

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted April 12, 2006 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

VINDICATION OR VENGEANCE

© Judith Z. Abrams, 2006

As we prepare for our seders this year, I'd like to suggest that we look at what may be one of the more problematic passages in the Haggadah, i.e., the one in which we ask God to pour out His wrath on those who oppress us:

Pour out Your wrath upon those who do not know You and upon the governments which do not call upon Your name. For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his dwelling place (Psalms 79:6-7). Pour out Your fury upon them, let the fierceness of Your anger overtake them (Psalms 69:25). Pursue them in indignation and destroy them from under Your heavens (Lamentations 3:66).

A similar feeling is conveyed in the blessings said after the reading of the Megillah:

What blessing is said after the reading of the Megillah? "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, [the God] who fought our fight and vindicated our cause and executed our vengeance and punished our adversaries for us and visited retribution on all the enemies of our soul. Blessed are You, O Lord, who avenges Israel on all their enemies."

Rava said: [The concluding words are], "The God who saves."

Rav Papa said: Therefore let us say both: "Blessed are You, O Lord, who avenges Israel on all their enemies, the God who saves." (B. Megillah 21b)

Clearly, the rabbis legitimate our happiness at God's avenging us. Rava proposes a different chatimah, the closing summation of the blessing; one that praises God's saving power rather than God's powerful vengeance. Rav Papa provides the characteristic answer to the question "Which prayer do we choose?", i.e. "Both!".

Discussion Questions:

1. The sages are wrestling with their happiness at God's vengeance on our enemies and their sense that there is something somewhat improper about that happiness. How can we keep our sense of vindication from turning into vengeance?
2. What will you do at your seder this year with this part of the Haggadah?

Chag Sameiach!