

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted August 13, 2003 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

DON'T INSIST ON HAVING IT ALL YOUR WAY (YOU'LL BE SURPRISED AT THE BONUS PRIZE YOU RECEIVE!)

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Dear Friends,

As we have now rounded the corner of Tisha B'Av we can now focus on the High Holidays.

Many people, it seems to me, are interested in kabbalah these days. But, of course, just as you really can't lose weight without diet and exercise (or surgery), so you cannot master kabbalah until you have proven that you will not use it for evil.

Three the Holy One, blessed be He, loves: he who does not become angry, he who does not become intoxicated, and he who does not insist on his [full] rights. Three things the Holy One, blessed be He, hates: he who speaks one thing with his mouth and another thing in his heart; and he who possesses evidence concerning his neighbor and does not testify for him; and he who sees something indecent in his neighbor and testifies against him alone. (B. Pesachim 113b)

Rav Judah said in Rav's name: The forty-two lettered Name is entrusted only to him who is pious, meek, middle-aged, free from bad temper, sober and not insistent on his rights. And he who knows it, is heedful thereof, and observes it in purity, is beloved above and popular below, feared by man and inherits two worlds, this world and the future world. (B. Kiddushin 71a)

One who waves his right to retribution [i.e., is not insistent on his rights] is forgiven all his sins. (B. Megillah 28a //Rosh Hashanah 17a//B. Yoma 23a and 87b)

The 42-lettered name of God is mentioned many times in kabbalah and is connected with the singing of the song Ana Vakoach in the preliminary prayers. It is said that one who knows the name can change God's creation with it. This, then, makes the rules presented above logical. If one is hot-tempered, detached from the Jewish faith, impetuously young, occasionally out of control because of substance abuse and demanding everything due him, that person would probably be unable to resist the temptation to use the 42-lettered name of God as a sort of magic wand.

As with all spiritual growth, it's the central conundrum of faith: you can only have it once you stop wanting to "own it" rather than just "be with it".

Another name of God, the 72 syllabled name of God, is derived from Exodus 14:19-21. These three verses each have 72 letters. The first letter from 19, the last letter of 20 and the first of the 21st. This pattern is completed until seventy-two syllables have been created. Some people attribute great power to this name of God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it so important not to insist that you receive everything you have earned and deserve? What sort of religious message does that send to the other parties involved and to God, who is always the third party to any transaction?

2. As we gear up for the High Holidays, can you think of a situation in which you may not insist on all your rights, thereby receiving forgiveness for all your sins?
3. In all the Talmud and Torah you have studied, what examples can you find of someone not demanding all their rights and being rewarded for that?
4. Are there any analogous cases on the contemporary scene today? If so, please share them with us.