

Excerpts From the Talmud

On the power of the spoken word

63. R. Eleazar said, "Whence do we learn that speech is equivalent to action? Scripture states: (Ps 3:6) By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." [See Gen 1:6f] Sabbath, 119b

On the evil potential of speech

64. R. Johanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. johai, "Verbal wrongdoing is more evil than cheating in matters of money; for concerning the former, Scripture states: (Lev 19:14) but thou shalt fear thy God, while this is not said of the latter."

R. Eleazar said, "Harmful speech is more wicked because it affects the person [of the injured] while the latter affects only his money" And R. Samuel b. Nahmani declared, "Harmful speech is worse because money can be returned, but words once uttered cannot easily be recalled." Baha Metzia, 58h

On honoring one's parents

48. R. Judah said, quoting Samuel, that R. Eliezer was once asked, "How far should one go in honoring his father and mother?" He replied, "Just see what a Gentile of Ashkelon, Dama ben Nathina, did. The Sages wanted to buy a jewel from him for the ephod [a sacred ritual object], but the key [to the safe where it was kept] was under the pillow of his father [who was asleep]. Dama refused to disturb him [and lost the sale].

"The following year the Holy One rewarded him with the birth of a red heifer. When the Sages offered to buy it, he said to them, 'I know that I could ask of you any amount of money, and you would pay the price. However, I only want you to make good the loss I sustained in honoring my father.'

R. Hanina declared that if one who is not commanded to honor his parents does so, and is so richly rewarded, how much more certain is the reward of one who is commanded to do so!

On the Messiah's role in creation

792. Our rabbis taught that seven things were created before the world itself-the Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden [Paradise], Gehinnom, the Throne of Glory, the Temple and the name of the Messiah. Nedarim, 39b

On the terrible conditions that will precede the Messiah's coming

793. R. Isaac said in the name of R. Johanan, "In the generation in which the son of David will come, scholarly men will be few in number, and the eyes of the people will protrude from sighing and sorrow. Many afflictions and many evil government decrees will be imposed upon them; one will not have passed when another will come." Sanhedrin, 97a

794. R. Nehorai said, "The Messiah, son of David, will appear when the young will expose the old to shame in public, and the old will rise up in respect before the young; a daughter will rebel against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. The leaders of that generation will be like dogs, and a son will feel no shame when reproached by his father." Sanhedrin, 97a

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