

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted March 30, 2000 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

### WHAT KIND OF STUDENTS ARE THE BEST?

Talmud teaches that Rabbi Akiba had an enormous number of students but that they all died during his lifetime. This is why the Omer is considered a sad period, since it was when they all perished. Here is the text of that incident:

It is said that Rabbi Akiba had twelve thousand pairs of disciples between Gabbat and Antipatris. All died during his lifetime, at the same time, between Pesach and Shavuot because they did not treat each other with respect. The was desolate until Rabbi Akiba came to our masters in the south and taught them Torah-he thus taught Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yose and Rabbi Shimon [and] Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua. He said to them, "The previous disciples died only because they begrudged one another the knowledge of Torah. See to it that you do not act like them." They rose and filled all the land of Israel with Torah. (B. Yebamot 62b)

Gabbata is today Gevat in the Jezreel Valley, near Haifa. Antipatris, is near where Tel Aviv is today.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Is it better to teach widely or teach a few students deeply?
2. The teachers that Rabbi Akiba trained became the founders of all of rabbinic literature. How does your one life, in its quietest, not its most acclaimed, moments, make all the difference in the world? What does this tell us about numbers and fame?
3. What does it say about learning on the internet? And, if I must be honest, my goals for you? Because I want you, at least some of you, to become the few, the proud, the teachers of Talmud.