

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted January 16, 2003 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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THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SYNAGOGUE LITURGY AND THE PRAYERS OFFERED IN THE TEMPLE

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The following is one of the most important passages that puts prayers we say in our worship services into a Temple context. After the daily sacrifice was processed, the priests went before the public to pray. (Interestingly, the actual sacrificing of the animal is supposed to be conducted in silence. The music the Levites provided was not performed inside the inner Temple grounds.)

The superintendent said to them [the priests]: Pronounce one blessing [assumed to be the blessing for Torah], Ahavah Rabbah, ("With abiding love . . .") and they did so. They then recited the ten commandments and the first, second and third sections of the Shema and they blessed the people with three benedictions, namely, "true and firm" and "avodah" and the priestly benediction. (M. Tamid 5:1)

Let us summarize this step-by-step:

1. The daily sacrifice is finished.
2. The priests are called upon to pray.
3. They say a prayer although its contents are not specified.
4. They then recite the ten commandments.
5. Next, the full three paragraphs of the Shema are spoken.
6. They pray a declaration of the truth of the Shema.
7. They pray that the sacrifices be accepted by God.
8. They recite the priestly blessing over the crowd.

So it would appear that the priests are leading a worship service that contains many of the most important parts of synagogue liturgy: a Shema recitation sandwiched in between two prayers and two of the last set of blessings of the

Amidah. There is another connection between synagogue liturgy and rites in the Second Temple when we consider that Psalms were sung there just as they are recited in services today.

Discussion Questions:

1. The ten commandments, have been relegated to a visual role in the synagogue. Almost every ark has some allusion to the ten commandments on it. Why do you think that the ten commandments were subsequently excluded from Jewish liturgy?
2. The image of the priests leading services here, and in other texts (e.g., when they receive the first fruit offerings on Shavuot) demonstrates that the priests were not, strictly speaking, genealogically-favored butchers. They used blood, wine, water and words to create spiritual truth. This combination of technical expertise and human, communal spirituality can serve as an ideal for several professions. Which professions come to your mind in this light?
3. How do you think these Temple beginnings affected the liturgy that we have now?