

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted September 26, 2002 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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BH

### IF YOU'RE SPOILED AND YOU KNOW IT, SAY AMEN!

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One of the most interesting things about Rabban Gamliel is his insistence on doing things in his own, personal way, even when that way defies the received traditions he was promulgating.

He justifies his actions by calling himself an "istinis": a spoiled, pampered person.

He Rabban Gamliel] washed on the first night after his wife died. His students said to him: Our Rabbi, you taught us that a mourner is forbidden to wash. He said to them: I am not like other persons; I am an istinis. (M. Berachot 2:6)

Other individuals may also claim the status of an istinis:

The morning incense was offered between [the] blood and the pieces [of the sacrificial animal in the Temple]. [The incense] of the dusk was offered between the pieces [of sacrificial animals] and the drink offerings. If the High Priest were old or an istinis, they would warm [water] for him and they would pour the warm water into the cold water in order that the cold [water] be less intense. (M. Yoma 3:5)

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: they make an eruv for a sick person and for an istinis with their own food and [they make an eruv] for a minor similar to his [regular] food and according to an average amount for any [grown] person. (T. Eruvin 9:4; 6:4)

In all three of these texts it appears that an istinis is used to and/or needs a level of luxury beyond the norm, especially regarding his bathing and eating. We aren't given much more information than that.

However, there is one passage that gives us the contrasting category to an istinis: one whose cognition is pretty, an idiomatic phrase which means the person is grossed out by nothing. These two passages (especially the latter) show

just how down and dirty someone with da'ato yafah can be:

"All the days of the poor are evil (Proverbs 15:15)" this [refers to] an istinis. " But a person of good heart [is as if he had before him] a constant banquet. (Proverbs15:15)" this refers to one whose da'ato yafah. (B. Sanhedrin 100b)

The istinis is too picky and therefore goes hungry while the man with da'ato yafah will eat anything put before him so life is a constant banquet.

Among the priests there are those who drank bodily fluids directly from an animal's innards:

Rabbi Yehudah said, Rabbi Yishmael asked Rabbi Joshua when they were going on a journey and said to him: Why have they [the sages] prohibited the cheese of idolaters? He said to him, Because [they make cheese] by curdling [the milk] with rennet [taken] from the carcass (n'veilah) [of an animal not ritually slaughtered]. He said to him: But is not the rennet from a burnt offering more stringently prohibited than the rennet from a carcass (n'veilah), and [nevertheless] they have said, A priest who is robust (sheda'ato yafah) may suck it out raw. (M. Avodah Zarah 2:5)

So here we have two categories contrasted: the overly picky and the insufficiently picky.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Rabban Gamliel and others are allowed their own practices because they're spoiled or pampered. Are we, with the unimaginable comfort of our lives, all in the class of "istinis"? How far could one take such an argument? For example, what if one simply could not stand to go to synagogue on Yom Kippur without brushing one's teeth and one brushed them but did not swallow any water? What about a person who is used to sleeping with air conditioning and/or heating? Are they exempt from sleeping in the sukkah?
2. Do you think the category "istinis" ought to slide and adapt to a given culture's standard of living? In other words, would one have to have a private jet and a summer home to be an istinis today? What criteria would you use to define today's istinis?
3. Are there disadvantages to being pampered? Are there advantages and/or disadvantages for those who simply cannot be grossed out by anything? What are they?