

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 November 2, 2007, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CHANGING NATURE OF HALLOWEEN AND JEWISH IDEAS OF COMMUNING WITH THE DEAD

© Judith Z. Abrams, 2007

Only 12 trick-or-treaters came to our door last night, all accompanied by their parents. The number has continued to decline year after year. It started me thinking. Here in Texas, Halloween is a much more serious affair than it is where I grew up in Pittsburgh. The Day of the Dead is a day of worship and commemoration rather than an excuse to dress up and collect candy from your neighbors. Communing with the dead is certainly something the sages recognized, as shown in this story:

It has been taught: It is related that a certain pious man gave a denar to a poor man on the eve of New Year in a year of drought, and his wife scolded him, and he went and passed the night in the cemetery, and he heard two spirits conversing with one another. Said one to her companion: "My dear, come and let us wander about the world and let us hear from behind the curtain what suffering is coming on the world." Said her companion to her, "I am not able, because I am buried in a matting of reeds. But do you go, and whatever you hear, tell me." So the other went and wandered about and returned. Said her companion to her, "My dear, what have you heard from behind the curtain?" She replied, "I heard that whoever sows after the first rainfall will have his crop smitten by hail." So the man went and did not sow till after the second rainfall, with the result that everyone else's crop was smitten and his was not smitten. The next year, he again went and passed the night in the cemetery, and heard the two spirits conversing with one another. Said one to her companion, "Come and let us wander about the world and hear from behind the curtain what punishment is coming upon the world." Said the other to her, "My dear, did I not tell you that I am not able because I am buried in a matting of reeds? But do you go, and whatever you hear, come and tell me." So the other one went and wandered about the world and returned. She said to her, "My dear, what have you heard from behind the curtain?" She replied, "I heard that whoever sows after the later rain will have his crop smitten with blight." So the man went and sowed after the first rain with the result that everyone else's crop was blighted and his was not blighted. Said his wife to him, "How is it that last year everyone else's crop was smitten and yours was not smitten, and this year everyone else's crop is blighted and yours is not blighted?" So he related to her all his experiences. The story goes that a few days later a quarrel broke out between the wife of that pious man and the mother of the [dead] child [buried in reeds], and the former said to the latter, "Come and I will show you your daughter buried in a matting of reeds." The next year the man again went and spent the night in the cemetery and heard the spirits conversing together. One said, "My dear, come and let us wander about the world and hear from behind the curtain

what suffering is coming upon the world." Said the other, "My dear, let me be. The words [spoken] between you and me have been heard among the living. " This would prove they [the dead] know? Perhaps some other man after his decease went and told them."
(B. Berachot 18b)

Amazing, is it not, that being on the "best dressed" list matters even after you're dead! But this story clearly shows that this was a recognized phenomenon even though the mixing of the two worlds, the living and the dead, wasn't seen as something that should happen.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is trick or treating declining where you live? If so, why do you think trick-or-treating is declining so much?
2. Have you ever had the experience told in the story above of communing with dead spirits? If so, what was it like? Please describe it.
3. Do you think the seriousness of "the Day of the Dead" could decrease the emphasis on trick or treating? How?