

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted January 3, 2007, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

A GREAT LADY: RABBAN GAMLIEL'S MAID

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There aren't too many great ladies to meet in rabbinic literature. So when we do, we should celebrate her.

We know that Rabban Gamliel is very close with his slave, Tavi and this made, Tavita, seems to be cut from the same cloth:

Tavita the maid-servant of Rabban Gamliel was examining herself in the intervals between attending to vessels of wine. When she felt the commencement of menstruation she stopped. He said to her: Have the vessels with wine become stale? She answered: No. When he realized the reason, he said: Alas, the wine has gone! Said she to him: I examined myself before attending to each vessel, but felt nothing till now. Said he: May your life be given to you, even as you have restored mine to me! (Leviticus Rabbah 19:4)

The laws of ritual purity were such that, had she touched the wine while menstruating, she would have made it unfit to drink. Tavita (from the root "tov"= good) knew the law well and took care with her master's property for which he enthusiastically praises her.

Discussion Questions:

1. The complicated laws of family purity (abstention from physical contact, self-examination, going to the mikveh) are the only laws regarding ritual purity that are still in operation today. Why do you think that is?
2. Many of those who follow the rules of family purity find that it enhances their marital relations. Why do you think that might be?