

Aggadeta – Class One

Brother and Sister in the Dark:

The Sharp Descent into Exile

A class by Rabbi Yonatan Y. Halevy

fell on each other and wailed until their souls departed out of grief. And concerning them Yirmeya lamented: “For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water”

(2) איכה א', ט"ז

על אלה אני בוכיה עיני עיני ירדה מים כי רחוק ממני מנחם משיב נפשי היו בני שוממים כי גבר אויב:

For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water, for a comforter to restore my soul is far from me; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed.

(3) בראשית מ"ה, י"ד

ויפל על צווארי בנימן אחיו ויבך ויבנימן בכה על צוואריו:

And he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept, and Binyamin wept upon his neck.

(4) בראשית מ"ו, כ"ט

ויאסר יוסף מרכבתו ויעל לקראת ישראל אביו גשנה וירא אליו ויפל על צוואריו ויבך על צוואריו עוד:

And Yosef harnessed his chariot and went up to meet Yisrael his father in Goshen; and he appeared to him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a long while.

(5) משלי כ"ה, י"ד

אשרי אדם מפחד תמיד ומקשה לבו יפול ברעה:

Fortunate is the man who is always afraid, but one who hardens his heart will fall into evil.

(1) תלמוד בבלי, גיטין נ"ח ע"א

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: מעשה בכנו ובתו של רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע שנשבו לשני אדונים. למים ננדו ונשאו שניהם במקום אחד. זה אומר: יש לי עבד שאין כפיו בכל העולם, זה אומר: יש לי שפחה שאין כפיה בכל העולם. אמרו: בוא ונשיאם זה לזה ונחלק בולדות.

Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: There was an incident involving the son and daughter of Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, the High Priest, who after his death were taken captive and sold to two different masters. After some time the two masters met in a certain place. This master said: I have a slave whose beauty is unmatched in all the world, and that master said: I have a maidservant whose beauty is unmatched in all the world. They said: Come, let us marry these two to one another and divide the children born to them between us.

הכניסום לחדר. זה ישב בקרן זוית זה, וזו ישבה בקרן זוית זה. זה אומר: אני כהן בן כהנים גדולים אשא שפחה? וזאת אומרת: אני כהנת בת כהנים גדולים אנשא לעבד? וככו כל הלילה.

They put them in the same room. This one sat in one corner, and that one sat in the other corner. He said: I am a priest, the son of High Priests. Shall I marry a maidservant? And she said: I am the daughter of High Priests. Shall I be married to a slave? And they wept all night.

כיון שעלה עמוד השחר, הכירו זה את זה, ונפלו זה על זה וגעו בבכיה, עד שיצאה נשמתו. ועליהן קונן רמיה: "על אלה אני בוכיה עיני עיני ירדה מים".

When dawn rose they recognized each other and saw that they were brother and sister. They

said to him: No. He grabbed him by his hand, stood him up, and took him out.

אמר: הואיל וקוץ יתבי רבנן ולא מחו ביה, שמע מינה קא ניחא להו. איזיל איכול בהו קורבא בי מלכא. אזל אמר ליה לקיסר: מרדו בך יהודאי. אמר ליה: מי יימר? אמר ליה: שדר להו קורבנא, תזית אי מקרבין ליה. אזל שדר בידיה עגלא תלתא. בהדי דקאיתי שדא ביה מומא בגיב שפתיים, ואמרי לה בדוקין שבעין, דוכתא דלדין הוי מומא ולדידהו לאו מומא הוא.

Bar Kamtza said to himself: Since the Rabbis were sitting there and did not protest the host's conduct, learn from it that they were content with what he did. I will therefore go and inform against them to the king. He went and said to the emperor: The Jews have rebelled against you. He said to him: Who says this is so? He said to him: Send them an offering and see whether they will sacrifice it. He went and sent with him a choice three-year-old calf. While he was coming with it, he made a blemish on the calf's upper lip, and some say he made the blemish on its eyelids, a place where according to us it is a blemish, but according to them, gentile rules, it is not a blemish.

סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות. אמר להו רבי זכריה בן אבקולס: יאמרו בעלי מומין קרבין לגבי מזבח. סבור למיקטליה, דלא ליזיל ולימא. אמר להו רבי זכריה: יאמרו מטיל מום בקדשים יהרג. אמר רבי יוחנן: ענותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבקולס הקריבה את ביתנו, ושרפה את היכלנו, והגליטנו מארצנו.

Because of the blemish, the Rabbis thought to sacrifice the animal as an offering due to the imperative to maintain peace with the government. Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas said to them: People will say that blemished animals may be sacrificed on the altar. They thought to kill bar Kamtza so that he would not go and speak against them. Rabbi Zekharya said to them: People will say that one who makes a blemish on sacrificial animals is to be

אמר רבי יוחנן: מאי דכתיב "אשרי אדם מפחד תמיד ומקשה לבו יפול ברעה"? אקמץא ובר קמץא חרוב ירושלים, אתרנגולא ותרנגולתא חרוב טור מלכא, אשקא דריספק חרוב ביתר.

Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Fortunate is the man who is always afraid, but one who hardens his heart will fall into evil"? The destruction of Jerusalem came on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza; the destruction of the King's Mountain region came on account of a rooster and a hen; and the destruction of Beitar came on account of the shaft of a carriage.

אקמץא ובר קמץא חרוב ירושלים. דההוא גברא דרומיה קמץא ובעל דבביה בר קמץא, עבד סעודתא. אמר ליה לשמעיה: זיל אייתי לי קמץא. אזל אייתי ליה בר קמץא. אתא אשכחיה דהנה יתיב. אמר ליה: מכדי הוה גברא בעל דבבא דההוא גברא הוא, מאי בעית הקא? קום פוק! אמר ליה: הואיל ואמאי שבקו, ויהיבנא לך דמי מה דאכילנא ושתנא. אמר ליה: לא. — יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתיה. — לא. — יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתיה. — לא. נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה.

The Gemara explains: The destruction of Jerusalem came on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza in this way. A certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named bar Kamtza. He once made a feast and said to his servant: Go bring me Kamtza. The servant went and brought him bar Kamtza. The host came and found bar Kamtza sitting at the feast. He said to him: That man is the enemy [ba'al devava] of that man, i.e., you are my enemy. What then do you want here? Arise and leave. He said to him: Since I have already come, let me be, and I will give you the money for whatever I eat and drink. He said to him: No. Bar Kamtza said: I will give you the money for half of the feast. He said to him: No. He said: I will give you the money for the entire feast. He

to him: Go bring me barley flour. By the time he went, it too was sold.

הָיָה שְׁלִיפָא מְסֻאָנָא, אָמְרָה: אִיפּוֹק וְאַחֲזִי אִי מִשְׁכַּחנָא מִיַּדִּי לְמִיכַל. אִיתִיב לָהּ פְּרָתָא בְּכַרְעָה וּמָתָה.

She had already removed her shoes, but she said: I will go out myself and see if I can find something to eat. She stepped on some dung, it stuck to her foot, and on account of her delicacy she died.

קָרִי עָלֶה רַבִּין יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּאי: "הֶרְפָּה בָּךְ וְהִעֲנוּגָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִסְתָּה כַּף רַגְלָהּ הֹצֵג עַל הָאָרֶץ".

Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai read concerning her the verse: "The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground" (Devarim 28:56).

(8) דְּבָרִים כ"ח, נ"ו

הֶרְפָּה בָּךְ וְהִעֲנוּגָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִסְתָּה כַּף רַגְלָהּ הֹצֵג עַל הָאָרֶץ מִהִתְעַנֵּג וּמִרֹד תִּרְעַע עֵינֶיהָ בְּאִישׁ חִיקָהּ וּבִבְנֶיהָ וּבִבְתָּהּ:

The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground out of delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter.

killed. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: The excessive humility of Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land.

(7) תְּלֻמוֹד בְּבִלִי, גִּיטִין נ"ו ע"א

מָרְתָּא בֵּת בֵּיתוֹס עֲתִירְתָּא דִּירוּשָׁלַם הָוָא.

It is related that **Marta bat Baitos** was one of the **wealthy women of Jerusalem**.

שְׂדֵרְתִּיהָ לְשִׁלּוּחָהּ, אָמְרָה לִיהָ: זֵיל אִיתִי לִי סוּלְתָא. אַדְאָזֵל אֵינְדִּבֵּן. אָתָּא אָמַר לָהּ: סוּלְתָא לִיכָא, חִינְרְתָּא אִיכָא. אָמְרָה לִיהָ: זֵיל אִיתִי לִי. אַדְאָזֵל אֵינְדִּבֵּן. אָתָּא וְאָמַר לָהּ: חִינְרְתָּא לִיכָא, גּוּשְׁקֶרָא אִיכָא. אָמְרָה לִיהָ: זֵיל אִיתִי לִי. אַדְאָזֵל אֵינְדִּבֵּן. אָתָּא וְאָמַר לָהּ: גּוּשְׁקֶרָא לִיכָא, קִמְחָא דְשַׁעְרֵי אִיכָא. אָמְרָה לִיהָ: זֵיל אִיתִי לִי. אַדְאָזֵל אֵינְדִּבֵּן.

She sent her servant out, saying to him: Go bring me fine flour [semida]. By the time he went, the fine flour was sold. He came back and said to her: There is no fine flour, but there is ordinary flour. She said to him: So go bring me ordinary flour. By the time he went, the ordinary flour was also sold. He came and said to her: There is no ordinary flour, but there is coarse flour [gushkera]. She said to him: Go bring me coarse flour. By the time he went, it too was sold. He came and said to her: There is no coarse flour, but there is barley flour. She said

Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (1903)
Chapter 8 — "The Carter and the Carpenter
[emphasis mine]

It is not to die, nor even to die of hunger, that makes a man wretched. Many men have died; all men must die. But it is to live miserable, we know not why; to work sore, and yet gain nothing; to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated, unrelated, girt in with a cold, universal Laissez-faire. —Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (1843)

The Carter, with his clean-cut face, chin beard, and shaved upper lip, I should have taken in the United States for anything from a master workman to a well-to-do farmer. The Carpenter—well, I should have taken him for a carpenter. He looked it, lean and wiry, with shrewd, observant eyes, and hands that had grown twisted to the handles of tools through forty-seven years work at the trade. **The chief difficulty with these men was that they were old, and that their children, instead of growing up to take care of them, had died.** Their years had told on them, and they had been forced out of the whirl of industry by the younger and stronger competitors who had taken their places.

These two men, turned away from the casual ward of Whitechapel Workhouse, were bound with me for Poplar Workhouse. Not much of a show, they thought, but to chance it was all that remained to us. It was Poplar, or the streets and night. **Both men were anxious for a bed, for they were about gone, as they phrased it.** The Carter, fifty-eight years of age, had spent, the last three nights without shelter or sleep, while the Carpenter, sixty-five years of age, had been out five nights.

But, O dear, soft people, full of meat and blood, with white beds and airy rooms waiting you each night, how can I make you know what it is to suffer as you would suffer if you spent a weary night on London's streets? Believe me, you would think a thousand centuries had come and gone before the east paled into dawn; you would shiver till you were ready to cry aloud with the pain of each aching muscle; and **you would marvel that you could endure so much and live.** Should you rest upon a bench, and your tired eyes close, depend upon it the policeman would rouse you and gruffly order you to "move on." You may rest upon the bench, and benches are few and far between; but if rest means sleep, on you must go, dragging your tired body through the endless streets. Should you, in desperate slyness, seek some forlorn alley or dark passageway and lie down, the omnipresent policeman will rout you out just the same. It is his business to rout you out. **It is a law of the powers that be that you shall be routed out.**

But when the dawn came, the nightmare over, you would hale you home to refresh yourself, and until you died you would tell the story of your adventure to groups of admiring friends. It would grow into a mighty story. **Your little eight-hour night would become an Odyssey and you a Homer.**

Not so with these homeless ones who walked to Poplar Workhouse with me. And there are thirty-five thousand of them, men and women, in London Town this night. Please don't remember it as you go to bed; if you are as soft as you ought to be you may not rest so well as usual. But for old men of sixty, seventy, and eighty, ill-fed, with neither meat nor blood, to greet the dawn unrefreshed, and to stagger through the day in mad search for crusts, with relentless night rushing down upon them again, and to do this five nights and days—**O dear, soft people, full of meat and blood, how can you ever understand?**