

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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

**BH**

### SILVER OR GOLD?

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While studying with Rabbi Gordon Fuller of Waco, Texas (yes, there are Jews there), we came across a truly fascinating irregularity in the text.

In Mishnah (when it is presented as Mishnah alone, without Gemara), Tosefta and Bavli, M. Baba Metsia 4:1 reads as follows:

*The delivery of the gold of a seller gives him title to the silver of the buyer but the delivery of the silver of the buyer does not give him title to the gold of the seller. (M. Baba Metsia 4:1)*

This is not the entire mishnah but in essence, what this mishnah says is that the less current type of coin is the item that is purchased by the more current type of coin. So it would appear that gold was the coin of the realm, so to speak. It's something akin to the difference between receiving a check, cashing a check and having the money credited to your account. The transaction is not complete until you see that the money is actually in your bank account. In ancient times, a transaction was only complete when the purchaser formally took possession of an item by drawing it towards himself or lifting it, in the case of movable property.

However, in the Yerushalmi, this is not how the mishnah reads. Instead, it is as follows:

*The delivery of the silver of a seller gives him title to the gold of the buyer but the delivery of the seller's gold to the buyer, to be acquired by silver, does not constitute a completed sale. (Y. Baba Metsia 4:1)*

So in the Mishnah, Tosefta and Bavli, gold buys silver, meaning the coin of the realm is gold. But in the Yerushalmi, silver buys gold, meaning that silver is the coin of the realm.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Why the switch? Changing the Mishnah is a pretty radical step. What change in the economic reality could have caused such a change in the text? Usually, if the Gemara wants to change something, they just include it in the discussion of the mishnah. Why change the mishnah itself?
2. Are there any analogous situations today? What is "the coin of the realm" in the world? Gold? Dollars? Euros? Yen? Why does it make a difference?
3. What other economic issues are in play here?