

Class on the month of Av – Lesson 3 – Reasons for Destruction

2 Temples, 2 Reasons for Destruction

The First Temple was destroyed because the people went back to idolatry, sacrificing humans on the altars of Molech. The second Temple was destroyed due to “baseless hatred” (sinachs chinam) between Jew and fellow Jew. And **this is the problem causing our exile even until today**. The following is a story we find in the Talmud that I copied from Chabad.org describing this hatred.

The Story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

The story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza was the pivotal event that ignited Nero's rage and caused the destruction of the Holy Temple:

A Jew who had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza made a feast. He told his servant to invite Kamtza, but by mistake the servant invited Bar Kamtza. Bar Kamtza took this as a gesture of forgiveness and put on his finest clothes and attended the feast. But when the host noticed Bar Kamtza, he demanded that he leave.

Bar Kamtza was embarrassed. "Since I am here," he requested, "let me stay. I will pay for whatever I eat and drink." But the host refused his offer.

"Then allow me to pay half the cost of the whole feast," begged Bar Kamtza.

"No!"

"Then I am willing to pay the full cost of the feast, but do not embarrass me any more..."

The host had Bar Kamtza dragged from the feast and thrown into the streets.

Bar Kamtza stood up, brushed the dust from his clothing and said to himself: "Since the rabbis were present at the feast and did not stop him, this shows they agreed with him. I'll slander them to the Emperor!"

Bar Kamtza went to Emperor Nero and told him that the Jews were planning a rebellion against him. "How do I know that to be true?" Nero asked. "Send an offering to the Temple and see if it will be accepted," Bar Kamtza said.

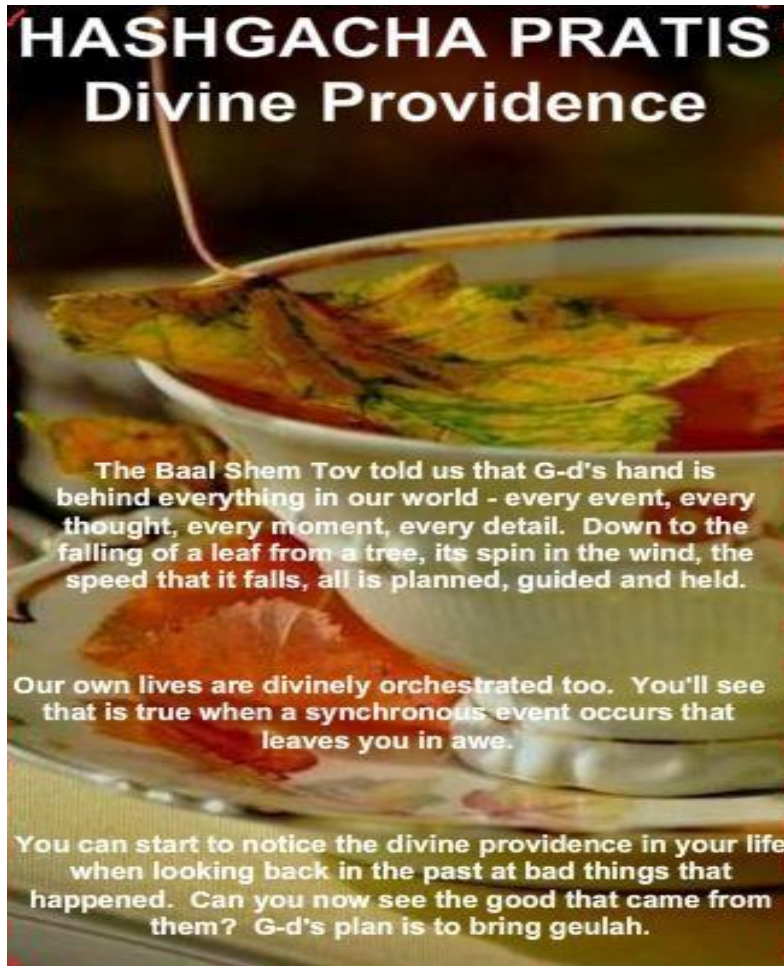
Nero sent a choice calf with Bar Kamtza, along with a delegation of Romans. During the journey, Bar Kamtza secretly made a blemish on the animal, disqualifying the animal as a sacrifice, and the animal was not accepted.

The delegation returned to Rome and told the emperor that his offering had been refused. Emperor Nero was furious, and the ramifications of his fury brought about one of the darkest chapters in our history.

Rabbi Elazar said, "Come and see how great is the punishment for causing embarrassment—for G-d assisted Bar Kamtza [i.e., He allowed Bar Kamtza's plot to succeed because of the embarrassment caused him] and He destroyed His house and burned His Tabernacle."

Hashgacha Pratis

There is a Chassidic concept from the Baal Shem Tov, called, "Hashgacha Pratis" – **everything on earth is divinely orchestrated - there are no accidents**, even the falling of a leaf from a tree, it's angle and speed. So, when "bad" things happen, we are to see them as orchestrated by a loving G-d who has our best interests at heart. And this is how we are to look at the destruction of the Temples. We can be sad and even angry, but we can also envision a better tomorrow.



An illustration of this is given by the Talmud noting that the Cruvim (golden angels on top of the Ark) were embracing each other when the Temple was destroyed. There is a story from a Chassidic sage that explains the meaning behind this, likening it to a parent who buys his child a fine suit and then the child stains it by playing in the mud. So, the parent buys the child a second suit which ends up torn. Finally, the parent tells the child he can't have another suit until he matures and is better able to care for it. **The destruction is not so much a punishment as a re-direction and simply a delaying of the fulfillment of the original promise.**

A story told about Rabbi Akiva illustrates this point very well. Rabbi Akiva is a sage from the second Temple. He was martyred by the Romans in a horrendous fashion and we read about his murder in the liturgy of Yom Kippur. He was a convert at a very late age and became one of the most famous of all rabbis from that time. In this story, he and other rabbis from that time went to see the Temple in ruins after it was burned down. (Its Talmudic version is copied/translated below - found on Chabad.org).

The Laughter of Rabbi Akiva

Talmud, Makkot 24b

Again, it happened that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiva went up to Jerusalem. When they reached Mt. Scopus, they tore their garments. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the place of the Holy of Holies. The others started weeping; Rabbi Akiva laughed.

Said they to him: "Why are you laughing?"

Said he to them: "Why are you weeping?"

Said they to him: "A place [so holy] that it is said of it, 'the stranger that approaches it shall die,'¹ and now foxes traverse it, and we shouldn't weep?"

Said he to them: "That is why I laugh. For it is written, 'I shall have bear witness for Me faithful witnesses-Uriah the Priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.'² Now what is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah was [in the time of] the First Temple, and Zechariah was [in the time of] the Second Temple!

But the Torah makes Zachariah's prophecy dependent upon Uriah's prophecy. With Uriah, it is written:

'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; [Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the Temple Mount like the high places of a forest.]³ With Zachariah it is written, 'Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem.'⁴

"As long as Uriah's prophecy had not been fulfilled, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy may not be fulfilled either. But now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is certain that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled."

With these words they replied to him: "Akiva, you have consoled us! Akiva, you have consoled us!"

1. Numbers 1:51.

2. Isaiah 8:2.

3. Micha 3:12.

4. Zachariah 8:4.