



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

"WHO ARE YOU?" THE ESSENCE OF TISHA B'AV

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



The Talmud tells us in Tractate Yuma 9b, that the second Temple was destroyed because of "sinas chinam" – baseless hatred among Jews. We find a famous and enigmatic story in the Talmud called "Kamtza and Bar Kamtza" which is also mentioned as a precursor to the "Churban" – destruction of the Temple. It too seems to revolve around senseless hatred between Jews:

SOURCE 1: TALMUD TRACTATE GITTIN 55b - STORY OF KAMTZA AND BAR KAMTZA

Jerusalem was destroyed on account of **Kamtza and Bar Kamtza**. There was a **certain man** whose **friend** was named Kamtza and whose **enemy** was named Bar Kamtza: He once made a large feast and said to his servant: Go bring me my friend Kamtza. The servant went and mistakenly brought him his enemy Bar Kamtza.

The man who was hosting the feast came and found Bar Kamtza sitting at the feast. **The host said to Bar Kamtza: That man is the enemy [ba'al devava] of that man,** (that is, you are my enemy). What then do you want here? Arise and leave. Bar Kamtza said to him: Since I have already come, **let me stay and I will give you money for whatever I eat and drink. Just do not embarrass me** by sending me out.

אֶקְמָצָא וְבַר קְמָצָא חָרוּב
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם – דִּהְהוּא גִבְרָא
דִּרְחֻמִּיהּ קְמָצָא, וּבִעַל דְּבִבְיָה
בֵּר קְמָצָא. עָבַד סְעוּדָתָא, אָמַר
לִיה לְשִׁמְעִיָּה: זֵיל אִייתִי לִי קְמָצָא.
אֲזַל אִייתִי לִיה בֵּר קְמָצָא.

אֲתָא, אֲשִׁכַּחֲהּ דִּהְוָה יְתִיב. אָמַר
לִיה: מַכְדִּי הֵהוּא גִבְרָא בִּיעַל
דְּבִבְיָה דִּהְהוּא גִבְרָא הוּא, מֵאִי
בָּעִית הָכָא? קוּם פּוּק! אָמַר לִיה:
הוּאִיל וְאֲתָאִי, שְׂבָקוּ וְיַהֲבִנָּא לָךְ
דְּמִי מָה דְּאֲכִילְנָא וְשִׁתִּינָא.

A number of questions come to mind when trying to understand this story:

Question: The sin of baseless hatred is of course bad, but does it deserve a punishment that has stretched over 2000 years? Why do you think it might?

"Baseless hatred" is equated with the three cardinal sins for which the 1st Temple was destroyed - murder, idol worship and improper intimate relations.

Question: Perhaps the essence of baseless hatred is at the root of these three mistakes. Any thoughts on Why?

Question: Why does the host of the party remain anonymous, while Kamtza, who is not at the party is named?

Question: It is certainly odd that the friend is called Kamtza and the enemy is called Bar Kamtza – “son of Kamtza.” Perhaps these aren’t real names. If not, what do you think they might suggest? (hint: Kamtza in Hebrew means miserly, stingy)

Maybe we should consider that the root of all evil, and certainly dispute, is selfishness – an extreme level of self-centeredness in a person. Bar Kamtza is also an interesting name. Bar is used literally as “son of,” and figuratively as leading to, or as part of, the next generation.

Question: How might this concept relate to dispute and hatred?

This type of hatred, which is baseless, has no limit since it has no cause; it just feeds upon itself (giving birth as it were) until it is all-consuming – from generation to generation!

Question: The first line of the story says that Jerusalem was destroyed on account of “Kamtza and Bar Kamtza.” What did Kamtza have to do with it? He wasn’t even at the party!?

Let’s look at another source from the Maharal of Prague to help us answer this question:

SOURCE 2: NETZACH YISROEL 5:8 - EXPLANATION OF KAMTZA BAR KAMTZA STORY

Let’s try to understand **what Kamtza did** and what sin he committed such that the **destruction of Jerusalem came about through him?** You need to know, that the **generation was one of baseless hatred and dispute**, and the way of a place that is permeated with baseless hatred is to “team up” with your loved ones against those you hate. **So although Kamtza was a friend, the friendship displayed in inviting him to the feast was really just a mechanism for further disharmony and hatred!** This is why he was **called “Kamtza” meaning “miserly & selfish,”** because his only function was to help further dispute, while the person who was actively causing the dispute was called “Bar Kamtza,” “son of Kamtza,” because he was “All about Dispute.”

ויש לך להתבונן, מה עשה קמצא, ומה פשעו ומה חטאו שאמר 'על ידי קמצא חרב ירושלים'. אבל יש לך לדעת, כי על ידי זה שהיה באותו הדור שנאת חנם ומחלוקת, ודרך המקום שיש בו שנאת חנם שיקח לו אוהב לחלוק עם אחר ששונא לו. וזה היה כאן, שהיה רחמיה קמצא. וזאת האהבה עצמה הוא באמת חלוק ופירוד ומחלוקת כמו השנאה, כי על ידי זה נעשה מחלוקת. ולפיכך האוהב הזה נקרא 'קמצא', שאין התקשרות זה רק כדי לחלוק על אחרים. והנה הפרוד והחלוק נאמר על המתחברים להיות אוהבים על זה הדרך. לכך נקרא בעל המחלוקת 'בר קמצא', שיש בו המחלוקת ביותר, והוא יותר גרוע. ומי שלא היה בו המחלוקת, רק שהיה מתחבר אל מי שהיה בעל מחלוקת, נקרא 'קמצא'.

Question: What is the Maharal instructing us about the complicity of Kamtza?

You can’t have a Bar Kamtza without a Kamtza. Dispute and hatred can only be sustained if society supports hatred and division. Without great numbers of people condoning hatred and being happy to advance it, it cannot endure, so perhaps they are just as guilty as those who originate it!

We explained that Kamtza means selfishness. Let’s consider this trait as we look at the last part of our story:

SOURCE 3: TALMUD TRACTATE GITTEN (56a) - KAMTZA/BAR KAMTZA CONTINUED.

The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza said to him: **I will give you money for half of the feast; just do not send me away.** The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza then said to him: **I will give you money for the entire feast; just let me stay.** The host said to him: No, you must leave. Finally, the host took Bar Kamtza by his hand, stood him up, and took him out.

אָמַר לֵיהּ: לֹא. אָמַר לֵיהּ:
יְהִיבְנָא לָךְ דְּמִי פִלְגָא
דְּסַעוּדָתִיךָ! אָמַר לֵיהּ: לֹא.
אָמַר לֵיהּ: יְהִיבְנָא לָךְ דְּמִי
כּוּלָּהּ סַעוּדָתִיךָ! אָמַר
לֵיהּ: לֹא. נִקְטִיָּהּ בְּיָדָהּ
וְאוּקְמִיָּהּ וְאַפְקִיָּהּ.

Bar Kamtza said to himself: Since the Sages were sitting there and did not protest the actions of the host even though he humiliated me, I understand from this that they were in agreement with what he did! I will therefore go and malign them to the king!

אָמַר: הוּאִיל וְהוּוּ יְתָבִי רַבָּנִן
וְלֹא מַחוּ בֵּיהּ, שְׁמַע מִינֵיהּ
קָא נִיחָא לָהּ, אֵיזִיל אֵיכּוּל
בְּהוּ קוֹרְצָא בִּי מַלְכָּא.

We understand that selfishness encourages division/hatred and would expect that to play out in the story. Yet, one would think that the party host would relish his enemy paying for the entire party. However, he throws him out instead and this process is described in detail.

Question: Does this make sense to you? Why? What does it teach us about hate?

Question: In the 2nd paragraph of source #1 the Host says to Bar Kamtza about himself: "That man (himself), is the enemy of that man (Bar Kamtza)"? Why the strange use of the 3rd person instead of the 1st person?

He seems to be alienated from himself - from his own self-interest! Since his essence is selfishness, he is alienated from who he is and what he wants. He will even hurt himself, when caught in the fire of baseless hatred, rather than ensure his own advantage.

We are all souls, made in the image of G-d. When we are alienated from that truth, we hurt others, do worse to ourselves and damage society. I would contend that all bad behavior, from angry outbursts at one's wife and children, to arrogance, to addiction and even to the crisis of identity that our society is currently suffering from, is all due to being alienated from who we really are. When we had a Temple it was obvious who we really were. Since then it has become very confusing. The opposite of hate and selfishness is unity and love. We give to one another, not just because it's nice, but it is the way in which we express ourselves as souls!

Question: Are there areas of your life where your behavior suggests an "alienation from your true self?"

Question: What small step can you take to tackle one of these areas and live more in line with your soul?

If you take this journey you become part of the process of rebuilding the Temple. May it be soon in our days!

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