

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted August 30, 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

UNDERSTANDING THE SYMBOLISM OF THE TEMPLE CULT ON YOM KIPPUR

Dear Friends,

As we continue preparing for the High Holidays, I thought it might be nice if we could bring some of the symbolism of the Temple cult to life. It's so hard for us to understand what the cult meant to the sages. They understood it not only literally, but metaphorically, as well.

Why are the sections on sacrifices (Leviticus 7) and the priestly vestments (Leviticus 8) close together? To teach you: as sacrifices make atonement, so do the priestly vestments make atonement.

The coat atones for bloodshed...

The pants atones for lewdness...

The mitre atones for arrogance...How do we know it? Said Rabbi Hanina: Let an article placed high up [on the priest's head] atone for an offense of haughtiness.

The girdle atones for [impure] meditations of the heart, i.e., where it was placed...

The robe atones for slander. How do we know it. Said Rabbi Hanina: Let an article of sound come and atone for an offence of sound. (B. Zevachim 88b)

Everything in this passage is rather self-explanatory except for the last sentence. Whatever the priest wears atones for sins associated with the body part it covers. But how does the robe atone for slander? The priest's robe had 36 bells on each side so when he moved it must have made quite a bit of noise and would drown out the noise of slander.

Understanding the priestly cult and the nostalgia for it is one of the biggest tasks anyone faces when trying to understand Judaism. I would like to suggest a book that might make it easier to do so. Tony Horwitz's *Confederates in the Attic* is a funny and telling book about nostalgia for the Confederacy in the South today. Understanding the Southern nostalgia for the Confederacy may help in understanding the nostalgia for the cult.

Horwitz's great-grandfather came over to the United States from Russia in 1882 and one of the first books he bought was one about the Civil War. Horwitz kept and treasured this book. He wonders why his great-grandfather bought it and says, "Poppa Isaac came from learned, rabbinical stock. Maybe he sensed that Civil War history was an American Talmud that would unlock the secrets of his adopted land and make him feel a part of it. (p. 389)"

Discussion Questions:

1. When you are in synagogue, check out the symbols on the ark and the sanctuary. What do they express, literally and metaphorically?
2. Think about what you wear to High Holiday services? How can you metaphorically express repentance by what you wear?
3. How can we achieve closure on personal and political defeats? What role does nostalgia play in healing? In keeping the hurt alive? Where does the balance lie?