

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted April 8, 2010, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN YOU DIE AT A GIVEN AGE?

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We're all familiar with the positivistic timeline of life from Pirkei Avot:

- 5 years of age is for the study of Scripture.
- 10 years of age is for the study of Mishnah.
- 13 years of age is for doing mitsvot.
- 15 years of age is for studying Talmud.
- 18 years of age is for getting wed.
- 20 years of age is for for getting a living.
- 30 years of age is for full strength.
- 40 years of age is for understanding.
- 50 years of age is for giving counsel.
- 60 years of age is for mature age.
- 70 years of age is for gray haired age.
- 80 years of age is a sign of strength.
- 90 years of age is for crippling old age.
- 100 years of age it is as if one has died and has gone from the world. (Pirkei Avot 5:21)

What we find in Y. Bikkurim, we find is a somewhat darker set of ages, i.e., what it means if you die at a given age:

- Death at 50 signifies atonement for sin.
- 60 is the normal age for death.
- 70 is death as an act of love.
- 80 a death of true old age.
- ffom that age onward, life is a life of pain.

If one survived for 50 years and did a deed which is subject to atonement and grew older, he should rejoice.

If he endured for 60 years and did something that is subject to the death penalty but he survives, he should rejoice.

If a person did a deed punishable by extirpation one died on the same day, that is death inflicted in divine wrath.

If it was after two days, it is death inflicted through confusion.

After three days, it is a death through divine plague.

Rabbi Halafta ben Saul taught:

If one died in the first, second or third decades of life, he died through atonement.

If in the fourth or fifth decades, death through being driven away.

If in the sixth, this is a natural death.

If in the seventh, it is an act of love.

If from that time forth, it is death through suffering. (Y. Bikkurim 2:1)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. It must be asked, is death a punishment or reward? Can we correlate death at a certain age with the things we've done in our lives?
2. What is the fundamental difference between listing the times to do certain things and listing what death means? Could this list have been a candidate for inclusion in Pirkei Avot and why might it have lost out to the more positive one that was eventually chosen?