

## Talmud Passage of the Week

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Look for new passages approximately every 2 weeks (next passage approximately 07/08/96).

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**"And let us say, 'Amen'!"**

*Dear Friends,*

*Greetings! For those of you who are interested in some scholarly analysis of the texts we've been studying, I'd like to recommend the article "Rabbis and Public Prayers for Rain in Later Roman Palestine", pp. 105-129 in Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East, edited by Adele Berlin (University Press of Maryland, POBox 34454, Bethesda, MD 20827), 1996. The volume has some interesting articles on other topics, too.*

*We seem to have many email addresses that were once valid and are no longer working. If you had received the discussion digests and are no longer getting them, please email Maqom and let us know. We want to have you with us!*

*We continue our discussion of who is fit to lead worship on a fast day and how that worship is conducted. This passage is not only more difficult than our average passage but I'm asking you to approach it in a more sophisticated way than usual. If you are new to our program, or simply lurking, please don't give up. It won't always be this difficult. As always, when approaching a difficult passage in rabbinic literature, get out of it what you can and don't torture yourself about what you don't understand. If you keep at it you'll be able to come back and get something new out of it each time you make a pass and you'll be able to measure how much you've grown. Enjoy!*

*Judy Abrams*

### **Bavli Ta'anit 16b, Steinsaltz, Volume 14, pp. 22-25:**

One who has dependents but no [money] is the same as one whose house is empty. Rav Hisda said: This [refers to] one whose house is empty of transgression.

"And whose youth was becoming". Abaye said: This [refers to] one who did not have a bad reputation in his youth.

"My heritage has become to Me like a lion in the forest. It has cried out against Me with its voice; therefore I have hated it. (Jeremiah 12:8)" What is [meant by] "it has cried out against Me with its voice"? Mar Zutra bar Toviyah said in the name of Rav, and some say Rabbi Hama said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: This [refers to] a prayer leader who is unfit who goes down before the ark.

"And he says before them twenty-four blessings, the eighteen of every day, and he adds to them another six." Are they six? They are seven, as we have learned: "For the seventh he says, 'Blessed [are You, Lord] who has mercy on the land.'"

Rav Nahman bar Yitshak said: "What is [meant by] "the seventh"? Seventh from the expanded one, as it was taught: "in [the blessing] 'Redeemer of Israel' he expands, and in its ending he says: 'He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, Lord], the redeemer of Israel. And they answer after him 'Amen'. And the synagogue attendant says to them: 'Sound a tekiah, sons of Aaron, sound a tekiah.' And he resumes and says: 'He who answered our forefathers at the Red Sea, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed [are you, Lord], who remembers the forgotten.' And they answer after him 'Amen'. And the synagogue attendant says to them: 'Sound a teruah, sons of Aaron, sound a teruah.' And similarly with each and every blessing, for one he says, 'Sound a tekiah' and for one he says, 'Sound a teruah.'

In what [case] are these things said? In the [rest of the] country. But in the Temple it is not so, for we do not answer 'Amen' in the Temple. And from where [do we derive] that we do not answer 'Amen' in the Temple? For it is said: 'Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting, and let them bless Your glorious Name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.'

## Background

### The Roaring of Unrepented Sin

Rabbi Steinsaltz quotes Rashi as saying that the person whose house is free of transgression is the one who has nothing stolen therein. Rambam takes a much stricter view and says that it must be a household in which no one is a transgressor. The text from Jeremiah is taken to mean that if an unrepentant sinner is appointed prayer leader his voice itself will accuse him. Recall, though, that a repentant sinner is closer to God than someone who never sinned at all (B. Berachot 34b).

### The Structure of the Fast Day Amidah

One of the core experiences of Talmud study is sitting at a table in a library and taking out book after book to explore parallels and extra information. If you can, try a taste of that now. (You'll also have a chance to have "cyber texts" out on your desk, below, in the discussion questions.) Look in a prayerbook and find the weekday morning service. Then find the Amidah (also called the Tefillah or the Shemonah Esrei). Look for the blessing that talks about redemption (starting from the beginning, you'll go through prayers about our ancestors (Avot), God's might (Gevurot), God's holiness (Kedushat HaShem), Insight, Repentance and Forgiveness). You'll see that there is an insert into that blessing for fast days. At this point you may ask yourself, "What about all these wonderful things the Gemara is outlining? Where's the shofar? Where are the six additional blessings?" We don't do them today and haven't done them for many centuries. It can be inspiring, though, just to see what creativity previous generations brought to prayer and the way they used ceremony, choreography, music and text to send their deepest wishes heavenward.

### What Does Amen Do?

In synagogues, we say Amen. It basically means, "I agree with what was just said." If you say "Amen" to a blessing it is as if you said it yourself. We do not say "Amen" to our own blessings because then it would be as if we said the blessing twice. In the Temple, however, they responded to blessings with a much more elaborate formula, "Blessed is the Name of His majesty for ever and ever." The text from Nehemiah supports this custom because every time we bless God's name we are to add praise to it. Today, we respond to God's name in blessings by saying, "Blessed is He and Blessed is His name".

### Discussion Questions

1. Compare the Gemara here to the Mishnah we already studied from [Jan. 11, 1996](#) and [Jan. 22, 1996](#). Are there any major differences here?
2. When is emptiness good? Have you ever come to the point where you hate your own sin? Did you atone for the sin and, if so, did the sin cease to accuse you or is it still with you? The image of the lion in the forest for sin is especially potent. How can unatoned sin become an uncontrolled animal in an uncontrolled place that can strike at any time?
3. How do you experience the difference between tekiah (one long blast) and teruah (several very short blasts)? Who is being awakened?

4. You have no doubt noticed that the response to God's name which was said in the Temple is the same line we use to respond to the saying of God's name in the Shema. Will this effect the way you say that line? Will you be able to envision yourself in the Temple twice a day as you say the Shema? What is the relationship of the six words of the Shema to the six words of the "Baruch Shem k'vod malkhuto l'olam va'ed"?

Bonus question: Why do you think there is no blessing, "...asher kidshanu b'mitsvotav v'tsivanu al kri'at Shema" (...who sanctified us with commandments and commanded us to recite the Shema)? Does the "Baruch shem" somehow compensate for that?

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