

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted March 16, 2005 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### FUN WITH THE HEBREW ALPHABET

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Dear Friends,

Since the topic of Bibliomancy has generated so much discussion I thought we might continue looking at the topic from the perspective of midrashim on the letters of the alphabet. You may need to take out a Hebrew text and actually look at the shape of the letters for this Talmud passage to make sense.

אבגדהוזחטיכךלמנסןסעפףציןקרשת

Alef Bet [means] 'learn wisdom [alef Binah];

Gimmel Dalet. Show kindness to the Poor [Gemol Dallim].

Why is the foot of the Gimmel stretched toward the Dalet? Because it is fitting for the benevolent to run after [seek out] the poor. And why is the roof of the Dalet stretched out toward the Gimmel? Because he [the poor] must make himself available to him. And why is the face of the Dalet turned away from the Gimmel? Because he must give him [help] in secret, lest he be ashamed of him.

Hey, Vav, that is the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He;

Zayyin, Chet, Tet, Yud, Kaf, Lamed: [this sequence teaches,] and if you do thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, will sustain [Zan] you, be gracious [Chen] unto you, show goodness [meiTiv] to you, give you a heritage [Yerushah], and bind a crown [Keter] on you in the world to come.

The open Mem and the closed Mem [denote] open teaching [Ma'amar] and closed [esoteric] teaching [Satum].

The bent Nun and the straight Nun: the faithful [Ne'eman] if bent [humble], [will ultimately be] the faithful, straightened.

Samek, 'ayyin: support [Semak] the poor ['aniyyim]....

The bent pey and the straight pey [intimate] an open mouth [peh], a closed mouth.

A bent tsaddi and a straight tsaddi: the righteous [tsaddik] is bent [in this world]; the righteous is straightened [in the next world]....

Kuf [stands for] Kadosh [holy];

Resh [for] Rasha' [wicked]: why is the face of the Kuf averted from, the Resh? The Holy (haKadosh) One, blessed be He, said: I cannot look at the wicked. And why is the crown of the Kuf turned toward the Resh? The Holy One, blessed be He, says: If he repents, I will bind a crown on him like Mine. And why is the foot of the Kuf suspended? [To show] that if he repents, he can enter and be brought in [to God's

favor] through this [opening]....

SHin [stands for] SHeker [falsehood]; Taf [for] emet [truth]: why are the letters of Sheker close together, while those of emet are far apart? Falsehood is frequent, truth is rare. And why does falsehood [stand] on one foot, whilst truth has a brick-like foundation? Truth can stand, falsehood cannot stand. (B. Shabbat 104a)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Does this midrash give you a greater appreciation for the Hebrew alphabet? If so, how and why?
2. Could we make the same sort of midrash about the English alphabet? Please give examples.