

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

TALMUD AS HYPERTEXT, PART III

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One of the most enjoyable kinds of Talmud study is the tracing of a passage from place to place in rabbinic literature. This can be especially fruitful when the passage in question has become somewhat garbled in the "cutting and pasting" process. The passage we've been studying, about King David being taunted in the world to come because of his behavior with Bat Sheva and his retort that shaming another is worse than any of the crimes he committed, appears in another place in the Babylonian Talmud. Here's how it appears there:

What does the verse mean, "And when I stumbled, they rejoiced and gathered themselves together...they tore me and did not cease. (Psalm 35:15)"? Said David before the Holy One blessed be He: Master of the world, it is revealed and known before you that if they tore my flesh my blood would not have dripped on the ground.

And not only this, but even when they are studying the tractates Nega'im and Oholot (tractates of the Mishnah dealing with ritual purity), they say to me: David, what kind of death penalty is meted out to a man who has intercourse with a married woman? And I say to them: He is strangled, yet he still has a portion in the world to come. But one who embarrasses his fellow in public has no portion in the world to come. (B. Baba Metsia 59a)

Several things make this version of our passage difficult. Instead of studying about capital punishment, the members of the heavenly academy here are studying something far less related to David's crime, i.e., somewhat obscure laws of ritual purity.

Discussion Questions:

1. Print out this passage with the past two passages and study them side by side. What are their differences? What are their similarities?
2. Have you ever experienced, either through reading or writing, a difficulty in composition when "cutting and pasting" material from one document to another? Can your experience shed light on what might have led the compositors of the Talmud to make the choices they did in transferring this passage from its origin locale in Sanhedrin?