

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

WHAT DO WE REALLY NEED? (PART I)

With this study material we are beginning a three-part study of the different ways different documents approach the idea of what a community needs. First we will study the Yerushalmi, then the parallel in the Bavli and, finally, the halakhah as set down by Rambam. We don't usually look at halakhah but in this case I think it will be instructive.

First, let us look at the mishnah with which our material is linked:

R. Nehorai says: I should lay aside every trade in the world and teach my son only Torah. For a man eats its fruits in this world, and the principal remains for the world to come. But other trades are not that way. When a man gets sick or old or has pains and cannot do his job, lo, he dies of starvation. But with Torah it is not that way. But it keeps from all evil when he is young, and it gives him a future and a hope when he is old. (M. Kiddushin 4:12)

This is the last mishnah in tractate Kiddushin which speaks of marriage. In this case, the Mishnah reflects that teaching one's children Torah makes them good mates in the sense that they can always make a living and that it helps them be better persons and, by extension, spouses. So, according to the mishnah, Torah is what we need.

The Yerushalmi's final comment in all of tractate Kiddushin puts a different spin on what we need:

R. Hezekiah, R. Kohen in the name of Rav: It is forbidden to live in a city in which there are no physician, no bath and no court administering floggings and imprisoning people.

Said R. Yose b. R. Bun: Also it is forbidden to live in a town in which there is no vegetable garden.

R. Hezekiah, R. Kohen in the name of Rav: In the future a person is going to have to give an account of himself for everything that his eye saw and he did not eat.

R. Elazar took account of this teaching and set aside funds to purchase every species at least once a year. (Y. Kiddushin 4:12)

According to the Yerushalmi a city needs a physician, a bath, a court and arable land. The second statement in the name of Rav has often been understood to mean that one should enjoy every single legitimate pleasure in the world.

P'nei Moshe, the commentary on the Yerushalmi, explains that R. Elazar made such an effort to observe this precept so that he could say Shehecheyanu each time he ate a new fruit in its season and give praise to the Creator of so many wondrous species. (One is supposed to say Shehecheyanu over eating a fruit for the first time in its season. Unfortunately, in a way, fruits don't have seasons the way they used to in the U.S. You can even have cherries in Winter flown up from South America and apples, oranges and tomatoes are available all year.)

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think of the Yerushalmi's list of necessities? What would your list for a modern city include?
2. This passage seems to suggest that it is an obligation to make the effort to find joy in life. What would you think

of such a mitsvah?

3. Why do you think this passage was paired with this mishnah? Why do you think the composers of the Yerushalmi chose to close the tractate on this note?