

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted June 7, 2001 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

Visit [Talmud: the Musical](#) or download a song! 

[Song 1 \(2409kb\)](#) [Song 2 \(4222kb\)](#)

(If you have trouble playing it as streaming audio, "right click" to download the entire file and then open it.)

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.

BH

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

Once it was clear that the cause was lost, one sage, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, was willing to commit to a "paradigm shift" that would change Judaism forever. He abandoned Jerusalem to save Judaism by founding a school for study of the sages' wisdom in Yavneh.

Abba Sikra, the head of the bionim in Jerusalem was the son of the sister of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. He sent to him [Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, his uncle] saying: Come to visit me secretly. [Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai] went and he said to him: How long are you going to keep doing this [military action of defending the city] and kill all the world with starvation? He said to him: What can I do? If I say anything to them, they will kill me.

He said to him: Make some plan for me to leave [Jerusalem]. It is possible that I shall be able to save a little.

[Abba Sikra] said to him: Pretend to be sick and let every one come to inquire about you. Bring some foul smelling thing and put it by you so that they will say you are dead. Then let your students get under your bed, but no others, so that they shall not notice that you are still light, since a living being is lighter than a corpse. He did so and Rabbi Eliezer went in [under the bier] from one side and Rabbi Yehoshua from the other. When they reached the door, some men wanted to put a lance through the bier. He said to them: They [the Romans] will say: They have pierced their master? They wanted to give it a push. He said to them: They will say: They pushed their master. They opened [a city] gate for him and he [Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai] got away. (B. Gittin 56a)

Through this legerdemain, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai escapes, with the aid of two of his greatest pupils (who, interestingly enough, were opponents in the Academy). And what did he seek to establish? The sages' learning, the Davidic line of leadership and a replacement for the Temple.

He [Rabbi Yohanan] said to him [the Roman ruler]: Give me Yavneh and its sages and the dynasty of Rabban Gamliel and the doctors who healed Rabbi Tsadok. (B. Gitten 56b)

We can understand the Temple and its personnel in much the same way as we think of hospitals today. A hospital is a place of healing and so was the Temple. Hospital staffs are arranged hierarchically: heads of sections, M.D.s, nurses, technicians and patients. So the "staff" of the Temple was arranged hierarchically as well. Strict rules regarding cleanliness and purity apply in hospitals and analogous rules applied in the Temple, too. The Temple is not dead, is merely transformed in this paradigm shift.

Discussion Questions:

1. We see clearly in this passage that the Jewish factions fighting for Jerusalem simply could not coordinate their efforts and that this is what forced the "paradigm shift" from saving the Temple to starting a new sort of Judaism that could exist without the Temple. What other moments in Jewish history would you identify as momentous paradigm shifts?
2. Do you agree with the idea that the "Temple" energy is now found in the medical establishment? Where else might it reside?