

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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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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RECEIVED TRADITION VS. REASONING

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One of the joys of studying rabbinic literature is tracing a passage through its variant and parallel texts...searching until the meaning of a passage becomes clear at last.

Here we will look at Mishnah and Sifre D. (an early midrash collection on the book of Deuteronomy). The details of the discussion are not that important for us to know at this point. This mishnah discusses whether an Ammonite and Moabite may be accepted into the congregation (see Deuteronomy 23:4). Rabbi Shimon makes a point and his colleagues reply to him thusly:

They said to him: If [your ruling] is based on a received tradition [halakhah] we will accept it. But if it is [based on your own] reasoning then we may refute it. He said to them: No! For this is a received tradition [halakhah] that I say [now]. (M. Yebamot 8:3//M. Keritot 3:9//Sifre D. 253)

M. Keritot is another technical argument but it uses the same words to describe the relative evaluation of a received argument (halakhah) v. a reasoned argument (din).

It seems clear that the use of the word halakhah in the Mishnah indicates a received tradition as opposed to something a sage reasoned out for himself. The received tradition is clearly the stronger argument.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why would the sages of the Mishnah consider received teachings more valuable than teachings that a contemporary authority reasoned out for himself? Are there any parallels to this sort of value system in modern day Judaism? What might they be?
2. It should be clear now that what a word means in one era is not what it means in another. How could the concept

of halakhah come to be misunderstood by retrojecting modern definitions of the word into our ancient documents? If we do this, are we not making the very mistake the sages of the Mishnah condemn...valuing our own understanding of a word rather than treasuring what the word actually meant?



Dear Friends,

I hope our international members will permit me a moment of patriotism. This year, I think it's more important than ever to look at the entirety of the national anthem. We usually end with the first verse, wondering whether the Star Spangled Banner still waves. As we progress through the anthem we see that not only does it still wave but it will in the future. Kein yirbu! So may it be!

Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars,
through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched,
were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets red glare,
the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night,
That our flag was still there,
Oh say, does that Star Spangled Banner yet wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

On the shore dimly seen throughout the mists of the deep
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes
What is that which the breeze o'er the towering steep
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam
In full glory reflected now shines on the stream.
'Tis the Star-Spangled Banner, Oh long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And where is that band who so hauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and country, shall leave us no more?
Their blood was washed out their foul foot steps pollution
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave.
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Oh thus be it e'er when free men shall stand
Between their loved homes and war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heaven rescued land
Praise the Pow'r that has made and preserved us a nation
And conquer we must when our cause is just
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

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