

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted January 4, 2006 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### TALMUD, LIES AND THE INTERNET: A FORM OF ANTI-SEMITISM ON THE WEB

© Judith Z. Abrams, 2006

Unfortunately, when one "googles" the Talmud on the internet, one is bound to encounter some virulently anti-Semitic sites that propagate horrible misunderstanding of the Talmud. In order to bring a little light and logic to this situation we will be examining some of these "proof texts" in their true contexts so that we can understand the Talmud's true meaning.

Let's take a look at the following text, first in the context of an anti-Semitic website:

**Where a Jew Should Do Evil**

Moed Kattan 17a: If a Jew is tempted to do evil he should go to a city where he is not known and do the evil there.

Now let's look at the larger passage itself:

If one sees that his evil inclination is gaining sway over him, let him go away where he is not known, let him put on sordid black clothes and do the sordid deed that his heart desires rather than profane the name of heaven openly. (B. Moed Katan 17a)

This teaching comes in the context of sages being excommunicated. In this larger context, this teaching is meant as a last resort so that the least damage should be done to the honor of scholars in the community.

Think of it in a modern day setting. If a rabbi in New York City (remember that we are thinking about a community of scholars/rabbis) wants to have an affair should s/he do it openly in NYC or would less damage be done if s/he carried on out of town until s/he came to his/her senses?

By going out of town, the rabbi would minimize the impact his/her deeds would have on the community. This would not mitigate the punishment (very harsh, indeed, for adultery) that s/he would receive.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think of this teaching? Does understanding it in its context help you understand it in a better light?
2. There are things in the Talmud that can be taken in a way that hurts the Jewish tradition and community. What should we do about this?