

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted October 25, 2001 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.

BH

THE SHEKHINAH AND WHAT CRIME AND PUNISHMENT DO TO PEOPLE AND GOD

Dear Friends,

One of the best-known names of God is Shekhinah, God's indwelling presence. Interestingly, it is not to be found in Jewish Scriptures. Its first use in Jewish canonical texts is in the Mishnah and there it occurs but once (not including Pirkei Avot which is not part of the Mishnah, proper). (There are all sorts of texts in the Pseudepigrapha that refer to the Shekhinah.)

In its discussion of crime and capital punishment, Rabbi Meir notes that earthly deeds have heavenly consequences:

Said Rabbi Meir: At the time when a person suffers, Shekhinah, what language does she utter (as it were)? My head hurts! My arm hurts! If Maqom is so troubled about the blood of the wicked that is shed how much the more so about the blood of righteous ones! (M. Sanhedrin 6:5)

God empathizes with everyone who suffers. Maqom here is another name for God. Literally, maqom means place...an ironic name for a Deity who is everywhere.

However, the hurt does not last forever as the mishnah after this one shows. After a suitable time for grieving and anger, the family of the condemned who was executed by the court reestablish contact with these persons:

When the flesh had decayed away they collected the bones and buried them in their place. And the next of kin came and greeted the judges and [greeted] the witnesses as if to say: We have nothing in our heart against you, for you have given a verdict of truth. And they did not observe mourning, but they might grieve for grieving is in the heart alone. (M. Sanhedrin 6:6)

We are not allowed to bear grudges forever. Acceptance leads to healing, both in the individual and in the community

at large. Yet we are not forced to instantly recover from our grief. This is an important lesson for us in the modern world. We are used to instantaneous results: we should be back to work 2 weeks after major surgery or we should recover from a loved one's death in 8 weeks. These are simply unrealistic expectations.

Discussion Questions:

1. From our first mishnah it is evident that God is a party to every human interaction. How would knowing that God was in the room, so to speak, affect the way you behave? If everything you do has heavenly consequences, how will that effect your behavior?
2. How can the mishnah mandate the sort of acceptance that it does? Is it possible to forgive in a situation such as this? Can you give examples?