

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

### "A TALMUD TALE" PREMIERED FEBRUARY IN HOUSTON, TX!

The musical was an enormous hit! If you'd like a dvd of the show, please send a [contribution](#) of \$18 for an enjoyable, entertaining and inspiring look at the world of the Talmud!

Posted September 13, 2007, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

## VALUE EVERYONE

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At this time of year when we are being evaluated by God, we should value everyone and see the merit in each of them. This story from Lamentations Rabbah is just one of many to be found there about looking carefully at one's surroundings and learning from everyone.

An Athenian came to Jerusalem where he studied for three and a half years to learn philosophy, but could not master it. After the three and a half years had passed he bought a slave who was blind in one eye. He exclaimed in disgust at his folly, 'After three and a half years of studying I have bought a slave who is half blind!'

The seller said to him, 'By your life, he is very wise and can see at a distance.' When they came out of the gate, the slave said to him, 'Hasten that we may overtake the caravan.' 'Is there, then, a caravan in front of us?' he asked. 'Yes, and there is a she-camel in front of us which is blind in one eye. It has twins in its womb, and is carrying two skin-bottles, one containing wine and the other vinegar. It is four miles away.'

He said to the slave, 'Oh you who belong to a stiff-necked people! With one eye, how do you know the camel is blind in one eye?' He answered, 'I notice that one side of the path has been grazed [by the camel] but not the other.' 'And how do you know that there are twins in its womb?' He replied, 'It lay down, and I noticed the trace of two of them.' 'And how do you know that it is carrying two skin-bottles, one containing wine and the other vinegar?' He answered, 'From the drippings; those of wine are absorbed in the ground but those of vinegar ferment.' 'And how do you know that it is four miles away?' He said to him, 'Up to four miles the mark of the camel's hoof is perceptible but not beyond that distance.'  
(Lamentations Rabbah 1:1 12)

The Athenian comes to Jerusalem seeking intellectual wisdom but is unable to see the value in a half-blind slave. The slave quickly demonstrates how even one who appears to be disabled can still have a keen appreciation of the world around him.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What is this midrash saying about the difference between intellectual knowledge and, for lack of a better word, *sekhel* (i.e., "street smarts")?

2. Is there a balance to be struck between intellectual learning and the world of deeds?
3. What gifts do you hope God takes into account as you face this Yom Kippur?

Shanah tovah!