

## Sin'at chinam -- Senseless hatred

Unpleasant topics, but we are commanded to face them: It's Tish'a b'Av.

### Talmud, Yoma 9b

#### Why was the first Temple destroyed?

-Because of three things that prevailed there: idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder.

**-Idolatry**, as it is written: 'For the bed is too short for a man to stretch himself, and the covering too narrow when he gathers himself up' [Isa. 28:20.] What is the meaning of 'For the bed is too short for a man to stretch himself'? R. Jonathan said: It is: This bed is too short for two neighbors to stretch themselves. [Manasseh, the evil king, introduced idols into the Temple. There was no room there for both the God of Israel and an idol.]...

**-Sexual immorality**, as it is written: 'Moreover the Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and make a tinkling with their feet.' [Isa. 3:16.]

-'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty' -- they walked with proud carriage.

-'And wanton eyes' -- they filled their eyes with kohl [a powder used to paint the eyelids].

-'Walking and mincing as they go' -- walking with the heel touching the toe.

-'And make a tinkling with their feet' -- R. Isaac said: They took myrrh and balsam and placed it in their shoes and when they came near the young men of Israel they would kick, squirting the balsam at them, which caused the evil desire to enter them like an adder's poison.

**-Murder**, as it is written: 'Moreover Manasseh shed much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.' [2Kings 21:16]

-They were wicked, but they [believed they were immune], for it is written, 'Their leaders judge for bribes, their priests teach for hire, and their prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say 'Is the Lord not in our midst? No evil shall come upon us' [Micah 3:11] .

-Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, brought them three evil decrees because of their own three evils: 'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.' [Micah 3:12]

**But why was the second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, observance of mitzvot, and the practice of charity? Because hatred without cause [sin'at chinam] prevailed.** That teaches you that groundless hatred is considered as serious as the three sins of idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder together.

But [during the time of] the first Temple, did no groundless hatred prevail? Surely it is written:

Ezek. 21:17. Cry and howl, son of man; for it shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel; terrors because the sword shall be upon my people; strike therefore upon your thigh.

and R. Eleazar said: This refers to people who eat and drink together and then run each other through with the daggers of their tongue!

-That [passage] speaks of the princes in Israel, for it is written, 'Cry and wail, son of man; for it is upon my people' [Ezek. 21:17.], etc. [The text reads] 'Cry and wail, son of man'. One might have assumed [it is upon] all [Israel], but it goes on to say, 'Upon all the princes of Israel'.

-R. Johanan and R. Eleazar both say: The former ones whose iniquity was revealed [Rashi: 'Who did not hide their misdeeds'] had their end [the end of their captivity in Babylon] revealed, the latter ones whose iniquity was not revealed have their end still unrevealed.

-R. Johanan said: The fingernail of the earlier generations [those of the first Temple] is better than the whole body of the later generations.

-Said Resh Lakish to him: On the contrary, the latter generations are better: Although they are oppressed by [foreign] governments, they are occupying themselves with the Torah.

-He [R. Johanan] replied: The Temple will prove [my point] for it came back to the former generations, but not to the latter ones.

-The question was put to R. Eleazar: Were the earlier generations better [than] the later ones? He answered: Look upon the Temple! Some say he answered: The Temple is your witness [in this matter].

Resh Lakish was swimming in the Jordan. Thereupon Rabbah ben Bar Hana came and gave him a hand [either to greet him or to help him out of the water]. Said [Resh Lakish] to him: By God! I hate you [Babylonians]!. For it is written: 'If she be a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver; if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.' [Song of Songs 8:9] Had you made yourself like a wall and had all come up in the days of Ezra, you would have been compared to silver, which no rottenness can ever affect. Now that you have come up like doors, you are like cedarwood, which rottenness prevails over. [A wall is of one piece; a door or gate of two or more. Had Israel come from Babylon, not in parts, but all at once, Jewry in Eretz Yisrael may have been found worthy of having the Temple restored.]

...

When he [Resh Lakish] came before R. Johanan, he said to him: [You are wrong,] This is not the reason. Even if they had all come up in the time of Ezra, the Divine Presence would still not have rested over the second Temple...

*[Note: Talmud implicitly criticizing Resh Lakish, who said later generations are better: Did YOU learn anything? Aren't YOU still into sin'at chinam?]*

*Sin'at chinam from the top down:*

*Factions:*

**Religious:**

- Pharisees (Oral law, rabbis)
- Sadducees (no Oral law, aristocracy)
- Essenes (monastic sect)
- Christians and followers of other would-be Messiahs
- Hellenized/Romanized seculars
- others

**Political:**

- Against an uprising (and collaborators)
- For an uprising (Zealots [kana-im], 3 factions)

*Next story: Sin'at chinam from the bottom up:]*

## Talmud, Gittin 55b-56a

The destruction of Jerusalem came through a Kamtza and a Bar Kamtza in this way. A certain man had a friend Kamtza and an enemy Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, Go and bring Kamtza. The man went and brought Bar Kamtza [by mistake]. When the man [who gave the party] found him there he said, See, you tell tales about me; what are you doing here? Get out. Said the other: Since I am here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink.

He said, I won't. Then let me give you half the cost of the party. No, said the other. Then let me pay for the whole party. He still said, No, and he took him by the hand and put him out. Said the other, Since the rabbis were sitting there and did not stop him, this shows that they agreed with him. I will go and inform against them, to the Government. He went and said to the Emperor, The Jews are rebelling against you. He said, How can I tell? He said to him: Send them an offering and see whether they will offer it [on the altar]. So he sent with him a fine calf. While on the way he made a blemish on its upper lip, or as some say on the white of its eye, in a place where we [Jews] count it a blemish but they [the Romans] do not. The rabbis were inclined to offer it in order not to offend the Government.

-Said R. Zechariah ben Avkolos to them: People will say that blemished animals are offered on the altar.

-They then proposed to kill Bar Kamtza so that he should not go and inform against them, but R.

Zechariah ben Avkolos said to them, Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?

-R. Johanan thereupon remarked: Through the humility [scrupulousness] of R. Zechariah ben Avkolos our House has been destroyed, our Temple burnt and we ourselves exiled from our land. [Josephus (Wars, II, 17, 2) also ascribes the beginning of the war to the refusal to accept the offering of the Emperor in 66 CE]

He [the Emperor] sent against them Nero the Caesar. [Figurative: Nero himself never came to Judea.] As he was coming he shot an arrow towards the east, and it fell in Jerusalem. He then shot one towards the west, and it again fell in Jerusalem. He shot towards all four points of the compass, and each time it fell in Jerusalem. He said to a certain boy: Repeat to me [the last] verse of Scripture you have learnt. He said: And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel.[Ezek. 25:14] He said: The Holy One, blessed be He, desires to lay waste his House and to lay the blame on me. So he ran away and became a proselyte, and R. Meir was descended from him.

He then sent against them Vespasian [who would later become] Caesar who came and besieged Jerusalem for three years...

Variant of story:

### Midrash, Lamentations Rabbah 4:3

It happened that a Jerusalemite once gave a dinner and instructed one of his household, 'Go and bring me my friend Kamtza'; but he went and invited Bar Kamtza who was his enemy. The latter entered and sat among the invited. When the host came in and found him among the guests, he said to him, 'You are my enemy, and yet you sit in my house! Get up and leave my house!' He answered, 'Do not put me to shame, and I will pay you the cost of what I eat.' He said to him, 'You will not recline at the meal!' He said to him, 'Do not put me to shame, and I will sit without eating or drinking anything'; but he replied, 'You will not recline at the meal!' He pleaded, 'I will pay the cost of the whole meal'; but the host said, 'Go away!' R. Zechariah ben Avkolos, who was present, could have prevented [the host from treating the man in this manner] but did not intervene.

Bar Kamtza at once left the house, and said to himself, 'They feast and sit in luxury; I will go and inform against them.' What did he do? He went to the governor and said, 'The sacrifices which you send to the Jews to offer in the Temple they eat themselves and substitute [inferior animals] on the altar.' He reprimanded him [The governor would not believe the charge] ; but he went to him a second time and said, 'All the sacrifices which you send to the Jews to offer they eat themselves and substitute [inferior animals] on the altar; if you do not believe me, send an officer and some sacrificial animals with me, and

you will immediately know that I am not a liar.' While they were on the journey the officer fell asleep, and in the night Bar Kamtza secretly made all the animals blemished. When the priest saw [that they were blemished] he substituted others for them.

The king's messenger asked him, 'Why do you not offer these animals which I brought?' He replied, 'I will do so to-morrow.' [He prevaricated because he felt it would be an insult to the ruler that his animals were disqualified as a sacrifice.] He came on the third day but the priest had not offered them. He sent a message to the king, 'What the Jew told you is true.' The king forthwith came up against the Temple and destroyed it. Hence the popular saying: 'Because of the difference between [the names] Kamtza and Bar Kamtza was the Temple destroyed.' R. Jose said: The meekness of Zechariah ben Avkolos [in not intervening to prevent expulsion] burnt the Temple.

*[Lesson: Seemingly minor transgressions can have cataclysmic consequences.]*

*-The 'blemished lips' of Israel: Lashon hara'*

*-Why is Kamtza seemingly blamed by association? He had nothing to do with any of it! Maharal: in an atmosphere of great enmity, people look for friends as allies in their disputes with their many enemies. Such a friendship reflects not true human warmth, but rather the calculating partnership of the hostile. If so, even the host's friendship with Kamtza was part of the corruption that characterized the Jewish society of the time.*

*-Rabbis' flexibility in offering flawed sacrifice was correct (Potential pikuach nefesh). R. Zechariah's scrupulousness was misplaced.*

*-Why is this story in Gittin (Divorces)? God is divorcing Israel. (Rav Tzadok Ha-kohen of Lublin)*

*-Role of Rabbi Zechariah: Too meek in public confrontations, too rigid in observance, yet correct in not agreeing to kill a man for an offense that does not call for the death penalty.]*

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## **Talmud, Baba Metzia 30b**

R. Johanan said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they gave judgments therein in accordance with Biblical law. Were they then to have judged in accordance with untrained arbitrators? But say thus: because they based their judgments [strictly] upon Biblical law, and did not go beyond the requirements of the law. [Tempering justice with mercy. ]

*Commentary: R. Kahn: The terrible action which caused the fall of Jerusalem, was that everyone firmly stood up for their rights -- according to the letter of the law [no compromise]. Consequently, God treated them in an identical manner -- according to the letter of the law. And Jerusalem fell.*

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*[-Is the State of Israel the Third Temple? (Ben Gurion = Messiah!)]*

*-Could it be also destroyed because of sin'at chinam?*

*-Should we be concerned that peace in the Middle East may bring civil war between secular and religious; and among the religious (deep rifts over arcane points of law; e.g., silk-screening, conversion crisis); intermarriage with Arabs; rise of population of mixed parentage with lower commitment, no commitment, or hostility towards Judaism; move towards abolishing Jewish character of state; abrogate 'law of return'*

*-Have we learned anything about sin'at chinam/lashon hara in 2,000 years?]*