

OVERVIEW of the Daf

1) Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (cont.)

The Gemara continues to recount the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza.

This leads the Gemara into a broader presentation of the events of the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash.

A lengthy account of the conversations between R' Yochanan ben Zakkai and Vespasian is presented.

The Gemara elaborates on Titus, what he did when he destroyed the Bais Hamikdash and how he challenged Hashem and lost. ■

REVIEW and Remember

1. Why did Nero Caesar decide not to destroy the Beis Hamikdash?

2. How did R' Yochanan ben Zakkai escape from the siege around Yerushalayim?

3. What requests did R' Yochanan ben Zakkai make from Vespasian and why?

4. Which whom did Onkelos consult when considering conversion and what was the response that he received?

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Distinctive INSIGHT

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai saves the Sanhedrin

תן לי יבנה וחכמיה

Once, when addressing the Kenaisiya Gedola, Rabbi Meir Shapira cited the Yerushalmi (D'mai 3:4), where we find Rabbi Yehoshua ben Kivsai who commented regarding the verse in Bamidbar (19:19). He said, "For my entire life I always read the verse, 'The pure shall sprinkle upon the impure' to mean that one pure person can only sprinkle upon one impure person. However, from the treasures of Yavneh I learned that the verse can also teach that one pure person can sprinkle upon many impure people."

Rabbi Meir Shapira explained that in this passage the "treasures of Yavneh" refers to the incident in our Gemara when Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai requested from Vespasian, the Roman general, "Let me have Yavneh and its sages." When faced with the tragedy of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, at a moment of despair, when many might be disillusioned, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai reacted by setting the foundation for the next Sanhedrin. The lesson which Rabbi Yehoshua derived from this was how it was possible for the noble actions of an individual to have a tremendous positive impact on the masses, just as we find with Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, whose farsighted vision provided the foundation for Torah to be perpetuated.

We must also learn a lesson from the actions of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. We must remain confident in our power to make a difference. For example, although we do not always feel that we are confronting the problem of assimilation head on, we nevertheless must realize that our study and teaching of Torah has a tremendous impact upon the spread of holiness and purity in the world. Even a small spark of light can have the effect of dispelling a large amount of darkness.

We must continue to implement the system which Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai proposed. As we establish Torah schools, yeshivos and Kollel institutions, we are witness to the tremendous effect they have in educating our community at all levels and how even these few talented and educated groups produced by our system successfully counteract the ignorance and misunderstandings which abound. We clearly see the great impact which our efforts have made and continue to make. We recognize that even the few pure souls who stand up to establish these institutions have met with marked assistance from the Heavens in fulfilling their mission to promulgate Torah and its values to the masses. Indeed, one pure person can purify many who are impure. ■

HALACHAH Highlight

Lessons from Bar Kamtza

סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות

The rabbis thought to offer the offering for the same of peace with the government

While discussing the obligation to spend extra money in order to beautify the performance of a mitzvah, Rema¹ writes that one is not obligated to spend all of one's wealth to fulfill a positive command. In contrast, one is obligated to give away all of his money rather than violate a prohibition. Magen Avrohom² writes that our Gemara implies that one is permitted to violate a prohibition out of fear of the government (מפני אימת המלכות). Aruch Hashulchan³ explains that he is referring to the korban sent by Caesar that was blemished on its lip or in its eye. The Rabbis thought to offer the animal as an offering even though it was blemished, and there is a prohibition to offer a blemished animal as an offering, out of fear of the government and didn't do so because of the concern expressed by R' Zecharyah ben Avkulas. Aruch Hashulchan, however, rejects this proof since in that case there was an additional factor that points to offering the korban even though it was blemished and that was the belief that offering this korban would save the Jewish People from destruction.

Another lesson that is derived from this story is the power of embarrassment. After recounting the entire incident of Bar Kamtza and the destruction that resulted from that incident the Gemara⁴ concludes that from this incident we see the power of embarrassment. Hashem assisted Bar Kamtza in carrying out his plot because of the embarrassment that he suffered. Teshuvos B'tzeil Hachochmah⁵ was asked whether embarrassment is an exemption from sitting and eating in a sukkah. There was once a man who due to the side effects of an illness became embarrassed to eat in the presence of others. During the year he always ate alone and became concerned as Sukkos approached since the community had only one sukkah that was located in the courtyard of the Bais Haknesses. B'tzeil Hachochmah cited the Gemara that highlights how powerful the emotion of embarrassment could be and writes that it does constitute an exemption from the mitzvah of sukkah. He adds, however, that one has to be careful applying this principle since there are different levels of embarrassment and sometimes it can be worse than physical suffering (צער) and other times it is less. Additionally, he adds that on the first night of Sukkos the fellow is obligated to eat in the sukkah even though he will suffer embarrassment. ■

1. רמ"א סי' תרנ"ו.
2. מג"א שם סק"ח.
3. ערוה"ש שם סוף סעי' ד'.
4. גמ' לקמן נ"ז.
5. שו"ת בצל החכמה ח"ה סי' ט. ■

STORIES Off the Daf

"Shalom Alecha, O King!"

"שלומא עלך מלכא ..."

Although Rav Yechezkel Abramsky, zt"l, only spent a year in Novhardok, the Alter, zt"l, left an indelible impression on him. At times he recounted with great emotion the Alter's words to him: "Mustar'! (This was the Alter's nickname for Rav Abramsky, since his hometown was Must.) If you want to know how to go through your entire life in this world doing the ratzon Hashem, I will tell you. You must always place upon your heart and know absolutely that there is no real existence except that which is written in the Torah. This is the lesson in Gittin 56. The Gemara tells us

that when Rav Yochanan ben Zakai met Vespasian, he greeted him as a king even though he had not ascended to the throne. Vespasian pointed out that Rav Yochanan was liable to the death penalty for calling him king when he was merely a general. Rav Yochanan ben Zakai explained that he knew that Vespasian would be a king because of a verse and a גזירה שוה that indicate that the one who conquers Yerushalayim will be a king."

The Alter continued, "But how could he take the chance and put his life in danger? We see that when Rav Yochanan ben Zakai approached Vespasian he saw a king. For him, there was no reality besides the Torah!"¹

The Biala Rebbe, zt"l, applied our Gemara to the following well known story: When the Baal HaTanya, zt"l, was imprisoned, he was interrogated on nu-

merous occasions. One day, the Czar of Russia decided to disguise himself and meet this rabbi to decide for himself if the charges against him were true or false. Despite the fact that he was incognito, the Baal HaTanya greeted him as one greets a monarch.

"But I am not the Czar, so why are you giving me this honor?"

"But of course your majesty is the Czar," the Baal HaTanya respectfully parried. "Earthly kingship is likened to heavenly dominion. Just as the heavenly beings are filled with fear and awe, I was filled with awe the moment your majesty entered the cell. Although I was interrogated by a number of noblemen and officers, I never felt such intense fear inspired by any mortal before!"² ■

1. מלך ביופיו, חלק א', עמוד 20
2. טוב, ימי הרחמים והסליחות, ע' שפ"ט

