

Tisha B'Av 2015

Tisha B'Av falls on Shabbat this year, therefore the fast is Nidcheh-pushed off to Motzei Shabbat and Sunday.

It's the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av – On that day we commemorate the destruction of the Temple and the various tragedies and persecutions that have happened to the Jewish people throughout the ages.

The Gemara in Gittin 53b asks why was the Temple destroyed.

Here is a well known story.

It takes us back to the time of the Roman occupation just a few years before the destruction in 70 CE. A wealthy Jew made a great feast and invited the leaders of the Roman community together with the greatest Rabbis of the generation.

A certain wealthy man had a close friend called Kamtza, but his Jewish arch enemy was a person who had almost the same name Bar Kamtza. Instead of sending the invitation to his friend Kamtza; he made a mistake and it went to the wrong man Bar Kamtza who turned up at the event. He went and sat down round a table together with some of the esteemed Rabbis.

The wealthy man on seeing his arch enemy Bar Kamtza present at this feast immediately goes over to him and says:

“What are you doing here; you know you're not welcome here”.

Bar Kamtza takes him aside and says to him:

“Listen I'll tell you what, I'll pay for what I've eaten, just don't put me to shame. Please don't humiliate me. Let's not make a scene”

“I'm sorry I didn't invite you. Leave now”.

“But I'll pay for my table and the people on it just don't embarrass me.”

“I think I've said to you before, leave now.”

“O.K, so I'll pay for the whole feast- just don't put me to shame.” The host immediately had Bar Kamtza physically escorted off the premises.

Bar Kamtza said: “Since the great Rabbis of the generation were sitting there and they did nothing about it- and I was publicly humiliated- it must be that they agreed- to my humiliation”.

He went to the Emperor of Rome and said the following: “the Jews are rebelling against you”!

“How do you know?” Asked the Emperor.

“Send them a tribute of a sacrifice to be offered in the Temple and see if they accept your sacrifice”.

Bar Kamtza took the sacrifice and on the way to Yerushalayim put a blemish on the animal. When he arrived at the temple, the Kohanim and the Rabbis refused to accept the animal as a sacrifice because of the blemish. The Emperor heard that the Jews had not accepted his sacrifice and concluded that the Jews were rebellious. He therefore made the decision to destroy Yerushalayim.

It's a very well known story.

This story is an illustration of the cause of the destruction of Yerushalayim. Look at the story. Bar Kamtza was ready to do anything to avoid the humiliation, but the wealthy man had none of it. He would do anything to cause humiliation and to shame his enemy. And the Rabbis and the machers did nothing about it. They knew it was wrong but the silence was deafening!

Our Sages explain that the second temple was destroyed because of one sin and that was: baseless hatred between one Jew and another. Yet, you're going to retort that this was one little case; you're going to tell me that the one little action of public humiliation could cause such a destruction? Our Temple was destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed. Hundreds of thousands of people displaced, our people thrown out of Yerushalayim. The Jewish people losing its national identity. They went into gallut – exile which would last for 1900 years. Years that were full of persecution and torment, all because people refused to show respect to one another???!?

That is exactly the point. We do not know the repercussions of one little detrimental act that we do to one another. It looks small but in the scheme of things- do you know what difference it makes up above?

We live in this world for 70, 80, 90 yrs. Please G-d 120. But what are the things that we can take with us when we pass on to the next world. Well it's definitely not the physical and material. That we leave behind. We work. But at the end of it all we cannot take it with us. The only things we have are our good deeds.

The story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza is there to demonstrate the power of a negative deed. What it can do and the destruction it can cause.

Think of the danger of Lashon Hara – speaking disparagingly against ones fellow. Think of the damage that you could cause; it's irreparable because it has no end. It goes from one to another ad infinitum.

But then again, conversely; Think of the power of doing one little act of kindness to your fellow, the power of a good word, to give chizuk to another. Because, just as the fact that it was one little harmful act that caused the destruction of our Holy Temple, so too, it is that small act of kindness that can rebuild our Temple speedily in our days. Amen