

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted January 17, 2002 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

EVEN THE SMALLEST MITSVAH BRINGS GREAT REWARDS

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Dear Friends,

Sometimes it seems as if, no matter what we do, things simply won't turn out right. So, to lighten your load, I bring you this rather fanciful sugya which will bring to you a whole new meaning for the phrase "stairway to heaven".

It was taught: R. Nathan said, There is not a single precept in the Torah, even the lightest, whose reward is not enjoyed in this world; and as to its reward in the future world I know not how great it is. Go and learn this from the precept of tsitsit.

Once a man, who was very scrupulous about the precept of tsitsit, heard of a certain harlot in one of the towns by the sea who accepted four hundred gold [denars] for her hire. He sent her four hundred gold [denars] and appointed a day with her....

When he came in she prepared for him seven beds, six of silver and one of gold; and between one bed and the other there were steps of silver, but the last were of gold. She then went up to the top bed and lay down upon it naked. He too went up after her in his desire to sit naked with her, when all of a sudden the four fringes [of his garment] struck him across the face; whereupon he slipped off and sat upon the ground.

She also slipped off and sat upon the ground and said, 'By the Roman Capitol, I will not leave you alone until you tell me what blemish you saw in me. 'By the Temple', he replied, 'never have I seen a woman as beautiful as you are; but there is one precept which the Lord our God has commanded us, it is called tsitsit, and with regard to it the expression 'I am the Lord your God' is twice written, signifying, I am He who will exact punishment in the future, and I am He who will give reward in the future. Now [the tsitsit] appeared to me as four witnesses [testifying against me]'. She said, 'I will not leave you until you tell me

your name, the name of your town, the name of your teacher, the name of your school in which you study the Torah'. He wrote all this down and handed it to her.

Thereupon she arose and divided her estate into three parts; one third for the government, one third to be distributed among the poor, and one third she took with her in her hand; the bed clothes, however, she retained. She then came to the Beit Hamidrash of R. Hiyya, and said to him, 'Master, give instructions about me that they make me a proselyte'. 'My daughter', he replied; 'perhaps you have set your eyes on one of the disciples?' She thereupon took out the script and handed it to him. 'Go', said he 'and enjoy your acquisition'.

Those very bed-clothes which she had spread for him for an illicit purpose she now spread out for him lawfully. This is the reward [of the precept] in this world; and as for its reward in the future world I know not how great it is. (B. Menachot 44a)

Discussion Questions:

1. If a woman were to write a story about wearing tsitsit, what do you imagine it might say? (Women are, according to the Talmud, obligated to wear tsitsit!)
2. This story is a beautiful literary creation where a righteous use of a piece of cloth (the cloth to which the tsitsit are bound) is rewarded by a piece of cloth (the wedding bed linen). Do you have any experiences of midah k'neged midah, measure for measure (or "karma") that echo this stories? Please tell us what they are.
3. How can wearing tsitsit or tying a string around your finger or wearing a mezuzah help you to remember to do mitsvot? Do you have a personal practice to help you to remember to do certain mitsvot? Please describe it for us.
4. Sometimes sages are tempted by lust, just as ordinary people are. Indeed, this continues to be a problem today. How can we internalize limits so that we don't need to have physical reminders? Or is that asking too much?