

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted June 17, 1999 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

### The Crown

One of the most enduring, and endearing, features of the love story between Rabbi Akiba and his wife is his wanting to buy her a Jerusalem of Gold. This was a tiara with images of Jerusalem on it. We can guess that it was an adornment that a woman of her rank, that is when she was living in her father's house, could have expected to own. Thus, Rabbi Akiba wanted to give her an emblem of the riches he knew his wife had sacrificed to marry him.

The mishnah in which the "city of gold" tiara is mentioned has to do with the sabbath prohibitions. Wearing jewelry is not forbidden on Shabbat. However, carrying anything on the sabbath is forbidden. The sages worried that a woman wearing a given piece of jewelry might take it off to show another person and therefore forbid women to wear these items on the sabbath as a precaution:

#### Text:

Wherewith may a woman go out and wherewith may she not go out [on Shabbat, lest she carry something on the sabbath]? A woman may not go out with cords of wool nor with cords of flax nor [may she go out with] a leather thong on her head Nor [may she go out with] a city of gold [tiara][But] if she does go out [on Shabbat wearing] any of these items she does not have to bring a sin offering. (M. Shabbat 6:1, Bavli 57a)

According to Rabbi Eliezer (B. Shabbat 59b), the women who wear "cities of gold" are women of wealth and are most unlikely to take them off to show them to someone and thereby violate the sabbath prohibitions by carrying these items. In another place in the Bavli, a "Jerusalem of Gold" is described as a crown worn by a bride (B. Sotah 49b). Crowns are also associated with Torah, as that is the adornment that beautifies more than any other (M. Taanit 4:8). However, all the sages agree that if a woman does go out on the sabbath wearing any such items she is not liable for a sin offering. In other words, it would be better if she wouldn't wear them in the first place but if she does wear them we do not punish her.

In its commentary on this mishnah, the Yerushalmi relates the following story about Rabbi Akiba:

A tale [is told] about Rabbi Akiba that he made his wife a [tiara of the type known as] a city of gold. Rabban Gamliel's wife saw it and became jealous of her. [Rabban Gamliel] said to her: If you would do for me as much as she did for him I would [buy you one, for] she sold the braids from her head and gave them to him that he might study Torah. (Y. Shabbat 6:1// B. Shabbat 59b)

Rabban Gamliel was an extraordinarily wealthy man and it is likely that his wife's station in society would merit her wearing a "city of gold" tiara. When his wife complains about Rabbi Akiba's wife's tiara, we learn of Rachel's devotion to her husband. Rachel gave much to her husband and sacrificed much for him; even the hair on her head. We have here a beautiful example of the principle midah k'neged midah, "measure for measure". Just as Rachel helped her husband by selling her hair, so Rabbi Akiba helps his wife by giving her an ornament to put in her hair.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Are adornments worn or carried? Should their use be prohibited on the sabbath? What do adornments communicate about a person? Should the sabbath be a day when social distinctions are set aside?
2. How much of yourself should you give to support your spouse's dreams?