

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted March 2, 2006 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### TALMUD AS HYPERTEXT, PART II

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We continue with our examination of the Talmud as the ultimate hypertext. Our last text was a story about how King David brought the test of temptation with Bat Sheva upon himself. His failure of that test results in his perpetually being shamed in the World to Come.

What does the verse (from Psalm 35:15) mean when it states: "But when they gleefully gather; wretches gather against me, I don't know why; they tear at me without end"? David said to the Holy One Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, it is known and revealed to You that had my enemies torn at my flesh, I would not have bled (because it has all wasted away because of my fasting to repent of my sin with Bat Sheva).

And furthermore, when they are engaged in studying the Beit Din's (the Jewish court's) four kinds of executions, they interrupt their studies and say to me: David, if someone has intercourse with a married woman, by which of these four ways is he executed?

I say to them: If someone has sex with a married woman, he is executed by strangulation, but he still has a portion in the World to Come. But if someone puts another person to shame in public, he does not have a portion in the World to Come. (B. Sanhedrin 107a)

Psalm 35 describes how much hateful words can hurt. The sages attributed authorship of the Psalms to David so, here, they put the words of Psalm 35 into David's mouth and make it refer to the episode in which he is most vulnerable to hurtful words, i.e., his misconduct with Bat Sheva.

Not only did he have to suffer such words in this world, he also had to do so in the Heavenly Academy. The scholars in the Heavenly Academy take time from their studies to taunt David. He retorts that while adultery is a mortal sin, hurting someone with words carries an even greater punishment: banishment from eternal life in the World to Come.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What does this text tell you about the relative weight the sages put on adultery and hurting someone with words? Do you agree with their valuation? Why or why not?
2. Do you think it is just that one could be deprived a portion of the World to Come just by hurting another person with words? Will you be denied a portion in the World to Come, i.e., have you hurt someone with words?
3. The sages envisioned a Heavenly Academy that corresponds earthly study houses here on earth? How do you envision heaven? What do people do there?