

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted April 4, 2012, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

PRAYERS FOR HEALING AND DESTROYING TO MAKE ROOM FOR INNOVATION

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King Hezekiah was one of the most beloved king's in Jewish history. If we were bracketing the kings of Israel (I'm still stuck in March madness!), it would likely result in this ranking:

1. David
2. Solomon
3. Josiah
4. Hezekiah

Hezekiah (c. 700 BCE) was a reformer and instituted many changes in the First Temple...some of which gained him praise and some of which did not. Let's take a look at the list of praiseworthy things he did:

Hezekiah, the king of Judah did sixth things, three of which were praised and three of which were not praised. These are the three things he did which were praised:

1. He crushed the copper serpent (Numbers 21:9).
2. He dragged his father's (King Achaz) body to the grave on a bed of ropes.
3. He hid the Tablet of Healings. (Y. Pesachim 9:4, 76a5)

OK...let's unpack these things. In the courtyard of the First Temple, apparently, stood Moses' brass serpent (Numbers 21:9), with which he healed the Israelites in the wilderness. Worshippers would come and ask this serpent for healing. It seemed to have worked...why else would Hezekiah have it destroyed? The second item is easily understood. Hezekiah's dad sold out to the Assyrians and Hezekiah's dragging the bones through the streets on a sledge would send the message that, "A new broom sweeps clean." The third item is truly problematic. Apparently, in the First Temple there was also a tablet, think a big monument or rock, with the zodiac on it, to which people would pray for healing.

We can get to the three bad things Hezekiah did next time, but for now, we have enough with these three things.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why grind the serpent down but not the tablet? What was the difference between the serpent, which had Toraitic origins, and this tablet? Why not hide them both or grind them both down?
2. Why do we sometimes have to destroy things to make changes and move forward? Is this an inherent part of

change? Must it be done violently to truly accomplish reform? If so, what about the alienated parties (as there must surely have been)? What happened to them? Have you ever been part of an organization that went through this sort of change? What happened? Who won? Was there a different way to do it?

3. The tablet was hidden away, which means...it could be found. Would you want to find it? If it could be found, how could we use it?

I look forward to your answers!

May your Passover be joyous and meaningful; old and new; destructive and constructive and may we have more years of Talmud study together!

[NOTE: Maqom is now a discussion group, [Maqom613](http://groups.google.com/group/maqom613), at Google groups. To leave a comment on the above passage, go to <http://groups.google.com/group/maqom613> and join the group. Also, you will need a gmail account to log in, so if you don't have one, then first go <https://mail.google.com/> to set up your email account.]