

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BRINGING TEXTS TO LIFE

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Invocation

I recently had the opportunity to give the invocation and benediction at the graduation ceremonies for the Baylor College of Medicine. Here's an example of how we can bring texts to life. Enjoy!

I stand with you today as the granddaughter of a physician, the daughter of a physician, the wife of a physician and, perhaps-God willing!-the mother of a physician. I've had a 50-yard-line seat from which to observe a doctor's life. Doctors are the priests and high priests of our culture and the hospital is our Temple. Before that makes you feel good, let me remind you that being a priest was a lot of hard work, assessing skin diseases (is it cancer, leprosy or just plain old acne?), figuring out how to help needy individuals and taking night call. The priests even had to take out the trash. (Spouses: I refer you to Leviticus chapter 6, verse 4 if you have trouble enforcing this one.)

How can anyone love such hard work? The same way anyone finds bliss in this life: figure out what God wants you to do and doing it. Listen to the still, small voice through which God speaks. Even if your road is less-traveled, if it is your road you will find happiness along the way no matter how unconventional your choices may seem to others.

Listening is the key to being a great physician---listening to patients, listening to test results, listening to your intuition. Listening to insurance companies? Well, you can do some selective listening in those cases so that you can keep your blood pressure under control. Just add listening to the Creator of the Universe to your listening skills.

When we are brought to judgment we will be asked six questions. One of those questions is, "Did you have hope?" Practice your art in hope: hope for healing your patients; hope for healing yourselves. May the work of all those here who are the instruments of God's healing bring us the day when cancer is merely a sign of the zodiac, when hearts are broken only by cupid's arrows and when the only thing that takes a person's breath away is wonder and gratitude for all that God gives us. We thank you God, for bringing us to this day and to this we say, "Amen."

Rava said: When one is led in for judgment [after death] one is asked:

Were you honest in business?

Did you fix times for learning?

Did you engage in procreation?

Did you hope for salvation?

Did you engage in dialectics of wisdom?

Did you understand one thing from another? (B. Shabbat 31a)

Closing Benediction

I understand that a large number of you are going to be interns...which means that come July first, you're

going to need all the help that you can get! So I want to bless you with the most powerful blessing I know.

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's light shine upon you and show you grace.

May God's face turn toward you and may you have peace.

Discussion Questions:

1. At this graduation about 30 Ph.D.'s were awarded their degrees as well. For Ph.D.'s, the advisor places the hood over the candidate him or her self. As each came up with his or her advisor and the hood dropped over their heads and in front of their eyes, I relived my moment of receiving my own Ph.D. Do you experience your own child namings or weddings when you attend these events? How do you explain the way this opens your memories?
2. Should a rabbi (or any clergy person) be at such an event at all? Consider, too, how culturally and religiously diverse the group receiving their degrees was.