



DERECH B'YAM HATALMUD



UNDERSTANDING THE STORY OF KAMTZA AND BAR KAMTZA

**A guided approach to learning
the account of the Churban in**

Mesechtas Gittin 55b-56a

**I'lui Nishmas Raiza Gittel bas Ze'ev a"h
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By Rabbi Michoel Gros

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Updated and revised

SECTION ONE



What Did Kamtza Do Wrong? (Why is he partially blamed for the destruction of Yerushalayim)?

מס' גיטין דף נה:-נו.

OVERVIEW

Beginning on the bottom of Gittin daf 55b, the Gemara recounts several tragedies at the time of the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash.

The Gemara says that Yerushalayim was destroyed because of the actions of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. It is necessary to analyze the actions of each of the parties in the episode to understand why the Gemara cites this event as the cause.

מראה מקומות

- גמרא מ-נה: "אמר רבי יוחנן" עד נו. "בי מלכא"
- תוס' - נה: (ד"ה אשרי איש)
- מהרש"א (ד"ה אמר דאזל) עד "שהוא הזמין"
- מהר"ל - חדושי אגדות גיטין נה: (מ- "ואמר כי כל" עד "וברורים מאד")
- בן יהודע (ד"ה אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים)

Summary of the Gemara

The Gemara beginning towards the bottom of Gitting daf 55b discusses the causes of the Churban (destruction) of the second Beis HaMikdash and certain events related to it.

אמר רבי יוחנן – The Gemara begins its account with an elucidation of a verse from Mishlei 28:14 which teaches: "אשרי אדם מפחד תמיד" – "praiseworthy is the man who is always afraid."

QUESTION: Why does the verse teach that it is good for a person to be afraid? It would appear that being afraid is not a proper emotion! What is the value of the fear that the verse advocates, and how does it relate to the story of the *Churban*?

Rashi in (ד"ה מפחד) explains that the verse teaches that a person should contemplate his actions and worry that a negative outcome might emerge from them.

Tosefos in (ד"ה אשרי איש) gives two lessons from this verse:

First, a person needs to be afraid lest he forgets his learning. Therefore he should constantly review what he learns so this does not occur.

Second, Tosefos explains that many of the events of the *Churban* were due to people trusting in the security of their personal situations. This gave them excessive confidence and caused them to act inappropriately. Specifically, he says this caused the host of the party to embarrass Bar Kamtza, as the Gemara will teach. Tosefos says that those involved in the episode should have been afraid of the outcomes of their actions (or inactions)

Tosefos says that it is appropriate for a person to be concerned for this, that he will become overly confident due to the stability of his situation. This is in contrast to fear for no reason, which people should avoid.

(We see from the Gemara here and the explanations of Rashi and Tosefos the importance of anticipating the outcomes of our actions. The Gemara will highlight how seemingly insignificant actions by multiple people had dramatic effects which ultimately led to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash.)

אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים – The Gemara continues and says that the city of Yerushalayim was destroyed because of an episode involving the men Kamtza and Bar Kamtza.

אתרנגולא ותרנגולתא חרוב טור מלכא אשקא יידיספק חרוב ביתר – The Gemara mentions other places which were also destroyed during the years of the Churban, due to particular events which happened there. The Gemara will later elucidate each situation.

אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים – The Gemara says that Yerushalayim was destroyed because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

The Gemara in Mesichtas Yoma 9a says that the second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed due to the *Sinas Chinam* (baseless hatred) among the Jewish people at the time.

The **Maharsha** in (יומט ט: ד"ה אבל מקדש ב') says that the episode of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza is a sign of the *Sinas Chinam* prevalent at the time. Therefore, the incident involving them is cited here as an example of why Yerushalayim was destroyed.

QUESTION: Since the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza was a sign of the *Sinas Chinam* which caused the overall Churban of the Beis HaMikdash, why does the Gemara here say that it was the cause of the destruction of the city Yerushalayim in particular (and not that of the Beis HaMikdash)?

The **Maharal** in ("והרורים מאד" עד "ואמר כי כל אחד" מ-ג: נה: גיטין) says that each place mentioned in the Gemara was destroyed due to a specific reason appropriate for it.

He explains that the Beis HaMikdash and the city of Yerushalayim represent the unity of the Jewish people, where they come together, "*K'Ish Echad*" – like one person. The goal of the Beis HaMikdash is to bring peace among the members of the nation. He notes, for example, that there is only a single *Mizbeyach* (altar) inside the Beis HaMikdash where *Korbanos* (offerings) can be brought, representing the Jewish people coming together to serve Hashem. This in comparison to the earlier practice of allowing each person to build his own **Bamah** – private altar – where he could bring his own *Korbanos*.

Therefore he says that when the Gemara attributes the destruction of Yerushalayim to the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, it is indicating that the division between people which was seen in the story was the cause of the Churban of **both** the Beis HaMikdash and the city of Yerushalayim. Since both of these places represent unity, they were destroyed due to the *Sinas Chinam* expressed in this episode.

The Gemara explains the details of the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza:

דההוא גברא – דרחמיה קמצא – *There was a man, who had a friend named Kamtza,*
ובעל דבניה בר קמצא – *and an enemy named Bar Kamtza.*

אמר ליה לשמעיה "זיל אייתי לי" – *The man made a party.*
אזל אייתי ליה בר קמצא – *He told his servant, "go, bring Kamtza."*
– He went and instead brought Bar Kamtza to the party.

אתא אשכחיה דהוה יתיב – *(When the host arrived at the party) he found that Bar Kamtza was sitting there.*
אמר ליה "מכדי דהוה גברא בעל דבבא" – *He (the host) asked him, "since you are the enemy of this man (me),"*
"מאי בעית הכא? קום פוק!" – *"What are you doing here? Get up and leave!"*

אמר ליה "הואיל ואתאי" – *Bar Kamtza replied, "since I already came,"*
"שבקן ויהיבנא לך דמי מה דאכילנא ושתינא" – *"let me stay and I will pay you for what I eat and drink."*
אמר ליה "לא" – *The host replied, "No!"*

"אמר ליה "יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתך" – The Gemara on the top of daf 56a says that Bar Kamtza said, "I will pay you for half of the entire meal." "א"ל "לא" – The host said no.

"אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתך" – Bar Kamtza then offered to pay for the entire meal. "א"ל "לא" – The host said no.

נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה – The host then grabbed Bar Kamtza and threw him outside.

אמר - Bar Kamtza said (to himself), "שמע מינה קא" – "since the Rabbis were sitting there and did not protest, it must be that they agreed with him."

*"איזיל איכול בהו קורצא בי מלכא" – "I will go and spread rumors to the Roman government about the Jews." (As explained by **Rashi**.)*

The Gemara at the end of the summary of this episode on daf 57a says that because of Bar Kamtza's embarrassment, Hashem aided him in his plot to take revenge on the Jews by destroying the Beis HaMikdash.

Understanding the actions of the Rabbis present

The **Maharsha** in (ד"ה ואמר הואיל) explains that the Rabbis in attendance felt that they could not protest the host's action. (However, their hesitancy to respond may have been incorrect.)

The **Birkas Avraham** in (ד"ה אמר והואיל) cites Shabbos 119b which attributes the Churban to the failure of the Rabbis at the time to give proper **Tochehah** – rebuke – to people. The Birkas Avraham says that this episode is an example of that statement.

The Gemara also says that another cause of the Churban is that people failed to give proper respect to Torah scholars. This is seen here (through the actions of Bar Kamtza).

QUESTION: The Gemara continues and says that Bar Kamtza falsely accused the Jewish nation of rebelling against the Roman empire, which ultimately led them to destroy the Beis HaMikdash. If so, why does the Gemara say that Yerushalayim was destroyed due to both Kamtza and Bar Kamtza?

The origins of the event were that the host of the party meant to invite Kamtza, but Bar Kamtza came instead. Why is Kamtza included in the

blame for the destruction, since the Gemara only mentions him in passing, and we do not see that he was directly involved in the story?

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה אקמצא ובר קמצא) **בן יהוידע** cites the **Iyun Yaacov** who asks: Kamtza had no stated role in the episode! The Gemara should therefore say that Yerushalayim was destroyed only because of Bar Kamtza's actions.

The Ben Ish Chai suggests an answer to this question. He cites the teaching (from Shabbos 55a) that if a person has the ability to protest another person's negative actions and does not, those actions are called by his own name.

He explains that when Bar Kamtza arrived at the party and the host yelled at him to leave, Kamtza was also sitting in the house. He had the ability to protest and convince the host not to throw out Bar Kamtza. Since he did not do so, he is considered a partner in the host's actions and its repercussions.

He cites the **Maharsha** in (ד"ה אמר דאזל) who suggests that Kamtza was the father of Bar Kamtza, and he was aware of the ill feelings between the host and his son. He should have tried to make peace between them. Since he did not, he shares blame for the Churban which followed.

The **Maharal** in **קדושי אגדות** from the word "וכאשר" says that the names of the men involved in the episode allude to their character flaws. He says that the name Kamtza represents *Chiluk* and *Pirud* – separation and divisiveness. He cites several examples in which words with the root קמץ represent separation, including the act of *Kemitza*, of separating a portion of flour to place on the *Mizbeyach*.

The Maharal explains that the people involved in the episode (Bar Kamtza and the host) were known in Yerushalayim because of the severity of their fight. Their actions were the cause of the destruction of the very city which stands for the unity of the Jewish people.

But what did Kamtza do wrong?

The Maharal answers that the friendship between Kamtza and Bar Kamtza was one of *Pirud*, of separating from and excluding others. Kamtza was aware of the fight which was raging between Bar Kamtza and the party's host. He knew that by befriending Bar Kamtza, this would further enflame the fight, and yet he did not hesitate to do so.

Instead of the friendship between Kamtza and Bar Kamtza encouraging more love among members of the Jewish people, it caused just the opposite, more division. The purpose of Yerushalayim is to unite the Jews, so it was appropriately destroyed by the *Sinas Chinam* present at the time, as displayed by men whose names represent this.

SECTION TWO

A Plot Fueled by Anger

מס' גיטין דף נו.

OVERVIEW

The Gemara on daf 56a continues its discussion of the story involving Bar Kamtza. It relates how he went to the Roman government and falsely accused the Jews of rebelling against them.

The גמרא centers on the debate of the Rabbis concerning how to respond to Bar Kamtza's plot. The commentators analyze their arguments.

מראה מקומות

- גמרא נו. מ- "אזל אמר ליה לקיסר" עד "והגליתנו מארצנו"
- מהרש"א (ד"ה דשדא ביה מומא)
- מאירי (ד"ה לעולם)
- מהר"ץ חיות (ד"ה ענותנותו)
- מהרש"א (ד"ה ואמר יאמרו)
- מהר"ל – חדושי אגדות נה: (מ- "ומעתה עד "דוקא ישראל")

Summary of the Gemara

The Gemara towards the top of daf 56a continues its explanation of the events which led to the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash. It describes that after Bar Kamtza was embarrassed and thrown out of the party, he traveled to the Roman government to make a false and malicious claim that the Jews were rebelling against them. (This does not necessarily mean that he traveled to Rome. He may have gone to the seat of the provincial government in Syria, whose governor was given the title Caesar.)

"אזל אמר ליה לקיסר "מרדו בכ יהודאי" – He went to the Caesar and said, "the Jews are rebelling against you."

"מי יימר" – The Caesar replied to him, "who told you?"

"א"ל "שדר להו קורבנא חזית אי מקרבין ליה" – He replied, "send an animal (to the Beis HaMikdash) as a korban and see if it is accepted."

אזל שדר בידיה עגלא תלתא – He went and sent with Bar Kamtza a third-born cow (a choice offering). בהדי דקאתי שדא ביה מומא בניב שפתים. – As Bar Kamtza was bringing it up, he made a wound – מום – in the animal's upper lip. ואמרי לה בדוקין שבועין. – Others say that he caused a cataract to form in the animal's eye.

The **Maharsha** in (ד"ה דשדא ביה מומא) says that the placement of the blemish was an allusion to the sins of the Jews which led to the Churban. According to the opinion that Bar Kamtza made a wound in the animal's lip, this represents that the Jews of the generation spoke *Loshon Hora*.

According to the opinion that he injured the animal's eye, this is a hint to the Jews' negative outlook towards others, shown by the party's host not wanting Bar Kamtza to benefit from his party, and by subsequently embarrassing him.

דוכתא דלדידן הוה מומא ולדידהו לאו מומא הוא – The Gemara says that the particular location of the wound invalidates an offering according to the Jews, but it does not do so according to the rules of the non-Jews.

The Gemara continues and describes the debate among the Rabbis of how to respond to Bar Kamtza's attempt to entrap the Jewish people:

סבור רבנן לקרוביה – The Rabbis thought that they should accept the animal and offer it on the altar, משום שלום מלכות, – to encourage peace with the government.

אמר לבו רבי זכריה בן אבקולום "יאמרו בעלי מומין קריבין לגבי מוזבח" – Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos said, "if we do so, people will say that it is permitted to offer animals with imperfections in their bodies."

סבור למיקטליה דלא ליזיל ולימא – The Rabbis then suggested that they should kill Bar Kamtza so that he would not return to the Caesar to say that the Jews had not brought up his animal as a korban.

The **Meiri** in (ד"ה לעולם) explains that it would have been permitted to kill Bar Kamtza because he was guilty of inciting the non-Jewish government against the Jews.

אמר להו רבי זכריה "יאמרו מטיל מום בקדשים יהרג" – Rav Zecharia said, "if we do so, people will say that anyone who makes a blemish in the

body of an offering is killed” (even though this is incorrect, as a person who does so is punished with lashes, not death).

The other Rabbis accepted his words.

"ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבקולס" – אמר רבי יוחנן – Rebbi Yochanan said, "due to the humility of Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos, החרבה את ביתנו" "ושרפה את היכלנו והגליתנו מארצנו" – "our house (the Beis HaMikdash) was destroyed, and the sanctuary was burnt and we were exiled from our land."

Rashi in (ד"ה ענוותנותו) says that the term humility here refers to the excessive patience of Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos that he did not permit Bar Kamtza to be killed.

Several questions need to be answered to understand these events:

QUESTION: What was the consideration of the Rabbis of Shalom Malchus, and why would this have permitted them to accept a blemished offering?

QUESTION: What was the final decision of the Rabbis? Was the cow brought as an offering?

QUESTION: There was an easier solution to the dilemma of the Rabbis. Why did they not send a message to the Caesar that they could not accept an animal with a blemish? This would have avoided the misunderstanding which led to the destruction!

QUESTION: What is the meaning of the phrase, “the humility of Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos,” and why was it the cause of the destruction?

Understanding the discussion whether to accept the blemished animal from the Caesar

The Gemara says that the Rabbis considered accepting the animal of the Caesar, despite its disqualifying blemish, for the purpose of maintaining peace with the Roman government.

How can this be understood, since offering a blemished animal as a Korban transgresses a Lav (negative prohibition)?

The **Maharas Chayos** in (ד"ה ענותנותו) cites the **Magen Avraham** in (תרנו:ה) who explains that it is permitted to violate a Lav for the purpose of **Eimas HaMalchus** – fear of the government. In this case, the Roman government was threatening the entire Jewish people, so it would have been warranted for them to offer the blemished korban to avoid this danger.

The Maharas Chayos cites an example from a statement of the Gemara in Mesechtas Yoma that the *Kohen Gadol* can wear his special eight garments only while he is in the Beis HaMikdash. The Gemara there cites the episode of Shimon HaTzaddik the Kohen Gadol leaving the Beis HaMikdash while wearing the clothing of the Kohen Gadol to greet Alexander the Great (of Macedon). It brings an opinion that this was permitted due to Eimas HaMalachus. The case there is also unique, since the Jews were concerned that Alexander would act harshly against them if not given proper respect.

The Maharas Chayos continues and says that the Jews would have been justified in killing Bar Kamtza because he had the status of a **Rodef** – pursuer – whom it is permitted to kill. However Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos convinced them not to do so. He did not hold himself to have enough standing as a leader of the nation to be able to order Bar Kamtza to be killed in this case.

This is the meaning of the statement that the excessive humility of Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos was the cause of the Churban. According to the conclusion of the Gemara, Rav Zecharia acted improperly, and should have ruled that Bar Kamtza could be killed.

The Maharas Chayos compares his action to the statement of the Gemara that the Rabbis should have protested the actions of the host when he ejected Bar Kamtza from his party.

Understanding why the Jews could not accept the blemished animal

The **Maharal** in ("דוקא ישראל" עד "ומעתה" מ- נה: מ- "דוקא ישראל") says that the events of the Churban of Yerushalayim began due to the actions of Kamtza (and Bar Kamtza) and continued until the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. He explains that the city of Yerushalayim and the Mizbeyach bring *Shleimos* – completion – to the entire world. He cites a Midrash which says that if the non-Jews would be aware of the benefit which the Beis HaMikdash provides to them, they would have built it themselves out of gold.

He says that since the Beis HaMikdash is meant to bring *Shleimos* to the entire world (and not only to the Jewish people), therefore the Torah commands us to accept (certain) offerings sent by non-Jews (see Menachos 73b).

For this reason as well, the non-Jews do not have a desire to destroy the Beis HaMikdash. The destruction could only be due to an event of disunity among the Jews themselves, which would conflict with the goal of *shleimos* which the Beis HaMikdash represents. Therefore when Bar Kamtza separated himself from the

Jewish people to try to persuade the Romans to attack them, this act set the events of the destruction in motion.

The Maharal continues and explains Bar Kamtza's machinations.

He says that even though the Beis HaMikdash serves a purpose for the entire world, ultimately it belongs to the Jewish people, and demonstrates that we are not under the control of the non-Jewish nations.

Bar Kamtza wished to show the Caesar that the Jews do not consider themselves to be under his control, specifically due to the presence of the Beis HaMikdash among them. Therefore he specifically engineered a plot which he knew would cause a rift between the Jewish people and the Roman government regarding this point.

The Gemara emphasizes that the blemish which he caused in the animal would invalidate it only for the Jews, but not for the Romans. The Maharal says that the non-Jews look at the overall body of the animal to judge if it is fit to be an offering. It is permitted to bring a *korban* with a slight imperfection, as long as it is not missing an entire limb.

However for an animal to be fit to be a *korban* for the Jewish people, it must be perfect in its body and all of its details.

The Rabbis knew that if they sent a message to the Caesar that his animal was unfit to be offered, it would emphasize the difference between our laws and theirs. It would also demonstrate that the presence of the Beis HaMikdash among us, and how the Jewish people relate to it, show that we are not under the control of the Romans.

The Caesar wished that the entire world would be under his control. The existence of the Jewish nation as an entity independent of his rule was a clear contradiction of this. Therefore, the Rabbis knew that the Caesar would be enraged if they refused to accept his *korban* for this reason.

Recognizing that this was the intent of Bar Kamtza, the Rabbis knew that they could not send a message to the Caesar explaining the true reason why they did not accept his offering.

QUESTION: The Gemara here attributes the destruction to Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos, but the Gemara earlier attributed it to the Sinas Chinam from the episode of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Which one of them was the true cause?

QUESTION: How can the Gemara here attribute all of the events of the Churban to the actions of the men who were involved in this episode, since the Gemara elsewhere attributes it the episode of the *Meraglim* (spies) giving a negative report after their trip in Eretz Yisrael?

The **Maharsha** in (ד"ה ואמר יאמרו) suggests that even though the exile of the Jews had already been decreed due to the *Sinas Chinam* of the time, it did not necessarily mean that the Beis HaMikdash would have been destroyed. He says that it is possible that if the Jews had accepted the Caesar's blemished animal and offered it on the *Mizbeyach*, the Romans would have spared the Beis HaMikdash.

However once the Jews did not accept Caesar's offering, this sealed the decision of the Romans to destroyed the Beis HaMikdash because they said, "for what use is this to us?"

The **Maharam Shif** in (ד"ה החריבה) says that even though the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash had already been decreed, these events caused the Churban to occur *at this moment*.

Understanding the ramifications of Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos' actions

The **Mesilas Yesharim** writes in פרק משקל החסידות that when a person is deciding the best course of action to take, he needs to carefully weigh the decision from all sides to decide whether to pursue it. Many actions cannot be decided on first glance, because it often occurs that a choice which seems positive on the surface will have negative outcomes.

He cites the description in the Gemara here of Rav Zecharia ben Avkulos' decision not to allow Bar Kamtza to be killed. The Mesilas Yesharim says that he failed to properly weigh all aspects of the decision and fully anticipate the outcomes, which is why the Gemara says that he was responsible for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash.

SECTION THREE



The Siege Begins

מס' גיטין דף נו.

OVERVIEW

The Gemara says that due to the false allegations of Bar Kamtza, the Romans sent an army to Yerushalayim, led by Nero Caesar. It describes the actions he undertook to determine if they would succeed.

Several issues need to be resolved, including why he acted in the way he did and why he deserved to be rewarded for his actions.

מראה מקומות

- גמרא נו. מ- "שדר עלוייהו לגירון קיסר" עד "שדריה עלוייהו לאספסינוס קיסר"
- בן יהודע (ד"ה שם שדר)
- מהרש"א (ד"ה א"ל ונתתי)
- בן יהודע (ד"ה שם ערק)

Summary of the Gemara

The Gemara on 56a describes the beginning of the Roman attack on Eretz Yisrael which led to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash several years later. (Eretz Yisrael was already part of the Roman Empire prior to this event, so the Romans sent an army not to conquer it, but to subdue the rebellion which Bar Kamtza claimed was beginning.)

שדר עלוייהו לגירון קיסר – (The ruler) sent against them Nero Caesar.

כי קאתי שדא גירא למזרח אתא נפל בירושלים – He shot an arrow towards the east and it fell in Yerushalayim.

למערב אתא נפל בירושלים לארבע רוחות השמים אתא נפל בירושלים – He shot towards the west and it fell in Yerushalayim. He shot arrows towards each of the four directions, and each one fell in Yerushalayim.

"א"ל לינוקא "פסוק לי פסוקיך" – The Gemara says that Nero then spoke to a young Jewish boy and asked what him, "what verse are you learning" (a technique to gauge Hashem's feelings).

'אמר ליה ונתתי את נקמתי באדום ביד עמי ישראל וגו' verse, "I will take My revenge against Edom through My nation Yisrael" (Yechezkel 25:14). (The Roman empire are descendants of Edom.)

The **Maharsha** in (ד"ה א"ל ונתתי) says that after Bavel (the Babylonian Empire) destroyed the first Beis HaMikdash, Hashem took revenge on them through Paras (the Persian Empire). The verse indicates that the Jews themselves will take vengeance in the future on the Roman Empire for destroying the Beis HaMikdash, as the verse indicates, "ועלו מושעים בהר ציון לשפוט את הר עשו והיתה לה' המלוכה" – "and the saviors will ascend Har Tzion to judge Har Eisav and the kingdom will be for Hashem" (Ovadiah 1:21).

"אמר "קודשא בריך הוא בעי לחרובי ביתיה" – Nero Caesar said to himself, "Hashem wants to destroy His house," "ובעי לכפורי ידיה בההוא גברא" – and wants to wipe His hands clean on that man (myself)."

ונפק מיניה – He ran away and converted to Judaism, ערק ואזל ואיגיר – and Rabbi Meir descended from him.

שדריה עילויהו לאספסינוס קיסר – The Gemara says that the ruler then sent Vespasian Caesar to lead the army against the Jews. (The Gemara continues and describes the events of his siege on Yerushalayim.)

QUESTION: Who was Nero Caesar?

The commentators discuss the identity of Nero Caesar and where he fits into Jewish and Roman history.

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם שדר) **בן יהוידע** says that the emperor of Rome was given the title Caesar. The appellation was also given to other government officials from the royal line, to indicate that they represent the emperor. Thus, the heads of the army in this episode were named Nero Caesar and Vespasian Caesar.

The **Maharsha** in (ד"ה ער' ואזיל) cites the **ספר חיי מלכים** – archives of the kings (of Rome) which mentions the general Nero Caesar and records that he deserted his army.

QUESTION: The Roman armies were the supreme military power of the ancient world, striking fear in those they threatened. Why did Nero Caesar feel it was necessary to do these acts of divination first to see if they would succeed against the Jews?

Anaf Yosef on the (יז) עין יעקב says that Nero Caesar knew the Jews had sinned and were worthy of being punished. However, he was concerned that Hashem would perform a *Neis* (miracle) to save them. He shot the first arrow in the direction of Yerushalayim, to see if it would fall there naturally, or if Hashem would make a *neis* and cause it to change direction. When he saw that the arrow landed in Yerushalayim, it was a sign that the Jews were not worthy of being miraculously saved.

Nero Caesar sent three additional arrows to confirm that Hashem wanted His city and His Beis HaMikdash destroyed at that moment.

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם שדא) בן יהוידע says that Nero Caesar performed an act of magic specifically through arrows, to test whether the Jews were worthy of being punished at that moment. When he shot the arrows in four different directions, and they all miraculously landed in Yerushalayim, this was a sign that the Jews had sinned and that the Roman army would be victorious.

He explains that Nero Caesar specifically chose to shoot arrows, since the Jews were being punished from heaven due to their sin of *Loshon Hora* which is compared to an arrow.

QUESTION: Nero Caesar acted admirably by abandoning his army and mission and refusing to destroy the Beis HaMikdash. He was certainly deserving of reward for this, but why did he merit to have the great Rebbi Meir descend from him?

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם ערק) בן יהוידע suggests three approaches to explain why Nero Caesar deserved that Rebbi Meir would descend from him.

First, he says that Nero Caesar showed honor to the Torah by asking a child for a verse and relying on it to determine whether to attack Yerushalayim. Therefore from him came Rebbi Meir (whose name is based on the root **Ohr** – light). He is called by this name because he lit up the eyes of the Jews in Halacha (Eruvin 13b).

Second, he says that Nero Caesar refused to destroy the Beis HaMikdash which was the light of the world (Bava Basra 3a). This led to Rebbi Meir descending from him, because he similarly lit up the world with the light of his Torah.

Third, because Nero Caesar specifically relied on the Neis of the arrows to determine whether he should attack Yerushalayim, his line produced Rebbi Meir who was known as Rebbi Meir Ba'al HaNes.

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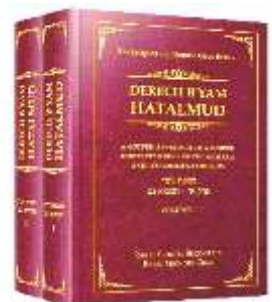
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