

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted December 9, 2010, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

CAN YOU SHOP THE CHRISTMAS SPECIALS?

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Our answer comes from Rabban Gamliel and one of the stories for which he is famous. He's a bit of a maverick. Things that most Jews don't do, he goes ahead and does. And in this story he's with his servant Tavi, who appears to have never left his side, day or night.

Once it happened that Rabban Gamliel was going along the road. He found a loaf of bread on the road. He said to his servant, Tavi: Take the loaf.

He saw a Samaritan coming toward him. Rabban Gamliel said to him: Magbai (a Samaritan name), take this loaf of bread.

Rabbi Ilai ran after Mabgai and said to him: What is your name? He answered: Mabgai.

Rabbi Ilai asked: And where do you come from? He answered: From one of the nearby station-keeper's villages.

Now, did Rabban Gamliel ever meet you before? He answered: No.

From this we learn that Rabban Gamliel divined by the Holy Spirit. And from this we learn three things. (1) We learn that the leaven of a gentile is permitted immediately after Passover. (2) And they do not pass by food but pick it up. (3) And they follow the status of the majority of those who travel the roads (the majority of which were gentiles in this case). (Y. Avodah Zarah 1:9)

Some explanation first. This incident takes place right after Passover. Rabban Gamliel and Tavi are walking along a road traveled mostly by non-Jews, so Rabban Gamliel assumes the bread is made by non-Jews. Nonetheless, Rabban Gamliel has Tavi pick it up and then gives it away.

What is the take home for your shopping in the coming weeks? I think Rabban Gamliel would say, "Go ahead and shop the sales. Just leave the overtly 'Christmas' things for those who observe Christmas."

Discussion Questions:

1. Rabban Gamliel would not, of course, pick up bread during Passover. Could this mean that you shouldn't shop the sales till after Christmas? Explain your reasoning. Do you think other sages might tell you to stay away from the stores during the Christmas season? Why or why not?

2. Rabban Gamliel is a billionaire, yet he seems to know the value of food. One does not leave food for humans to the birds and beasts, even if one isn't going to eat it oneself. In these tight economic times, could this inspire you to look through your cabinets for food you haven't eaten (and aren't intending to eat) and perhaps to donate these to a food bank?

Looking forward to your insights!