

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories With a Twist

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Even If He Did This a Million Times, He Did Not Yet Reach Even Half of the Honor That the Torah Requires.

Insights into Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 1:1 & Babylonian Talmud,
Kiddushin 31b

Background to Our Story

Rabbi Tarfon



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Ketubot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page

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Rabbi Tarfon was one of the great tanna'im in the generation following the destruction of the Second Temple. Rabbi Tarfon was a priest, and although he was young in the days when the Temple still stood, it appears that he served there as a priest. Apparently, he lived in the town of Lod. It seems that he was the same age as the students of Rabbi Yoĥanan ben Zakkai and perhaps even studied under him. He is also said to have been on close terms with Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, with the latter calling him: Tarfon, my brother. He was often in the great academy of Yavne, engaged in Torah discussions with its important Sages. It is likely that he first served as a kind of teacher to Rabbi Akiva before becoming his colleague after Rabbi Akiva grew in stature. Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon were regularly engaged in Torah discussions, and Rabbi Tarfon honored and esteemed him greatly. Several of the Sages of the next generation were disciples of Rabbi Tarfon's, with Rabbi Yehuda being his chief disciple.

Honor your father and your mother



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honor_your_father_and_your_mother

Honor your father and your mother is one of the *Ten Commandments*, which are widely understood as moral imperatives by legal scholars, Jewish scholars, Catholic scholars, and Post-Reformation scholars. The *Book of Exodus* describes the Ten Commandments as being spoken by God to *Moses*, inscribed on two stone tablets by the finger of God, or written on tablets by Moses.

Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land that Hashem your God is giving you. – Exodus 20:12

In the Torah, keeping this commandment was associated with individual benefit and with the ability of the nation of Israel to remain in the land to which God was leading them. Dishonoring parents by striking or cursing them was punishable by death. In the Talmud, the commandment to honor one's human parents is compared to honoring God.

What constitutes "honor?" One must provide them with food and drink and clothing. One should bring them home and take them out and provide them with all their needs cheerfully. – Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 143:7

The commandment to honor one's human parents is compared, by at least one writer, to honoring God. The Talmud says that since there are three partners in the creation of a person (God and two parents), honor showed to parents is the same as honor shown to God.

The Text: Jerusalem Talmud Peah 1:1 & Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 31b

Story 1

אָמוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי טַרְפוֹן יָרְדָה לְטַיִל לְתוֹךְ חֲצִירָה בְּשַׁבָּת. וְהֵלֵךְ רַבִּי טַרְפוֹן וְהִנִּיחַ שְׁתֵּי יָדָיו תַּחַת פְּרִסוֹתֶיהָ וְהִיָּתָה מְהֻלָּכָת עָלֶיהֶן עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעָה לְמִיטָתָהּ. פְּעַם אַחַת חָלָה וְנִכְנָסוּ חֲכָמִים לְבַקְרוֹ אָמְרָה לְהֵן הִתְפַּלְלוּ עַל טַרְפוֹן בְּנֵי שָׂהוּא גֹוֹהֵג בִּי כְבוֹד יוֹתֵר מִדָּאִי. אָמְרוּ לָהּ מָהוּ עֲבַד לֵידָ וְתִגְיִית לְהוֹן עוֹבְדָא אָמְרוּ לָהּ אֲפִילוּ עוֹשֶׂה כֵן אֵלֶּף אֲלָפִים אֲדִיין לְחֻצֵי כְבוֹד שְׂאֲמָרָה תוֹרָה לֹא הִגִּיעַ.

Rabbi Tarfon's mother went to promenade in her backyard on the Sabbath. Rabbi Tarfon went and put his two hands under her feet, and she walked on them until she got to her couch.

Once he [Rabbi Tarfon] fell ill and the sages came to visit him. She [Rabbi Tarfon's mother] told them: Pray for my son Tarfon because he honors me too much.

They [the Sages] asked her, what did he do for you?

She told them what had happened.

They [the Sages] said to her, even if he did this a million times, he did not yet reach even half of the honor that the Torah requires.

Story 2

רַבִּי טַרְפוֹן הָוּה לִיהָ הָיָא אִמָּא, דְּכָל אִימַת דְּהוֹת בְּעֵינָא לְמִיִּסַּק לְפוֹרְיָא גָּחִין וְסָלִיק לָהּ, וְכָל אִימַת דְּהוֹת גָּחִית – גָּחַת עָלוּיָהּ. אֲתָא וְקָא מִשְׁתַּבַּח בֵּי מְדַרְשָׁא. אָמְרֵי לִיהָ: עֲדִיין לֹא הִגִּיעַת לְחֻצֵי כְבוֹד. כְּלוּם זָרְקָה אַרְנָקֵי בְּפָנֶיהָ לִים וְלֹא הִכְלַמְתָּהּ?

Rabbi Tarfon had a certain manner of treating his mother, that whenever she wished to ascend into her bed he would bend over and help her to ascend,

and whenever she wished to descend from the bed, she would descend onto him.

He came and praised himself in the study hall.

They said to him: You still have not reached even half of the honor due to her. Has it ever happened that she threw a purse into the sea in front of you, and you did not embarrass her?



Explaining the Story

What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Story 1

? Why did Rabbi Tarfon put his two hands under her mother's feet and allow her to walk on them until she got to her couch?

Bonus ? Why did Rabbi Tarfon's mother give a reason when she asked the Sages to pray for her son?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

"They [the Sages] said to her, even if he did this a million times, he did not yet reach even half of the honor that the Torah requires." **?** To whom was their reply directed?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Story 2

? Why did Rabbi Tarfon bend over when his mother wanted to climb into the bed or descend from it?

Bonus ? Why did Rabbi Tarfon praise himself in the study hall?

? What do you think Rabbi Tarfon's colleagues meant by their cutting retort?

- Don't brag!
- You are not honoring your mother enough!
- Keep trying harder!

- Get your mother to throw a purse of money into the sea in front of you to test yourself!
- You will never be able to give your mother the honor the Torah commands, so stop trying!
- You will never be able to give your mother the honor the Torah commands, so try your best and don't worry!

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

*Could song fill our mouths as water fills the sea,
and could joy flood our tongues like countless waves,
Could our lips utter praise as limitless as the sky,
and could the sparkle of our eyes match the splendor of the sun,
Could we soar with outstretched arms like eagle's wings,
and could we run with the gentle grace of swiftest deer,*

*Never could we fully state our gratitude for one ten-thousandth of the lasting love, which is
Your precious blessing, dearest God, granted to our ancestors and us.*

(from the Shabbat morning service)

! When you can never repay a debt: Living with that awareness while trying your best.



In both of our short stories, we find Rabbi Tarfon exemplifying how honoring one's parents look. The Sages' sharp retort, both to Rabbi Tarfon and to his mother, reminded them and all of us, that there are debts we would never be able to repay. What is expected from us in these situations is to live with that awareness (remember: this is a debt you can never repay) while going out of our way to fulfill our duty to the best of our abilities.