

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

"A TALMUD TALE" PREMIERED FEBRUARY IN HOUSTON, TX!

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 29, 2008, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

DOING KOSHER BUSINESS IN A KOSHER WAY

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In the past few days, it has come to light that one of the biggest kosher meat providers may not be living up to its Jewish obligations to its workers. (See: www.thejewishweek.com/viewArticle/c37_a9467/News/National.html)

One of the classic statements of ethics regarding workers is M. Baba Metsia 7:1:

One who hires day workers and told them to start work early or to stay late, in a place where the custom is not to start work early or not to stay late, he has no right to force them to do so.

In a place where employers are accustomed to provide a meal, he must provide a meal. And where the custom is to make do with a sweet, he provides it. Everything is according to the practice of the province. (M. Baba Metsia 7:1)

The Yerushalmi offers an example:

The workers of Tiberias do not begin work early or leave late. The workers of Beit Ma'on begin work early and leave late. Workers from Tiberias who go to work in Beit Ma'on work according to the custom of Beit Ma'on. And workers of Beit Ma'on who went to work in Tiberias, work according to the custom of Tiberias.

As to Friday, both starting early in the morning and working late depend on the employer. To what extent to do the workers stay late? To the extent of giving them time to draw water, roast a fish and light the Shabbat lights. (Y. Baba Metsia 7:1)

This Yerushalmi touches on the problems at Rubashkins in several ways.

Discussion Questions:

1. Many of the workers at Rubashkins were from Latin America and were paid less than the minimum wage. Does that violate what is taught in the Yerushalmi?
2. It is clear that workers are entitled to certain rights, determined according to local custom but all within some boundary of hours worked and food provided to workers. (Workers would get up before dawn and eat breakfast at their place of work, which normally consisted of what we would call tacos and refried beans.) Should we

consider food kosher that has not been processed according to this part of Jewish law?

3. Should ethics be made a part of the observance of kashrut? If so, how?
4. Parenthetically, it appears that Friday night is fish night. Should we perhaps adopt that custom?