

Talmud Passage of the Week

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Look for new passages approximately every 2 weeks (next passage approximately 01/07/97).

BH

Praying, Healing, Celebrating: A New Format

Dear Friends,

Greetings! Until we get the technical side of our new format up and running, which is probably going to take several weeks, we'll start in our more conventional way. For on-going study, we are moving to a more accessible passage in Taanit. We are adding Healing and Holiday tracks and later we will begin the introductory track. Mail all your answers to the discussion questions, and your hevruta discussions, to me at [Maqom](#) and I will put them out in a discussion digest as usual. The intervals between new web pages may be longer. Please bear with me as I sort out how this will work. Let me know how you like the new format or if there's anything you want changed.

As always, your financial support is greatly appreciated: Maqom has no big benefactors or outside funding. What you send is what we have to work with. Thank you for your emotional, intellectual and financial support!

Judy Abrams

Bavli Taanit 19b-20a, Steinsaltz, Volume 14, pp 75-77:

We are moving further into the tractate Taanit. Here, we pick up the Gemara at the point where it begins a long section outlining the best ways to pray for rain, and other blessings.

Our Rabbis taught: Once all Israel went up on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and they did not have water to drink. Nakdimon ben Guryon approached a certain governor, [and] said to him: Lend me twelve wells of water for the pilgrims, and I will give you twelve wells of water. And if I do not give [them] to you, I will give you twelve talents of silver. And he set a time for him.

When the time arrived and the rain had not fallen, he sent to him in the morning: Send me either the water or the money you owe me. He sent to him: I still have time, [for] the entire day is mine.

At midday he sent to him: Send me either the water or the money that you owe me. He sent to him: I still have time left in the day.

In the afternoon he sent to him: Send me the water or the money that you owe me. He sent to him: I still have time left in the day. That governor sneered at him [and] said: All year long rains have not fallen, and rains will fall now? He entered the bathhouse joyfully.

As the lord entered the bathhouse joyfully, Nakdimon entered the Temple in sadness. He wrapped himself and stood in prayer. He said before Him: Master of the Universe! It is revealed and known before You that I did not do [this] for my [own] honor, nor did I do [it] for the honor of my father's house. Rather, I did [it] for Your honor, so that water would be available for the pilgrims. Immediately the sky became covered with clouds and rain fell until the twelve wells filled and overflowed.

As the lord left the bathhouse, Nakdimon ben Guryon left the Temple. When they met each other, he said to him: Give me the money for the extra water which you owe me. He said to him: I know that the Holy One blessed be He, did not shake His world except on account of you. But I still have a claim against you that I may collect me money from you, for the sun has already set and the rains fell in my possession.

He went back and entered the Temple, wrapped himself and stood in prayer, and said before Him: Master of the Universe! Make it known that You have loved ones in Your world." Immediately the clouds dispersed and the sun shone. At that time the lord said to him: If the sun had not broken through, I would have had a claim against you that I could have collected my money from you [but now, I cannot].

Discussion Questions

1. Contrast Nakdimon with Honi, whose exploits we studied at the very start of Maqom's program. How are they the same? How do they differ? What Biblical character does Nakdimon resemble?
2. Identify what Nakdimon does correctly that allows him to merit such great rewards. Note that he is a lay person, not a sage. In essence, he is a rich Jewish leader; a Federation president. How could Nakdimon serve as a role model for lay leadership today?
3. What festival does this story revolve about? What time of year is it during this story? Is there any symbolism there?

Healing

We will begin our study of texts on Jewish healing with a little-known variant of a well-known dictum about the efficacy of visiting the sick:

Rav Huna said: If a person visits the sick, a reduction of 1/60 part of his illness is thereby effected. They pointed out an objection to Rav Huna: If that is so, let 60 people come in and enable him to go down into the street! He answered them: Sixty could accomplish this, but only if they loved him like himself. (Leviticus Rabbah 34:1, Behar)

A well-known parallel to this passage on B. Baba Metsia 30b states that we can take away 1/60 of a person's illness by visiting him only if we are born under the same star, that is, are exactly the same age as that person.

Healing Discussion Questions

1. How do you show a sick person you're visiting that you love him/her as you love yourself? How would this contribute to that person's healing? If you can't project this sort of love in a visit, should you go anyway?
2. Is there something especially beneficial about being visited by someone your own age? What?

Holidays

The next holiday we look forward to is Tu Bishvat, the Jewish Arbor Day, on January 23. The midrash collection which treats the holidays thematically is called Pesikta Rabbati. In Piska 11 of that work, there is an extended comparison of Israel to nuts (no puns, please!). Here are two examples:

All other fruits, once they fall to earth, get soiled, and a man's instinct makes him shy away from eating them. But the nut, if it falls and gets soiled, may be washed and is then fit to eat. So, too, with Israel: If they get soiled with sin during all the days of the year, when the Day of Atonement comes, they are washed clean of their sin, as it is said, "For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you from all your sins shall you be clean, etc. (Leviticus 16:30)"

Another comment: Nuts are put into a basket, and if a man wishes to put sesame or pepper or peas among them, the

nuts will accommodate them--something which is not true of any other fruit, and cannot be said of dates or figs but only of nuts. Even so Israel accept into their midst every one who comes to be converted. (Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 11:2)

Holidays Discussion Questions

1. Extend the metaphor. How else are the Jewish people like nuts? How is the Jewish people like a tree?
 2. Please share your observances of Tu Bishvat with the rest of the group. Do you hold a seder? Do you have any special customs?
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