

MAR UKBA IN STORY AND HAIKU

There was a poor man in Mar Ukba's neighborhood into whose door socket Mar Ukba used to throw four coins every day. Once, the poor man thought: I'll be ready today and get a look at who does me this kindness. On that day, it happened that Mar Ukba was late at the Bet Midrash and his wife came to meet him. As soon as the poor man heard someone approaching the door, he began to go out. When Mar Ukba and his wife saw that the door was opening, they ran from him, taking cover in a communal fireplace from which the fire had just been swept. Mar Ukba's feet began to burn on the hot floor and he shifted his weight from one foot to the other. His wife said to him: "Put your feet on top of mine." He did so and his feet were insulated from the heat; but his pride was wounded. Were his wife's feet so much tougher than his own? Had a miracle been done for her but not for him? She read the emotions in his face and explained: "I am usually at home and so my gifts are given directly."

(Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67b)

Merits of fathers
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
Avoiding the gaze.

The door swings open
See the face of shame or thanks
Mirror in the eye.

Protecting mothers
Opening to hungry need
Knowing the faces.

(Steven G. Sager)



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