

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted November 21, 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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## THE SOUNDS AND SMELLS OF THE TEMPLE

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One of the more interesting mishnayot describing the Temple details its impact on people miles away. Jericho is roughly 15 miles from Jerusalem.

From Jericho they would hear the sound of the great gate as it was opened.

From Jericho they would hear the sound of the ten-fluted musical instrument.

From Jericho they would hear the sound of the wood [cover over the laver being removed] that Ben Katin made (or paid for).

From Jericho they would hear the sound of G'vini, the public crier.

From Jericho they would hear the sound of the flute.

From Jericho they would hear the sound of the symbol.

From Jericho they would hear the sound of the song.

From Jericho they would hear the sound of the shofar.

And there are those who say that even the sound of the High Priest as he mentioned [God's] name on Yom Kippur [could be heard].

From Jericho they would smell the scent of the incense.

Said Rabbi Eliezer ben Digla'i: the goats of my father's house on Mount Michvar [east of Jordan] would sneeze from the smell of the compounding of the incense. (M. Tamid 3:8)

This mishnah has a poetic rhythm to it. It's quite reminiscent of the very last psalm, Psalm 150:

Halleluyah! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in the firmament of His power.

Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His abundant greatness.

Praise Him with the blast of the horn; praise Him with the psaltery and harp.

Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and the pipe.

Praise Him with loud-sounding cymbals; praise Him with the clanging cymbals.

**Let every thing that has breath praise the Lord. Halleluyah! (Psalm 150)**

Even at the end of the psalm, there is a parallel with the mishnah as the soul is often linked to the sense of smell (because scent floats on the air; disembodied as the soul survives without a body).

The machine of Ben Katin was a big cover placed over the laver (the place where the priests ritually washed their hands) so that bugs and lizards wouldn't get into it overnight and render the water unfit for washing (M. Yoma 3:10). He also made it so that there were 12 spigots so that the priests could wash quickly. (Think of it in terms of improvements you'd like to see made in women's public bathrooms today.)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How do you imagine the Temple music sounded: like a rock group, a brass band, the choir and orchestra for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? How could we best recapture the "production value" of the Temple in our services today?
2. The incense was an immensely important part of the Temple service. Though one can find the recipe for the incense in the prayerbook today (right before Ein Keiloheinu at the end of Shabbat services) one is excommunicated forever if one attempts to make it today. How could we make an approximation of the incense that wouldn't violate the prohibition? How could we use it in synagogue services?
3. Should we try to recapture some of what obviously "worked" for worshippers in the Temple or should we just leave it as an historical concept?