

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted May 23, 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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GRACE AFTER MEALS: THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

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Grace after meals is one of the foundations of daily Jewish living. While we say a short blessing before we eat we recite a quite lengthy blessing after we've eaten.

Grace is preceded by the reciting of Psalm 137 on weekdays bemoaning the exile (although this is observed more often in the breach) and Psalm 126 on Shabbat and Festivals. This psalm speaks of a farmer crying while sowing seeds. The only scenario that would explain this behavior is if they were the farmer's last seeds. This is a psalm that says, "Never give up, even when you are down to the last measure of hope." People feel desperate hungers besides physical famine and this psalm conveys comfort to those who are lonely, depressed or lost.

Following the recitation of the Psalm is the zimmun, an invitation to say grace which may only be said if three people are present who have washed their hands ritually before breaking bread. If ten or more persons partook of the meal, the word Eloheinu, "Our God", is added to this invitation. Special forms of zimmun were created for assemblies of great numbers:

How do we say zimmun? If there are three he [the one saying grace] says, "Let us bless [Him of whose bounty we have eaten]". If there are three plus himself he says, "Bless".

If there are ten, he says, "Let us bless our God"; if there are ten plus himself he says, "Bless". It is the same whether there are ten or ten myriads [according to R. Akiba].

If there are a hundred he says, "Let us bless the Lord our God"; if there a hundred plus himself he says, "Bless".

If there are a thousand he says, "Let us bless the Lord our God, the God of Israel"; if there are a thousand

plus himself he says "Bless".

If there are ten thousand he says, "Let us bless the Lord our God, the God of Israel, the God of Hosts, who dwells among the cherubim, for the food which we have eaten." If there are ten thousand plus himself he says, "Bless".

Corresponding to his invocation the others respond after him, "Blessed be the Lord our God the God of Israel, the God of Hosts, who dwells among the cherubim, for the food which we have eaten."

Rabbi Jose the Galilean says, "The formula of invocation corresponds to the number assembled, as it says, 'Bless ye God in full assemblies, even the Lord, ye that are from the fountain of Israel.(Psalms 68:27)'"

Said Rabbi Akiba, "What do we find in the synagogue? Whether there are many or few [beyond a minyan of ten the reader] says, 'Bless ye the Lord', Rabbi Ishmael says, 'Bless ye the Lord who is blessed'." (M Berachot 7:3)

There are special zimmunim for weddings (B. Ketubot 8a) and britot milah. Additions for Shabbat, festivals and other holidays are added when appropriate, just as they are added into the Amidah.

Discussion Questions:

1. We have special forms of "zimmin" for weddings and britot milah. On what other occasions would you like to see a special zimmin? How would you phrase it?
2. The mishnah here makes it clear that the only numbers that matter when counting Jews are 3 and 10. Yet many rabbis and Jewish professionals count heads and feel success is measured by how many people attend an event. What would a better standard of success be in the Jewish world?
3. Have you ever been down to your last seeds of hope? Did you plant? How did it turn out?