

abstract

**"Raise My Eyes for Me":
Gazing at Old Age in a Talmudic Narrative**

Haim Weiss and Mira Balberg

In this article we propose a new reading of the Babylonian Talmudic narrative of Rav Kahana's migration from Babylonia to Palestine, at the heart of which stands a dramatic encounter between the young "lion" Rav Kahana and the elderly Rabbi Yohanan. Whereas most previous scholarship on this narrative focused on the competitive dynamics between the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic academies, the focus of our analysis is the dramatic exchange of mutual gazes between Rav Kahana and R. Yohanan, through which charged questions of old age, loss of bodily prowess, and intergenerational tension are explored. We argue that the old man's body, which is revealed to him through the eyes of the young man, brings to the fore aspects of disorder, horror, and particularly shame, and speaks to the cultural place of old persons as residing at the margins of the social order or beyond it.