

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted November 20, 2001 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

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Exciting Developments in Long-Term, Intensive Talmud Study at Maqom!

About one year ago, I offered those who study Talmud with Maqom the option of working with me on a one-on-one basis to do research and create articles about rabbinic literature that would be posted [here](#) at Maqom. With this article, that project is bearing its first fruit. I hope you enjoy reading Rabbi Louis Rieser's research and the papers that have yet to come.

--Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Ph.D.

BH

OMNITERRITORIALITY©

Dear Friends,

Now that the holidays are over, we can turn our attention to texts and ideas we express more regularly. Below is Rabbi Tom Alpert's beautiful translation of the prayer before the Shema, called Ahavah Rabbah, "[With] Great Love [Have You Loved Us]".

With compassion, with kindness, with love,
Loving God,
You have given us greatly and more
Of your care.

Our ancestors prayed
And sought your aid.
They trusted in you
And you led them through.
Send us, too, your grace
And help us to face
Our lives.

Hold us safe,
Make us strong,
Free from hurt,
Free from harm

To know
To see

To learn
To teach
To do
To keep
The truths of your Torah, the teachings it tells
With love.

Let Torah give light to our eyes
Let mitzvot give warmth to our hearts
Let your Name be great in our minds
And keep us forever from shame.

We've relied on your grand, on your glorious Name
Now we will dance, we'll rejoice when You save us.

Bring us from all the ends of the earth
Let us go straight and proud to our land,

For You are the rescuing God.

You called upon us, You gave us this task,
To tell the whole world, to say it with love:
You are One.

Blest are You, O our God,
Who has chosen Your people with love.

The theme of love looms large in the recitation of the Shema. The love is one of mutual responsibility; like a marital relation. Just as we must obey the conditions of the contract, so must God. This is an amazing act of Divine love. The Creator of the universe's powers are voluntarily limited so that God can be in a relationship with us. For example, God could destroy the world at will, and yet God has promised never to do so again (Genesis 9:14-15).

The symbols of a committed relationship between humanity and God are mutual. We keep God's words between our eyes with tefillin and God, as it were, does the same.

Rav Nachman bar Isaac said to Rav Hiyya bar Avin: What is written in the tefillin of the Lord of the Universe? He replied to him: "And who is like Your people Israel, a nation unique in the earth? (I Chronicles 17:21)"

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: You have made me a single entity in the world, and I shall make you a single entity in the world. "You have made me a single entity in the world", as it is said, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)'" 'And I shall make you a single entity in the world', as it is said, 'And who is like Your people Israel, a nation unique in the earth ?(I Chronicles 17:21)'" (B. Berachot 6a)

This love was expressed not just for the mitzvot and Torah but for the land of Israel. For 2000 years this was a remote hope; a nostalgic dream. Now the dream has come reality.

We should remember that a thriving diaspora has long been a part of a healthy Jewish community. After the First Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.E., Jews were taken to Babylonia. They were allowed to return to Israel in 516 B.C.E. However, many Jews stayed in Babylonia and founded the community which would later produce the Babylonian Talmud, upon which much of modern Judaism is based.

The great Professor Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus, said that "omniterritoriality" (i.e., living all over the globe) is one of the things that has saved the Jewish people; i.e., by living everywhere, we cannot all be wiped out by a single hostile campaign. Nonetheless, the Reform Movement is connected to the Land of Israel, and the State of Israel, through

persons and institutions there and support for them in the diaspora. We may still say this prayer in a hopeful way. The sages dreamed of the Land of Israel as a place of natural healing and harmony (B. Ketubot 111a-112a).

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the plea for a return to the land of Israel has a place in Jewish liturgy today? Should it be expressed differently now that all one need do to return is by a ticket and hop on a plane?
2. How are tefillin like a wedding ring, expressing mutual commitment between two parties?
3. What role has "omniterritoriality" played in Jewish life over the centuries? Is it valuable to the Jewish community?