

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted August 16, 2001 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

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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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PERSONAL PRAYERS OF THE SAGES AND . . . CAN YOU SPOT THE TEXTUAL EMANDATION?

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Personal Prayers of the Sages and...Can You Spot The Textual Emendation?

Dear Friends,

While we are studying this passage we will pass into the month of Elul (August 20). This is the month when we prepare for the High Holidays. Ideally, you should have all your accounts "reconciled" by the time Rosh Hashanah comes around. If you wait for the Ten Days of Repentance you're cutting it a little close.

So, as an aid to your efforts at repentance, let's study the prayers of two sages:

After Rava finished his prayer (i.e., the Amidah) he would say thus: My God, I was worthless before I was created and I am unworthy now that I have been created-as if I had not been created [as a person at all]. In life I am [but] dust and how much the more so [shall I be merely dust] when I die. Behold I am before You like a vessel full of shame and disgrace. May it be Your will, O Lord my God that I sin no more and let Your great mercy erase from before You [those sins] I [have already] committed. But [please] do not [erase them] by means neither of sufferings nor evil illnesses. And some say this was the confession of Rav Hamnuna the lesser on the Day of Atonement.

When Mar, the son of Ravina, would finish his prayer he would say thus: My God, stop my tongue from [speaking] evil and my lips from speaking fraudulently and let my soul be serene toward those who curse me and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah and may my soul pursue Your commandments. And save me from an evil accident. And from an evil inclination and from an evil woman and from every evil things which come rushing into the world. And may the plans of all who

speak evil about me be quickly broken and may their plans be spoiled. "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:15)" (B. Berachot 16b-17a)

These are but two of the personal prayers of the sages listed in this passage of Berachot. They are followed by the favorite sayings of several sages, one of which relates to this season:

The beginning of wisdom is repentance and good deeds. (B. Berachot 18a)

Clearly, by preserving all these personal prayers and pieces of wisdom, the Bavli is affirming that individual, creative prayer is valid and important.

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare the prayer of Mar here with the version found in the prayerbook after the Amidah. What's been changed? What does this say about the process by which the prayerbook is edited?
2. True repentance in Judaism involves great risk on the part of the person who was hurt by the sin. To truly repent, we have to have the same desire to sin, the same ability to sin and the same opportunity to sin and not repeat the sin. That means the person against whom we sinned has to give us a free shot at hurting them again. Have you given the people who have sinned against you the chance to truly repent? How do you deal with your feelings of vulnerability during this process?