

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted March 28, 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.

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MORE BLESSINGS

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In a previous study session we looked at blessings over things one enjoys or experiences as gifts from God (even negative things). However, there are some things for which we cannot pray.

One says a blessing for evil, similar to that said over good [tidings] and over good a blessing is said similar to that over evil. And one who cries over something that is past; behold he [utters] a vain prayer. If a man's wife is pregnant and he says, "[God] grant that my wife bear a male child", this is a vain prayer. If he is coming on the way and heard a voice crying in the city, and says, "[God] grant that this does is not in my house," this is a vain prayer...(M. Berachot 9:2-3)

One may not utter vain prayers such as "magically double this harvest" but one may pray that what he brings in may be for a blessing and not for a curse [i.e., that it should not spoil, cf. M. Berachot 9:3)] (T. Berachot 6:7)

Yet, there are still miracles every day for which we can be grateful:

Blessings for people and other wonders:

One who sees attractive people or attractive trees says, "Blessed...be he who has [made] such attractive creations." (T. Berachot 6:4)

A blessing over chocolate and spontaneity in prayer:

If they brought before him types of desserts he recites over them the benediction, "Creator of types of sweets"...Rabbi Meir says, Even if one saw a loaf [of bread] and said, "Praised be He who created this loaf, how nice it is," that serves as its benediction." (T. Berachot 4:4)

If one saw figs and said, "Praised be He who created these figs, how nice they are" that serves as their

benediction. (Y. Berachot 4:4)

For wind:

For the winds he recites, "Blessed... whose power fills the world (M. Berachot 9:2)" The Mishnah speaks of strong winds. But for gentle winds one recites, "Blessed...who made all creation." (Y. Berachot 9:2)

On seeing the new moon:

Blessed...who renews the months. (Y. Berachot 9:2)

Blessings for miracles:

If one sees a place where miracles have been wrought for Israel, he says, "Blessed...who wrought miracles for our ancestors in this place." (M Berachot 9:1)

Discussion Questions:

1. God did not have to create a world in which chocolate or butterflies or rainbows exist. Or God could have created them but we might not be able to appreciate them. God, like us, appreciates a bit of thanks. Does this idea of God fit your conception of "normative Jewish ideas about God"? Why or why not?
2. We can't pray for unreasonable requests. In other words, we cannot ask God to change the order of time or nature. But, then, what can we legitimately ask of God?
3. Rabbi Eliezer was able to magically make a field of cucumbers appear and be harvested into neat piles. He was tried for heresy and eventually excommunicated from the Academy which he served so diligently. What role does "magic" have in Jewish practice?