

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted September 30, 2010, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

PRAISED BE THE GOD OF THE JEWS

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In the Yerushalmi, we find this phrase four times, three of them in Baba Metsia 2:5 and all concerning honorable conduct in returning lost property. Here is one of the stories:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Sosartai went to Rome. The queen lost her bracelet and he found it. A herald went through the city: One who returns it within 30 days will receive such and such a reward. But after 30 days, he will be beheaded. He returned it after 30 days. She asked him: Haven't you been in the city [and heard the herald's announcement]? He said: Yes, I heard the announcement. She said: And what did the herald say? He said: One who returns the bracelet within 30 days will be rewarded but one who returns it after 30 days will be beheaded. She asked him: So why didn't you return it within the 30 day time limit? He said: So that no one should say that I acted out of fear of you. Rather, I wanted people to know that I acted out of fear of the Merciful One. She said to him: Blessed is the God of the Jews. (Y. Baba Metsia 2:5)

Discussion Questions:

1. Is it conceivable that these sorts of stories might be literally true? If not, what could be the motivation behind their composition?
2. What is the importance of doing the wrong thing for the right reason? Did R. Shmuel do the right thing? How was he to know that this bracelet was not terribly special to the queen?