

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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The musical was an enormous hit! If you'd like a dvd of the show, please send a [contribution](#) of \$18 for an enjoyable, entertaining and inspiring look at the world of the Talmud!

Posted May 21, 2009, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

THE TABLETS AND THE WRITING ON THEM ARE ALIVE (ACCORDING TO THE YERSHALMI)

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As you prepare for Shavuot, you might enjoy learning about the Yerushalmi's dramatic understanding of what happens when the tablets broke.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: The tablets were six handbreadths long and three broad. Moses was holding on to two handbreadths and the Holy One, blessed be He, was holding on to two of them and there was a space of two handbreadths in the middle. When the Israelites worshiped the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to grab the tablets out of Moses' hand. But Moses' hand was stronger and he seized them from Him. Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yose bar Abayye: The tablets wanted to fly, but Moses was holding on to them. It was taught in the name of Rabbi Nehemiah: The writing itself flew off the tablets.

Rabbi Ezra in the name of Rabbi Yeudah bar Rabbi Shimon: The tablets weighed 40 seahs and the writing was holding them up. When the writing flew off, the tablets became heavy in Moses' hands, and the tablets fell and were broken. (Y. Taanit 4:5)

Imagine Moses overpowering God in a wrestling match! And the tablets and the writing are animated beings. The letters act like Helium in a balloon. And the tablets are not cast down in anger: the animating force goes out of them, as it were, and the lifeless rock falls insensible to the ground.

Discussion Questions:

1. This is an imaginative Judaism that makes the heavenly realms scalable and exciting. In fact, two colleagues with whom I learned this passage thought about concretely bringing this teaching to younger children. Rabbi Gordon Fuller said he'd have children put the ten commandments or favorite pesukim on paper and then make them into a mobile. Rabbi Mark Miller suggested that this Talmud passage would be ideal for bibliodrama. Or words of Torah could be written on Helium balloons and let the tiniest children play with them. How could you incorporate this passage into your Shavuot observance?
2. How could Moses overpower God? And does it make the story different if Moses simply dropped the tablets rather than throwing them down? Why do you think this story wasn't included in the Bavli?

3. Note that the ancient, Mesopotamian base 60 number system is part of this passage ($6 \times 3 \times 2 = 36$, i.e., 6 squared). We might say that the tablets offered life in this world and life in the world to come. What other meanings can you find in these numbers as applied to the tablets of the law?