

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted November 6, 2002 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.

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## GETTING A PICTURE IN MIND OF THE SECOND TEMPLE AND DO WOMEN AND MEN DIFFER IN PHILANTHROPY?

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If we're going to learn about the priesthood, one of the first things we'll need to do is get a true picture in mind of what the place looked like. The following links should give you a start at picturing the Temple.

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/3969/catriel.html>

<http://www.ipol.com/Gallery/SecondTemple.htm>

[http://www.inisrael.com/holyland/m\\_academic.htm](http://www.inisrael.com/holyland/m_academic.htm)

<http://www.yahrzeit.org/temple.html>

<http://www.alpena.net/Israel/day3-3.htm>

<http://www.templemodels.com/temple/Fullsizewht1200.jpg>

<http://jeru.huji.ac.il/pba3.htm>

<http://jeru.huji.ac.il/pba1.htm>

<http://www.solomonstemple.com/page1.html>

One web page speaks of the blinding light of the Temple's reflection of the dawning sun. We have a text that explains that this was no accident. This text recounts the gifts of Helene to the Temple. She lived in the first century C.E. and was the sister and wife of Monobaz I, king of Adiabene. Helene and her son Izates converted to Judaism in about 30

C.E. through the influence of Ananias, a Jewish merchant. Helene spent the latter part of her life in Jerusalem where she built a palace. She died in Adiabene but her remains were buried in Jerusalem in the Tomb of the Kings.

Helene is portrayed in Rabbinic literature as exercising power both as it is conventionally understood and also the power associated with virtue. For example, she is remembered for making lavish donations to the Temple.

**Helen his [Munbaz the king's] mother made a candelabra of gold over the entrance of the Sanctuary and she also made a tablet of gold with the sotah portion on it (Numbers 5:11-31). (M. Yoma 3:10)**

The candelabra which Helene put on the Sanctuary was placed at the very top of the building so that, at sunrise, it would glitter and the inhabitants of Jerusalem could tell it was time to recite the morning Shema which is to be said at sunrise (T. Yoma 2:3). The scroll with the sotah portion refers to that passage in the Torah concerning a woman who is suspected of adultery. This passage from the Torah is written down and combined with bitter waters and the suspected adulteress drinks it in order to determine if she has actually been unfaithful. This golden version of it was made so that, when it was needed, no one would have to hunt for a Torah scroll, but rather could sit in front of this tablet and copy the passage down.

This mishnah is one of three mishnayot (M. Yoma 3:9-11) which contrast those who are remembered with praise and those who are remembered in shame for their contributions to the Temple or their lack thereof. Those who contributed lavish, or simply practical, improvements to the Temple are remembered with praise. Those who had special skills in preparing materials for the Temple, or in singing or writing and who refused to teach these skills to others were remembered for shame. Helene is the only woman in either group.

In addition, we note that all the other contributions listed have to do specifically with the functioning of the Temple, particularly on Yom Kippur. Helene's gifts relate much more to the common person and the performance of basic mitzvot. In fact, her gifts seem aimed, first, at maintaining people's relationships with God by reminding them to say the Shema and, second, maintaining people's relationships with each other through the use of the sotah passage. It is tempting to suspect that this represents the different interests of men and women in their charitable pursuits.

Today, we find that women use the power of their philanthropy to further those causes that are meaningful to them and give money to charitable causes for different reasons than do men. For example, women seem to be much more interested in the end result of their philanthropy than in the secondary gain they experience from belonging to an organization such as, for example, the Major Contributors Circle of a Federation. Could Helene be an early forerunner of these independent, grass-roots-oriented, feminist philanthropists? It's tempting to propose such a theory, but we are obviously on weak historical grounds when we make such a suggestion. Still, it is food for thought.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. After perusing the web pages with their pictures and explanations of the Temple what questions do you have about the Temple and how it functioned?
2. Do you think men and women perform the mitzvah of philanthropy? If so, why and how? If not, why and how?