

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Learn with Rabbi Abrams! If you like the website, you'll love learning with Rabbi Abrams in person even more! She can come to your synagogue or group as a scholar-in-residence or you can learn with her long distance via phone or skype. You can also have her teach single lectures to your group. Click [here](#) for a list of just a few of the talks available.

Posted October 29, 2010, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

LOTS AND LOTS OF OPTIONS IN THE MOURNING PROCESS IN THE YERUSHALMI

© Judith Z. Abrams, 2010

One of the Yerushalmi's most endearing features is the way it embraces different customs without conveying the need to pick one over another. In the following passage, we find that there is enormous flexibility with regards to the way people deal with those who are mourning. What's even more fascinating is that the different customs are based on geography.

In the Yerushalmi, the center of rabbinic life is in Tiberias and the nearby town of Sepphoris (Tsippori in modern Hebrew). And just as today, when Jewish practice in large Jewish centers can differ from outlying communities, so, too, did Jewish practice differ between the Northern centers and everything south of these two cities. (This would include Jerusalem, which, at this point, may have lost its centrality to Jewish life due to Roman oppression.)



Here is our text:

It was taught: In a place where they were accustomed to greet mourners on Shabbat, they may greet them. And in the South they would greet them.

Rabbi Hoshia the Great went to a place where he saw mourners on the Sabbath and he would greet them.

He said to them: I do not know the custom in your town, but peace be with you in accord with the custom in my town.

Rabbi Yose of the house of Rabbi Halafta was praising Rabbi Meir before the townsfolk of Sepphoris.,

saying, "He is a great person, a holy person, a modest person." Once he saw mourners on the Sabbath and he greeted them. (Y. Berhachot 2:7)

Discussion Questions:

1. Here we see that there were differences in Jewish practice, not only between Babylonia and the land of Israel but within the land of Israel itself. So what is the correct way to act? One acts according to the custom of one's place of origin...provided that one explicitly says that one is acting according to one's native custom. Why would some locales develop the custom that one does not greet mourners while others would not? Might it have something to do with the tragic history of Jerusalem?
2. Rabbi Meir, one of the all-time greatest sages, and one of the primary creators of the Mishnah, seems to have a genuine empathy for those who are mourning and an appreciation for local customs. Does this reflect a flexibility toward Jewish practice on his part? Could it be because he is flexible because he experienced the death of two of his sons and thus has a great deal of empathy toward those who've experienced a loss?
3. The compliment Rabbi Meir is paid, in Hebrew, is "Adam gadol, adam kadosh, adam tsanua." It is a unique compliment. Would you ordinarily link greatness with modesty? Why is this one of the greatest compliments a person could ever be paid?