

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

"A TALMUD TALE" PREMIERED FEBRUARY IN HOUSTON, TX!

The musical was an enormous hit! If you'd like a dvd of the show, please send a [contribution](#) of \$18 for an enjoyable, entertaining and inspiring look at the world of the Talmud!

Posted July 4, 2007, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

ALASKA ... WHAT A JEWISH EXPERIENCE!

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I have just returned from a short trip to Alaska, including a three-day cruise through the glaciers of Prince William Sound (near Anchorage). I probably said the shehecheyanu (the prayer we say on seeing things for the first time) and she-kachah lo-ba'olamo ("That thus it is in His world," the blessing we say upon seeing beautiful things of nature) more in those three days than in any ten years of my life.

Easily the most inspiring experience was in College Fjord. In 1899, Edward Harriman assembled an expedition to the area and the team named the glaciers after colleges and universities. As you enter the fjord, the several slender glaciers to the left are all named for "Seven Sister" colleges (e.g., Smith, Wellesley, etc.). At the end of the fjord is the massive Harvard glacier.

The incredible blue in the glaciers is caused by the weight of millennia pressing down on the snow and ice, pushing all the oxygen out of it. It is truly a beautiful and magical phenomenon. More brachahs



But the most amazing thing was watching the glacier calve. You stand watching the glacier and, quite suddenly, you hear what they call "white thunder." It is like hearing a massive explosion. Sometimes, it is within the glacier itself and you can't see the fall of ice that comes with it. But sometimes it is in the face and huge blocks of ice and snow come off and fall into the fjord. The blessing I said on hearing this sound (with the shehecheyanu, of course, for the first time) was "...shekocho u'gevurato malei olam" "Blessed is the Lord our God, ruler of the universe, whose strength and might fill the world." This blessing is said when witnessing lightning and thunder and I thought the sages would have prescribed it upon hearing this sound and seeing this sight. Take a look and listen for yourselves:

The wildlife was also amazing and inspiring. Even the naturalist on our boat said she'd never gotten this close to a pod of Orca whales. Another shehecheyanu, another "she kacha lo ba'olamo.



Dall's porpoise, which bear a resemblance to the black and white orcas, swam around the boat in this area as well, cruising around it, going under it, jumping beside it, just having a good time.

As we left the glaciers, as a final act of grace and beauty, this rainbow appeared and I was able to say another berachah: "Blessed are You, oh Lord our God, who remembers the covenant" (i.e., the covenant with Noah, symbolized by the rainbow, that God would never destroy the earth again).



There is much, much more to show and tell but I think that gives you the idea.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does knowing the blessings to say ahead of time, help you appreciate the beauties of nature? Or do you think just saying a prayer is good enough? (After this trip, I see the importance of knowing the blessings ahead of time. Otherwise, I would have been too stunned to put my sense of wonder into words.)
2. Where else in the world do you think there are so many "brachah opportunities"?