

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted November 20, 2009, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

CHECK UNDER YOUR BED; TAVI MIGHT BE THERE!

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Here's another story about Tavi from the Yerushalmi and it offers a wonderful glimpse into the world of the sages. Tavi was Rabban Gamliel's slave, but the two of them were very close and Rabban Gamliel respected Tavi's wisdom. The story is told in the context of a dispute as to whether one fulfills the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah if he sleeps under the bed in the sukkah.

It is taught: Tavi, Rabban Gamliel's slave, would wear tefillin and the sages did not protest his actions [even though slaves are exempt from the mitzvah of tefillin]. [So why would Tavi sleep under the bed in the sukkah? Presumably he would be allowed to sleep normally and observe the mitzvah of sleeping in the sukkah.] Tavi slept under the bed in order that more sages could get into the sukkah.

So then why would Tavi stay in the sukkah at all and take up any room? He should have stayed out of it completely! Tavi did it so he could listen to the learning and conversation of the sages. (Y. Sukkah 2:1)

Discussion Questions:

1. Rabban Gamliel was wealthy and important and it sounds as if his sukkah reflects his social prominence. Many people would come to his sukkah to study and, perhaps, to sleep. This isn't the first time we've seen that Tavi is not merely a slave, but an important part of Rabban Gamliel's household. First, an ethical question: do you hire household help? If you do, how does Rabban Gamliel's relationship with Tavi show you how to deal with those who work for you?
2. The question must be asked: why didn't Rabban Gamliel set Tavi free? Tavi was interested in the sages' world and wisdom and Rabban Gamliel clearly liked him. So why did Rabban Gamliel keep him as a slave? Or are we perhaps understanding slave here incorrectly? Is Tavi perhaps a paid servant or considered a member of the family?
3. Rabban Gamliel wasn't the only one with a huge sukkah. Queen Helena of the Adiabene had a sukkah so big it had rooms!

I look forward to hearing your thoughts!