

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted April 28, 2005 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

THE LOWDOWN ON DESCENDING INTO THE RED SEA

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If we really try to picture what happened at the Red Sea, we can play the scene two ways in our minds. Either everyone was pushing to be first or everyone wanted someone else to be first. The sages of rabbinic literature saw it that way, too.

When the Israelites stood by the Red Sea, the tribes strove with one another, each wishing to descend into the sea first. Then sprang forward the tribe of Benjamin and descended first into the sea...

That is not what happened; but each tribe was unwilling to be the first to enter the sea. Then sprang forward Nachshon the son of Amminadav and descended first into the sea [and it appeared he would drown]...

At that time Moses was standing and lengthening his prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He. God said to him: Moses! My beloved one (i.e., Nachshon) is sinking in the water and the sea is closing [over him], the hated one (i.e., the Egyptians) is in pursuit and you stand and lengthen your prayer before Me?!?

He said before God: Master of the world, and what am I able to do to help him? God said to him: Raise up your staff [and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it so that the children of Israel may pass through the sea on dry ground (Exodus 14:16)]. (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishma'eil Beschalach Vayehi 6//B. Sotah 36b-37a)

Discussion Question:

If you were at the Red Sea-WITHOUT KNOWING IT WOULD PART-would you be pushing to be the first to get in or would you stay on land till the last possible second? This is a tough question to answer because you know it did part. Have you ever been in a situation in your life where you had to leap without knowing how you'd land? Please tell us about it.

Passover Bonus:

If you try to look up the word matsot (plural of matsah) using a computer concordance, you also get "hits" for mitsvot, (plural of mitzvah). It's easy to see how eating matsah is a mitzvah but how is a mitzvah like matsah?