

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted March 13, 2003 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.

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THE HEART OF THE TORAH: MORE HIDDEN MEANINGS (PLUS: A PURIM BONUS)

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Thanks to our webmaster, Chris Benton, we now know what the exact middle letter, middle word and middle sentences in the Torah are. (The middle chapter is not relevant. The verses are ancient Masoritic traditions. The chapter numbers are a Christian influence.)

All three of these "middle things" fall in Chapter 8 of Leviticus that outlines the ordination of Aaron and his sons as high priests.

1. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
2. Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bull for the sin offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread;
3. And gather all the congregation together to the door of the Tent of Meeting.
4. And Moses did as the Lord commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together to the door of the Tent of Meeting.
5. And Moses said to the congregation, This is the thing which the Lord commanded to be done.
6. And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water.
7. And he put on him the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and he girded him with the finely done girdle of the ephod, and bound it to him with it.
8. **And he put the breastplate on him; also he put on the breastplate the Urim and the Tummim.**
9. **And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, upon its front, he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as the Lord commanded Moses.**
10. And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the Tabernacle and all that was in it, and sanctified them.
11. And he sprinkled it upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, both the basin and its pedestal, to sanctify them.

12. And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron's head, and anointed him, to sanctify him.
13. And Moses brought the sons of Aaron, and put coats upon them, and girded them with girdles, and put turbans upon them; as the Lord commanded Moses.
14. And he brought the bull for the sin offering; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull for the sin offering.
15. And he slew it; and Moses took the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar around with his finger, and purified the altar, and poured the blood at the bottom (**y'sod**) of the altar, and sanctified it, to make atonement upon it.
16. And he took all the fat that was upon the entrails, and the appendage above the liver, and the two kidneys, and their fat, and Moses burned it upon the altar.
17. But the bull, and its hide, its flesh, and its dung, he burned with fire outside the camp; as the Lord commanded Moses.
18. And he brought the ram for the burnt offering; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram.
19. And he killed it; and Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar.
20. And he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burned the head, and the pieces, and the fat.
21. And he washed the entrails and the legs in water; and Moses burned the whole ram upon the altar; it was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet savor, and an offering made by fire to the Lord; as the Lord commanded Moses.
22. And he brought the other ram, the ram of consecration; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram.
23. And he slew it; and Moses took of its blood, and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.
24. And he brought the sons of Aaron, and Moses put blood on the tip of their right ear, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet; and Moses sprinkled the blood on the altar.
25. And he took the fat, and the rump, and all the fat that was upon the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys, and their fat, and the right shoulder;
26. And out of the basket of unleavened bread, that was before the Lord, he took one unleavened cake, and a cake of oiled bread, and one wafer, and put them on the fat, and upon the right shoulder;
27. And he put all upon Aaron's hands, and upon his sons' hands, and waved them for a wave offering before the Lord.
28. And Moses took them from their hands, and burned them on the altar upon the burnt offering; they were consecrations for a sweet savor; it is an offering made by fire to the Lord. (rei'ach nicho'ach asher **hu** l'Adonai)
29. And Moses took the breast, and waved it for a wave offering before the Lord; for of the ram of consecration it was Moses' part; as the Lord commanded Moses.
30. And Moses took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron, and on his garments, and on his sons, and on his sons' garments with him; and sanctified Aaron, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him.
31. And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons, Boil the flesh at the door of the Tent of Meeting; and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of consecrations, as I commanded, saying, Aaron and his sons shall eat it.
32. And that which remains of the meat and of the bread shall you burn with fire.
33. And you shall not go out of the door of the Tent of Meeting in seven days, until the days of your consecration are ended; for seven days shall he consecrate you.
34. As he has done this day, so the Lord has commanded to do, to make an atonement for you.
35. Therefore shall you remain at the door of the Tent of Meeting day and night seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, that you die not; for so I am commanded.
36. So Aaron and his sons did all things which the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

So the middle letter of the Torah is **aleph** (in the word **hu** in verse 8:28), the middle word is **y'sod** (foundation, 8:15) and the two middle verses describe Aaron donning the gold vestments of the High Priest 8:8-9). This outcome fits our theory that the priests were the ones who redacted the Torah quite well. They made the center of the entire document the validation and glorification of their ancestor.

Purim Bonus:

The longest verse in Tanach is Esther 8:9 and Esther 3:13 is one of the few verses in Tanach to use all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is there often resistance to the notion that the Torah could be arranged so carefully that the deliberate placing of letters, words and verses could have meaning?
2. What do the aleph, y'sod (foundation...and a name of one of the sefirot), the Urim and Tumim and Aaron's crown mean to you?
3. What do you imagine the middle word of the Mishnah would be? The Gemara? Will you help us find out?