

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted September 12, 2009, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### **KARMA IN THE YERUSHALMI: START YOUR YEAR OFF RIGHT**

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As we roll up to the new year, the Yerushalmi reminds us that you can determine your fate by putting out the energy you'd like to receive back.

Rabbi Chaggai said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman: It once happened that a certain righteous man would dig cisterns, ditches and caves for the benefit of passers-by on the roads. Once his daughter was crossing a river on her way to be married and the river washed her away.

Everyone came to her father, wishing to console him, but he refused to be consoled. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair came to him, wishing to console him, but he refused to be consoled. He said to the townspeople: Is this what you call a pious man?! He's rebelling against God's judgment (which isn't righteous).

They replied: Rabbi, thus and such did he regularly do and thus and such befell him. He said: Is it possible that a person should honor his Creator with water and that God should thus smite him with water!?

Immediately, a report spread in the town that the daughter of that man had come back. Some maintain that she was caught on a branch in the river. Others maintain that an angel came down in the shape of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair and saved her. (Y. Demai 1:3Y. Shekalim 5:2/Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:3/B. Hullin 7a//B. Baba Kamma 50a//B. Yebamot 121b)

Clearly, this is a popular story; it's quoted all over the place! It's part of a large passage of stories about the piety of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair. (Heard of extreme sports? He's into extreme mitsvot.)

We've seen similar stories in the Bavli, as well. If you do mitsvot with fire, fire will not touch you or your neighbors. If you do mitsvot with a shovel, you and your neighbors will be saved from an epidemic that would cause you to be buried with a shovel.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. The Yerushalmi certainly believes in midah k'neged midah: "measure for measure." Colloquially put, "what goes around, comes around." Do you agree with the Yerushalmi? Have you seen this happen in your own life? If so, please tell the story.
2. The Yerushalmi entertains the depressing notion that "measure for measure" might not work, indeed, might only have happened here due to Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's angelic power. What in the life of the sages of the land of

Israel might lead them to entertain this notion? What historical realities might this bespeak?

3. As you go to services, think not only of the year past, but plan proactively for the upcoming year. In other words, plan out what kind of energy you'd like to get this year and figure out how to put that energy out there.

Shanah tovah!