

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted May 1, 2008, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

THE YERUSHALMI'S DEFINITION OF OLD AGE

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The Yerushalmi here tells us that if one is condemned to excommunication, he will die at fifty years of age. But what if someone was excommunicated and doesn't die at 50? Here's the Yerushalmi's explanation:

As to death at the age of 52, that is the age at which the prophet Samuel died.

He who dies at 60 dies in the way the Torah refers to death.

Death at the age of 70 is death as an act of love.

Death at the age of 80 is true old age.

From that age onward, life is a life of pain. (Y. Bikkurim 2:1)

The Gemara goes on to give prooftexts for each of these assertions. Compare these with Pirkei Avot:

50 is the age of counsel

60 is old age

70 is satisfactory old age

80 is strength in old age

90 is stooped over

100 is as if he had died and passed from the world. (Pirkei Avot 5:25)

Both texts look at old age past 80 as a burden. These passages show that people did live extraordinarily long lives in the ancient world. If one could survive childhood, one did have the chance of living a very long time.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have things changed much in 1500 years? Is life past 80 a life of pain?
2. Is great old age something to desire or something to avoid?