, and they were promoted to sit alongside the other Sages.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said to the other Sages present: I have a single fledgling among you, i.e., my son Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, and you are seeking to take it from me? By promoting my son to such a prestigious position at such a young age, his chances of being adversely affected by the evil eye are greatly increased.

They [the Sages] demoted Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to sit on the ground, at his father's request.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korhā said to the Sages: Should one who has a father to care for him, i.e., Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, live, while the other one, who does not have a father to care for him, i.e., Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, die?

Upon hearing his argument, the Sages also demoted Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon.

He [Rabbi Eleazar] became offended and said to them: You are equating Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to me, by demoting us together.

Up until that day, when Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would state a matter of Torah, Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, would support him by citing proofs for his opinion. From this point forward, when they were discussing a subject and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would say: I have an argument to respond, Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, would preempt him by saying to him: Such and such is what you have to respond, and this is the refutation of your claim. Now that you asked these questions, you have surrounded us with bundles of refutations that have no substance. Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, would anticipate Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's comments and immediately dismiss them as having no value.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi became offended. He came and told his father what had transpired.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said to him: My son, don't be upset, as he is a lion, son of a lion, and you are a lion, son of a fox.



**Explaining the Story** - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Why did Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korhâ sit on benches in the house of study? Why did Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi sit before them on the ground?

**?** "From their waters we drink, and they are sitting on the ground?" What did the Rabbis mean by the expression: "From their waters we drink"? To whom is "their" referring?

**?** Why did the Rabbis make benches for Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi?

**?** Why did Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel object to his son sitting on a bench?

**?** Why did the Rabbis lower Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi back to the ground?

**Extra Bonus ?** How did Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi take the Rabbis move? Why?

**Bonus ?** Why did the Rabbis decide to lower Rabbi Elazar back to the ground? How did he take their move? Why?

**?** What do you think prompted Rabbi Elazar's change of behavior towards Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi?

**?** At this point, please describe succinctly the personalities of:

- Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel
- Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi
- Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai

**Extra Bonus ?** Why did Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi become dismayed?

**?** Why did Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi go to his father?

**Bonus ?** What do you think Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel meant by his words to his son: My son, don't be upset, as he is a lion, son of a lion, and you are a lion, son of a fox? How are these words supposed to bring comfort to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi?

### **"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text**

**!** "My son, don't be upset, as he is a lion, son of a lion, and you are a lion, son of a fox" (3 possible readings)

- He [Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon] is greater (in Torah) than you only because his father was greater than your father.
- Ultimately you are greater (in Torah) than he. He is great because of his father's merit, while you are great even though your father is not so great. He told his son: "You are superior to him. He is a lion in Torah scholarship because his father was a lion; you, however, are a lion because of your own efforts, for your father is merely a fox" (Ben Yehoyada – Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad – Ben Ish hai).
- He [Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon] is unnecessarily aggressive and confrontational, because his natural *lion-like* personality, gets exponentially increased by the role-model he inherited from his father (another *lion-like* personality). You, my son, can perfectly blend your natural *lion-like* personality with your father's mellower, subtler, and wiser, foxlike personality. This balance will serve you well in your future leadership position.

! It is not about you, my son; don't take it personally and move on - the loving advice of a wise and caring father.



In our story, we experience the interaction of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, his son, Rabbi Yehuda (later will become Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi), and Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon.

Each of the characters in our story has his own personality. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel holds a position of great authority, yet he knows that other Sages, among them Rabbi Elazar's father, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, were his superiors in knowledge. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel uses his position of authority to protect his son from the evil eye, suggesting that perhaps he is not ready yet to make the big move to "the bench."

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi is passive in our story. He is being both elevated and lowered against his will, and he seems OK with it.

Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon, has both a stronger sense of self-worth and an aggressive personality. When the Sages lowered him to the ground (without explaining to him their noble reason), he takes it personally with Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, who doesn't understand his friend's sudden change of behavior.

Dismayed, he [Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi] goes and recounts to his father, I would like to suggest not so much to complain, but to try to understand Rabbi Elazar's aggressive behavior.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, in his wisdom, doesn't spend too much time explaining or justifying Rabbi Elazar's behavior. Instead, he praises his son for his wisdom, elevating him above his own (you are a lion, son of a fox), and comforts his son, by pointing out that Rabbi Elazar's behavior is unrelated to Rabbi Yehuda, and that he should not take it personally.