

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted June 5, 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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JEWISH MEDITATION: AN ANCIENT PRACTICE

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The evidence for genuine Jewish meditative practice is overwhelming. Below are but a few texts which validate this point.

Meditate on different rulings, both strict and lenient, before prayer.(Y. Berachot 5:1)

If you concentrate during your prayer, it is like good news for your prayers are heard. (Y. Berachot 5:5)

"Praise is due to you, o God, in Zion (Psalm 65:1)": Silence sums it all up. As regarding a priceless pearl, all who attempt to praise it, [by doing so merely] diminish its value. (Y. Berachot 9:1)

It was related of Jonathan b. Uzziel [that] when he sat and studied the Torah, every bird that flew over him was burned. (B. Baba Batra 134a)

Rabbi Eliezer says: He who makes his prayer a fixed task, it is not a genuine supplication. What is meant by a "fixed task? Anyone whose prayer is like a burden on him. The Rabbis say, "Whoever does not say it in the manner of supplications." Other say, "Whoever cannot say something new in it. (B. Berachot 29b)

These texts (and these are only a sampling from rabbinic literature, let alone Biblical and post-rabbinic texts) affirm that meditation was an important part of Jewish spiritual practice. By reclaiming it, we reclaim our birthright. Silence, guided meditation, song that is meant to stimulate meditation, will all be more effective in leading us to prayer than the mechanistic recitation of psalms. By linking such practices with ancient texts, we validate our modern practice as authentically Jewish.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you meditate? What could add to your meditation practice to make it more in the mold of Jewish meditation?
2. Jonathan ben Uzziel's study was so intense that it generated a direct line to God, so to speak and that anything that crossed that connection would be burned? Have you ever let yourself become immersed in study so much that time stands still and you are completely in God's presence? What was it like?
3. Rabbi Eliezer speaks of prayer that has no soul to it. Yet there are people who "go through the motions" all the time. Is there merit in that sort of prayer? Why or why not?