

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted February 19, 2006 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

TALMUD AS HYPERTEXT, PART I

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In our discussion group we have begun to explore Talmud as the ultimate hypertext. In order to demonstrate this feature of the Talmud we will slowly examine the way a story is linked in different places and what happens as the venue for the story changes. This is advanced Talmud study and will take several weeks to do on the internet.

We start with an entertaining story, told in the context of many stories about King David.

One should never intentionally bring himself to the test, since David king of Israel did so, and fell.

He said to God: Master of the Universe, why do we say in the first prayer of Amidah, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," but not the God of David?'

God said: Because they passed tests and trials and you haven't.

David said: Master of the Universe, try me and test me....

God said: I will test you and even give you the benefit of telling you what kind of trial it will be ahead of time (which I did not give to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob). I will test you in a matter concerning adultery.

That evening, David rose from his bed, forgetting the teaching that there is a small organ in man, which is satisfied when hungry, but hungry when satisfied. He walked onto the roof of the palace and from there saw a very beautiful woman bathing. Bat Sheva was washing her hair behind a screen when Satan appeared in the guise of a bird. David shot an arrow at the bird/Satan and the arrow broke the screen and so Bat Sheva was revealed to him. Immediately, David sent out enquiries about her and failed the test (B. Sanhedrin 107a)

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever wondered why King David is not included in the Amidah? Apparently the sages wondered, too.
2. What do you think of the teaching about the "small organ in a man"? Do you find it apt?
3. This is obviously a fanciful story. Can you point out its holes and/or indiscrepancies?