

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted December 7, 2006, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

THE SAGES KNEW IT 1500 YEARS AGO: DRINK RESPONSIBLY

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As the party season approaches, it may be good to remember what the sages already knew 1500 years ago: that alcoholism has frightful consequences:

Our Rabbis taught: Every scholar who feasts much in every place, eventually destroys his home, widows his wife, orphans his young, forgets his learning and becomes involved in quarrels.

His words are unheeded and he desecrates the name of Heaven and the name of his teacher and the name of his father.

And he causes an evil name for himself, his children and his childrens' children until the end of time. (B. Pesachim 49a)

It's easy to understand how the outcomes the sages predicted could come true. The drinker eventually builds up such an appetite for drinking that it cannot be satisfied outside the home. So starts drinking at home, selling off his home and goods to feed his habit. Finally, he leaves home, in practicality leaving his wife a widow and his children fatherless. Obviously, his situation would lead to numerous arguments.

And he'd have let down not only his family, but his teachers and God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Note that this advice is addressed to scholars. What does this tell us about the distribution of alcoholism in the population if even scholars are included in the number of alcoholics?
2. Do you think the sages accurately describe the outcomes of alcoholism? Would you add or delete anything? What?
3. Jews have traditionally thought to have a low rate of alcoholism. What does this passage tells us about the image versus the reality?

Have safe and joyful holidays.

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