

LANGUAGE

Sicarii [Sikarikon] – סִיקָרִיקוֹן: Borrowed from the Latin sicarii, meaning assassins or murderers, which is derived from the Latin sica, meaning dagger, their weapon of choice.

The Sicarii included different types of people, among them soldiers discharged from the Roman army, other gentiles who acted as the occupying force, and various Jewish collaborators. Through threats and extortion they bought properties or received them as gifts. The properties were acquired by ostensibly legal means, such as deeds of sale and the like.

Most of the Sicarii were not interested in maintaining these properties but rather sought to make a profit from them. For this reason, after they seized the properties they would sell them to the locals, both Jews and gentiles. Since the Sicarii secured these properties for almost nothing and had no interest in maintaining them, they would sell them at rates far below their market value.

HALAKHA

לִקְחָ מִן הָאִישׁ – If one purchased from the husband: If a man sold his wife's property and afterward the wife wrote to the buyer: I do not have any claim to your property, then even if the buyer performed an act of acquisition with her, she can seize this property from him. The assumption is that she wrote this only to please her husband. Even if she wrote him that she would not be able to claim that she wrote this only to please her husband, such a document has no value. If he acquired it first from the woman, so that she has no lien on the land, and afterward the husband sold the right to use it to him, the purchase stands (Rambam *Sefer Kinyan, Hilkhoh Mekhira* 30:3 and *Sefer Nashim, Hilkhoh Ishut* 22:17–18; *Shulhan Arukh, Even HaEzer* 90:17).

רַבִּי הוֹשִׁיב – Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi convened a court: If a gentile was harassing a Jew and threatened to kill him, and he redeemed himself with his field or his house, if that gentile harasser wishes to sell the land, the prior owner who wishes to buy it back takes precedence over any other person. If the owner is unable to buy it, or if the land remained in the hands of the gentile for twelve months, whoever comes first to buy it is given precedence. This is the *halakha* as long as the purchaser gives the prior owner one-fourth of the land or one-third of its value. But if he does not do this, it is considered as if he stole that portion of the property, in accordance with the ruling of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's court (Rambam *Sefer Nezikin, Hilkhoh Gezeila VaAveda* 10:3; *Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat* 236:1).

מִתְנִי' לֹא הָיָה סִיקָרִיקוֹן בִּיהוּדָה
בְּהַרְוֵי מִלְחָמָה, מִהַרְוֵי הַמִּלְחָמָה
וְאֵלֶּךְ יֵשׁ בָּהּ סִיקָרִיקוֹן. בִּיצֵד? לִקְחָ
מִסִּיקָרִיקוֹן וְחֹזֵר וְלִקְחָ מִבְּעַל הַבַּיִת –
מִקְחוֹ בָטֵל, מִבְּעַל הַבַּיִת וְחֹזֵר וְלִקְחָ
מִסִּיקָרִיקוֹן – מִקְחוֹ קָיָם.

לִקְחָ מִן הָאִישׁ וְחֹזֵר וְלִקְחָ מִן הָאִשָּׁה –
מִקְחוֹ בָטֵל, מִן הָאִשָּׁה וְחֹזֵר וְלִקְחָ מִן
הָאִישׁ – מִקְחוֹ קָיָם. זֶה מִשְׁנֵה רֵאשׁוֹנָה.

בֵּית דִּין שֶׁל אַחֲרֵיהֶם אָמְרוּ: הַלּוֹקֵחַ
מִסִּיקָרִיקוֹן נוֹתֵן לְבָעֲלִים רְבִיעַ. אֵימָתִי?
בְּזֶמַן שֶׁאֵין בִּידָן לִיקְחָ, אֲבָל יֵשׁ בִּידָן
לִיקְחָ – הֵן קוֹדֵמִין לְכָל אָדָם.

רַבִּי הוֹשִׁיב בֵּית דִּין וְנִמְנָה, שֶׁאִם שִׁהְתָּה
בְּפָנֵי סִיקָרִיקוֹן שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ – כָּל
הַקְדָּוָה לִיקְחָ זָכָה, אֲבָל נוֹתֵן לְבָעֲלִים
רְבִיעַ.

גַּמ' הִשְׁתָּא בְּהַרְוֵי הַמִּלְחָמָה לֹא הָיָה
בָּהּ סִיקָרִיקוֹן, מִהַרְוֵי מִלְחָמָה וְאֵלֶּךְ יֵשׁ
בָּהּ סִיקָרִיקוֹן?

MISHNA The law of Sicarii [Sikarikon]¹ did not apply in Judea in the time that people were being killed in the war. From the time that people were being killed in the war and onward, the law of Sicarii did apply there. What is this law of Sicarii? If one first purchased land from a Sicarius,^N who extorted the field from its prior owners with threats, and afterward the buyer returned and purchased the same field a second time from the prior landowner, his purchase is void. The prior owner of the field can say that he did not actually mean to sell him the field. By contrast, if he first acquired the field from the prior owner and afterward he returned and purchased the same field from a Sicarius, his purchase stands.

Similarly, if one first purchased from the husband^H the rights to use a field belonging to his wife, and afterward he returned and purchased the same field from the wife, so that if the husband were to predecease or divorce her, the purchaser would then own it fully, his purchase is void.^N The woman can claim that she did not wish to quarrel with her husband and to object to the transaction but that in truth she did not agree to the sale. By contrast, if he first acquired the field from the wife, and afterward he returned and purchased the same field from the husband, his purchase stands. This is the initial version of this mishna.

Later, the court of those who came after the Sages who composed that mishna^N said: With regard to one who purchased a field from a Sicarius, he must give the prior owner one-fourth of the field's value. When does this apply? At a time when the prior owner is unable to purchase the field himself. But if he is able to purchase it himself, he precedes anyone else.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi later convened a court,^H and they counted their votes and determined that if the field remained before, i.e., in the possession of, the Sicarius for twelve months,^N whoever first purchases the field acquires possession of it, but he must give the prior owner one-fourth of the field's value.

GEMARA The Gemara challenges the mishna's assertion that the law of Sicarii did not apply in Judea in the time that people were being killed in the war: Now if in the time that people were being killed in the war, there were no Sicarii stealing land, is it possible that from the time that people were being killed in the war and onward there were Sicarii?

NOTES

One first purchased land from a Sicarius – לִקְחָ מִסִּיקָרִיקוֹן: The early commentaries write that the entire discussion is based on the opinion of Rav Huna, who says that even if one was forced to make such a sale, the sale is still valid. This was said only with regard to a sale in which the seller received an appropriate payment for his property although the sale was forced upon him. However, in the case of a Sicarius, there is no sale, as the owner received a minimal amount or nothing at all in exchange for his property (see Ritva).

If one purchased from the husband...his purchase is void – לִקְחָ מִן הָאִישׁ...מִקְחוֹ בָטֵל: In tractate *Bava Batra* (49b), this mishna is interpreted as referring to a field to which the woman has a unique attachment, e.g., the field designated by her husband for the payment of her marriage contract or a field from her own property that she owned prior to the marriage, which took on the status of property guaranteed for the payment of her marriage contract. The early commentaries disagree whether the sale is void immediately or it remains in the hands of the buyer until the time arrives when she must be paid the value of

her marriage contract. Some distinguish between different types of fields (see Rashba).

The court of those after them – בֵּית דִּין שֶׁל אַחֲרֵיהֶם: The primary reason for this is to encourage the settlement of Eretz Yisrael, as had they not instituted this ordinance, and had they consequently relied on the Torah law, then Jews would not buy from Sicarii, and the land would remain in the hands of gentiles. The Sages instituted this ordinance so that Jews would purchase the land, so that it would remain in Jewish hands. Some say that since these *halakhot* are related to Eretz Yisrael, they do not apply to similar cases outside of Eretz Yisrael. However, from the Gemara later (58a) and in the Responsa of the *Ge'onim*, it would seem that these *halakhot* were applied to all land owned by Jews.

Twelve months – שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ: If one waited this amount of time and did not repurchase the land from the Sicarius, this shows that he accepted the matter and fully transferred possession of the field. Alternatively, this is a punishment imposed by the Sages for one's lack of diligence in redeeming his field and his leaving it in the hands of a gentile (Ritva).

BACKGROUND

Three decrees – שְׁלֹשׁ גְזֵירוֹת – It would appear that these were not actual governmental decrees, but rather descriptions of various situations in Eretz Yisrael during and in the aftermath of the war against the Romans. Josephus provides a similar account. This war, which lasted for several years, created strong feelings of hostility. With its conclusion, there was no adherence to military or any other law but rather widespread slaughter of the Jews, many being subjected to cruel torture. It was only later that some semblance of order returned and the public killing of the Jews came to an end. Still, most of the land was confiscated from its owners and considered property of the Roman authorities, with its owners regarded as tenant farmers.

LANGUAGE

Kamtza – קַמְצָא: Some say that this is a reference to the family known as Κομψός, Komposos. Josephus writes that they were an important family in Tiberias and supporters of the Romans. The name Komposos means graceful and wise, yet it also carries the negative connotation of crafty and deceitful.

Chariot [rispak] – רִיסְפָק: The *Arukh* and some manuscripts read *dispak*, which is apparently derived from the Middle Iranian *dēspak*, meaning a chariot drawn by horses.

Enemy [*ba'al devava*] – בַּעַל דִּבְבָּא: The root *dalet*, *beit*, *beit* seems to be connected to *dovev*, speaking. However, in Aramaic, and as it is used when borrowed into Hebrew, it denotes hostile speech. In Syriac it also carries the meaning of enemy or foe.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה: לֹא דָנוּ בָּהּ דִּין סִיקְרִיקוֹן קַאָמַר; דְּאָמַר רַבִּי אָסִי, שְׁלֹשׁ גְּזֵירוֹת גְּזֵרוֹ: גְּזֵרְתָּא קַמִּיִּתָּא – כָּל דְּלֹא קָטִיל לִיקְטִלוּהוּ, מְצִיעֶתָּא – כָּל דְּקָטִיל לִיִּיתִי אַרְבַּע זוּזֵי, בְּתֵרִיתָּא – כָּל דְּקָטִיל לִיקְטִלוּהוּ. הֲלָכָה, קַמִּיִּתָּא וּמְצִיעֶתָּא, כִּיּוֹן דְּקָטִילִי – אֲגַב אוֹנְסִיָּה גָמַר וּמִקְנִי.

בְּתֵרִיתָּא, אָמַרִי: הָאִידְנָא לִישִׁיקוּל, לְמַחֵר תִּבְעֵנָא לִיָּהּ בְּדִינָא.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, מֵאֵי דְכֹתִיב: "אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם מִפְּחִיד תִּמְיֵד וּמִקְשָׁה לְבֹו יִפּוֹל בְּרָעָה?" אֶקְמָצָא וּבִר קַמְצָא חֲרוּב יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, אֶתְרַנְגּוּלָא וְתִרְנַגּוּלָא חֲרוּב טוּר מְלָכָא, אֲשִׁקָא דְרִיסְפָק חֲרוּב בֵּיתָר.

אֶקְמָצָא וּבִר קַמְצָא חֲרוּב יְרוּשָׁלַיִם; דִּהְוָא גְּבָרָא, דְּרַחֲמִיָּה קַמְצָא וּבַעַל דְּבִבְיָה בִּר קַמְצָא, עֲבַד סְעוּדָתָא, אָמַר לִיָּהּ לְשִׁמְעִיָּה: זֵיל אִיִּיתִי לִי קַמְצָא, אֲזִיל אִיִּיתִי לִיָּהּ בִּר קַמְצָא.

אֲתָא אֲשִׁכַּחְיָה דִּהְוָא יְתִיב, אָמַר לִיָּהּ: מַכְדִּי הֵוָּא גְּבָרָא בַּעַל דְּבִבְיָא דִּהְוָא גְּבָרָא הוּא מֵאֵי בָעִית הָכָא? קוּם פּוּק! אָמַר לִיָּהּ: הוּאִיל וְאֲתָאִי שְׂבָקָן, וְיִהְיֶנָּא לָךְ דְּמִי מַה דְּאֲכִילְנָא וְשִׁתִּינָא.

Rav Yehuda said: The mishna is saying that in the time that people were being killed in the war they did not apply the law of Sicarii, but rather they would confirm the purchases of land made from the Sicarii. The reason for this is in accordance with what Rabbi Asi said: The gentile authorities issued three decrees^B during and in the aftermath of the war that ended in the destruction of the Temple. The first decree was that anyone who does not kill a Jew should himself be killed. The second decree was that anyone who kills a Jew should pay four dinars as a fine. The last decree was that anyone who kills a Jew should himself be killed. Therefore, during the time of the first and second decrees, the time when people were being killed in the war, since the gentile would kill Jews, then the owner of the field, owing to the danger posed to his life, would fully transfer ownership^N of his field to the Sicarius.

Then, during the time of the last decree, after the time when people were being killed in the war, anybody whose field was stolen by a Sicarius would say to himself: Now let him take the field; tomorrow I will claim it from him in court. Although the gentile had the advantage and could force the owner to give him the field, the assumption is that the owner did not fully transfer possession of the field to him, as he thought that he would still be able to recover it in court.

§ Apropos the war that led to the destruction of the Second Temple, the Gemara examines several aspects of the destruction of that Temple in greater detail: Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Happy is the man who fears always, but he who hardens his heart shall fall into mischief" (Proverbs 28:14)? Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza^L and bar Kamtza.^N The place known as the King's Mountain was destroyed on account of a rooster and a hen. The city of Beitar was destroyed on account of a shaft from a chariot [rispak].^L

The Gemara explains: Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza. This is as 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*]^L 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.

NOTES

Owing to the danger would fully transfer ownership – אֲגַב: It is not enough to transfer ownership through an act of acquisition. Rather, there must be full acceptance of the transfer from the seller to the buyer. When the owner's life is in danger, the assumption is that in order to save his life he wholeheartedly agrees to transfer the ownership of his property.

On account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza – אֶקְמָצָא וּבִר קַמְצָא: Many commentaries ask: Since it was bar Kamtza and the party's host who caused the calamity, why is Kamtza's name mentioned

here? The simple answer is that these places were destroyed over trivial matters, such as a slight difference between the names Kamtza and bar Kamtza. The Maharal suggests a more profound explanation: As is mentioned in many places, Jerusalem was destroyed because of baseless hatred. Not only does baseless hatred cause fights between people, such as the host of the meal and bar Kamtza, but it also leads to the formation of factions and of bonds that only intensify the contention. Presumably, Kamtza played a role in the development of the discord between bar Kamtza and the party's host.

אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה: יהיבנא לך דמי
פלגא דסעודתך! אמר ליה: לא. אמר ליה:
יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתך! אמר ליה:
לא. נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה.

אמר: הואיל והו יתבי רבנן ולא מחו ביה,
שמע מינה קא נחא להו, איזיל איכול בהו
קורצא בי מלכא. אזל אמר ליה לקיסר:
מרדו בך יהודאי! אמר ליה: מי ימר? אמר
ליה: שדר להו קורבנא, חזית אי מקרבין
ליה.

אזל שדר בידיה עגלא תלתא. בהדי דקאית
שדא ביה מומא בגיב שפתים, ואמר ליה
בדוקין שבועין, דוכתא דלדין הוה מומא
ולדידהו לאו מומא הוא.

סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות,
אמר להו רבי זכריה בן אבקהלס, יאמרו:
בעלי מומין קריבין לגבי מוצב! סבור
למיקטליה, דלא ליזיל ולימא, אמר להו רבי
זכריה, יאמרו: מטיל מום בקדשים יהרג!

אמר רבי יוחנן: ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן
אבקהלס החריבה את ביתו, ושרפה את
היכלו, והגליטנו מארצנו.

שדר עלויהו למרון קיסר. בי קאתי, שדא
גידא למזרח – אתא נפל בירושלים,
למערב – אתא נפל בירושלים, לארבע
רוחות השמים – אתא נפל בירושלים.

אמר ליה לנזקא: פסוק לי פסוקיך, אמר
ליה: "ונתתי את נקמתי באדום ביד עמי
ישראל" וגו' אמר: קודשא בריך הוא בעי
לחורבי ביתיה, ובעי לכפורי ידיה בההוא
גברא! ערק ואזל ואיגיר, ונפק מיניה רבי
מאיר.

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.

After having been cast out from the feast, bar Kamtza said to himself: Since the Sages were sitting there and did not protest the actions of the host, although they saw how he humiliated me, learn from it that they were content with what he did. I will therefore go and inform [eikhul kurtza]¹ against them to the king. He went and said to the emperor: The Jews have rebelled against you. The emperor said to him: Who says that this is the case? Bar Kamtza said to him: Go and test them; send them an offering to be brought in honor of the government, and see whether they will sacrifice it.

The emperor went and sent with him a choice three-year-old calf. While bar Kamtza was coming with the calf to the Temple, he made a blemish on the calf's upper lip.² And some say he made the blemish on its eyelids, a place where according to us, i.e., *halakha*, it is a blemish, but according to them, gentile rules for their offerings, it is not a blemish. Therefore, when bar Kamtza brought the animal to the Temple, the priests would not sacrifice it on the altar since it was blemished, but they also could not explain this satisfactorily to the gentile authorities, who did not consider it to be blemished.

The blemish notwithstanding, the Sages thought to sacrifice the animal as an offering due to the imperative to maintain peace with the government. Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolos³ said to them: If the priests do that, people will say that blemished animals may be sacrificed as offerings on the altar. The Sages said: If we do not sacrifice it, then we must prevent bar Kamtza from reporting this to the emperor. The Sages thought to kill him⁴ so that he would not go and speak against them. Rabbi Zekharya said to them: If you kill him, people will say that one who makes a blemish on sacrificial animals is to be killed. As a result, they did nothing, bar Kamtza's slander was accepted by the authorities, and consequently the war between the Jews and the Romans began.

Rabbi Yohanan says: The excessive humility of Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolos⁵ destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land.

The Roman authorities then sent Nero Caesar⁶ against the Jews. When he came to Jerusalem, he wished to test his fate. He shot an arrow to the east and the arrow came and fell in Jerusalem. He then shot another arrow to the west and it also fell in Jerusalem. He shot an arrow in all four directions of the heavens, and each time the arrow fell in Jerusalem.

Nero then conducted another test: He said to a child: Tell me a verse that you learned today. He said to him as follows: "And I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel" (Ezekiel 25:14). Nero said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, wishes to destroy His Temple, and He wishes to wipe his hands with that man, i.e., with me. The Romans are associated with Edom, the descendants of Esau. If I continue on this mission, I will eventually be punished for having served as God's agent to bring about the destruction. So he fled and became a convert, and ultimately Rabbi Meir descended from him.

LANGUAGE

Inform [eikhul kurtza] – איכול קורצא: This Aramaic expression is found in the Bible, where it says: "Va'akhlu kartzeihon" (Daniel 3:8), as well as in Aramaic translations of other verses, as the word for talebearing, informing, or denouncing.

Avkolos – אבקהלס: Apparently from the Greek εὐκολος, *eukolos*, meaning good-natured, easily satisfied, self-sufficient, or admired.

HALAKHA

On the calf's upper lip – בגיב שפתים: If the lip of an animal is damaged or cracked, it is considered to be blemished and may not be sacrificed as an offering. The same applies to an animal that has a white dot in the middle of its pupil, referred to as *dak* in the Torah (Rambam *Sefer Avoda*, *Hilkhot Biat HaMikdash* 7:5, 7).

The Sages thought to kill him – סבור למיקטליה: With regard to those who slander Jews to the government, it is a mitzva to eradicate them and to cause them to descend to the pit of destruction (Rambam *Sefer HaMadda*, *Hilkhot Avoda Zara*, 11:1).

PERSONALITIES

Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolos – רבי זכריה בן אבקהלס: Very little is known about this Sage, and only one *halakha*, in tractate *Shabbat*, is recorded in his name. Yet, based on what is written here and in collections of *midrashim*, he appears to have been one of most prominent Sages of his generation. Some identify him with Zekharya ben Amfadolos, who is mentioned by Josephus as one of the Sages close to the leaders of the rebellion.

Nero Caesar – נירון קיסר: The Roman emperor Nero was killed under strange circumstances and after his death, rumors circulated that he was not actually killed but had taken refuge elsewhere.

It should be noted that the name Caesar is fundamentally a family name, and many members of this family, both those born into it and those who were adopted, were called Nero either as a first or middle name, such as Tiberius, Claudius' father Drusus, and others. It therefore appears that this story refers to a member of the Caesar family who was appointed as an officer in the Roman army in the campaign against the Judean revolt. It is also known that there were several figures in the Caesar family who had a high regard for Judaism, and it is reasonable to assume that this officer eventually converted.

NOTES

His humility, etc. – ענוותנותו וכו': Rabbi Zekharya's actions here are an expression of his humility in that he did not wish to rely on his own opinion and rule one way or the other, as he was concerned about what people would say if he issued a ruling with regard to this matter. Rabbi Yohanan criticizes him for this, as there are times when a Sage must rule decisively, and not be concerned with the reaction of the masses (Maharatz Hayyut). *Midrash Eikha* explains that Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolos was one of the Sages at the feast that bar Kamtza was mistakenly invited to, and due to his humility he did not protest the host's conduct.

LANGUAGE

Keys [aklidei] – אַקלידֵי: From either the Greek κλεῖς, *kleis*, meaning key, bolt, or hook, or from κλειδῖον, *kleidion*, meaning small key.



Key from the mishnaic period

Storehouse [akhleva] – אַחלֵבָא: This word is a misspelling of *akhlekha*, which is derived from the Akkadian *kalakku*, meaning storehouse.

Storehouses [ambarei] – אַמְבָּרֵי: From the Middle Persian *ambār*, meaning storehouse.

Fine flour [semida] – סְמִידָא: Related to the Greek σμιδαλις, *semidalis*, meaning fine wheat flour.

Coarse flour [gushkera] – גּוּשְׁקֵרָא: Apparently from the Middle Iranian *huskar*, meaning coarse flour.

שְׂדֵרִיָּה עִלּוּיָהּ לְאַסְפִּינּוּס קִיסָר. אֲתָא, צֵר עָלָה תְּלַת שָׁנִי. הָוּ בַּהּ הִנְהוּ תְּלַתָּא עֲתִירִי: נְקִדִּימוֹן בֶּן גּוּרְיוֹן, וּבֶן כַּלְבָּא שָׁבוּעַ, וּבֶן צִיצִית הַכֶּסֶת; נְקִדִּימוֹן בֶּן גּוּרְיוֹן – שֶׁנִּקְדָּה לּוֹ חֲמָה בַּעֲבוּרֵי; בֶּן כַּלְבָּא שָׁבוּעַ – שֶׁכָּל הַנֶּכֶס לְבֵיתוֹ כְּשֶׁהָוָה רָעַב כְּכֹלֵב, יוֹצֵא כְּשֶׁהָוָה שָׁבַע; בֶּן צִיצִית הַכֶּסֶת – שֶׁהִיתָה צִיצִיתוֹ נִגְרָרָה עַל גְּבִי כֶּסֶתוֹ. אֵיכָא דְאַמְרִי: שֶׁהִיתָה כֶּסֶתוֹ מוֹשְׁלָת בֵּין גְּדוּלֵי רוֹמִי.

חַד אָמַר לָהּ: אֲנָא זֵינָא לָהּ בְּחִיטֵי וְשִׁעְרֵי, וְחַד אָמַר לָהּ: בְּדַחְמָא וּבְדַמְלָחָא וּמִשְׁחָא. וְחַד אָמַר לָהּ: בְּדִצְיָבִי, וְשִׁבְחוּ רַבָּנִי לְדִצְיָבִי, דְּרַב חֲסֵדָא כָּל אַקְלִידֵי הָוּ מָסַר לְשִׁמְעִיָּה בֶּר מְדִצְיָבִי, דְּאָמַר רַב חֲסֵדָא: אַכְלָבָא דְחִיטֵי בְּעֵי שִׁיתִּין אַכְלָבִי דִצְיָבִי. הָוּ לָהּ לְמִיּוֹן עֲשָׂרִים וְחַד שְׁתָּא.

הָוּ בַּהּ הִנְהוּ בְּרִיּוֹנִי, אָמְרוּ לָהּ רַבָּנִי: נִפּוֹק וְנַעֲבִיד שְׁלָמָא בְּהַדִּיחָהּ, לֹא שְׁבִקְנִיָּהּ. אָמְרוּ לָהּ: נִפּוֹק וְנַעֲבִיד קֶרֶבָא בְּהַדִּיחָהּ, אָמְרוּ לָהּ רַבָּנִי: לֹא מִסְתַּיְימָא מִיְלָתָא. קָמוּ קָלְנָהּ וְלָהֲנָהּ אַמְבָּרֵי דְחִיטֵי וְשִׁעְרֵי, וְהָוּ כְּפָנָא.

מָרְתָּא בַת בַּיְתוֹס עֲתִירָתָא דִּירוּשָׁלַיִם הָוָה, שְׂדֵרָתָה לְשִׁלּוּחָהּ וְאִמְרָהּ לֵיהּ: זֵיל אֵייתִי לִי סְמִידָא. אֲדַאָּזֵל אֵינְדְּבִן, אֲתָא אָמַר לָהּ: סְמִידָא לֵיכָא, חִיּוּרָתָא אֵיכָא, אִמְרָהּ לֵיהּ: זֵיל אֵייתִי לִי. אֲדַאָּזֵל אֵינְדְּבִן, אֲתָא וְאָמַר לָהּ: חִיּוּרָתָא לֵיכָא, גּוּשְׁקֵרָא אֵיכָא, אִמְרָהּ לֵיהּ: זֵיל אֵייתִי לִי. אֲדַאָּזֵל אֵינְדְּבִן, אֲתָא וְאָמַר לָהּ: גּוּשְׁקֵרָא לֵיכָא, קִימְחָא דְשִׁעְרֵי אֵיכָא, אִמְרָהּ לֵיהּ: זֵיל אֵייתִי לִי. אֲדַאָּזֵל אֵינְדְּבִן.

The Roman authorities then sent Vespasian Caesar^p against the Jews. He came and laid siege to Jerusalem for three years. There were at that time in Jerusalem these three wealthy people: Nakdimon ben Guryon,^p ben Kalba Savua,^p and ben Tzitzit HaKesat.^p The Gemara explains their names: Nakdimon ben Guryon was called by that name because the sun shined [*nakad*] on his behalf, as it is related elsewhere (see *Ta'anit* 19b) that the sun once continued to shine in order to prevent him from suffering a substantial loss. Ben Kalba Savua was called this because anyone who entered his house when he was hungry as a dog [*kelev*] would leave satiated [*save'a*]. Ben Tzitzit HaKesat was referred to by that name because his ritual fringes [*tzitzit*] dragged along on blankets [*keset*], meaning that he would not walk in the street with his feet on the ground, but rather they would place blankets beneath him. There are those who say that his seat [*kiseh*] was found among the nobles of Rome, meaning that he would sit among them.

These three wealthy people offered their assistance. One of them said to the leaders of the city: I will feed the residents with wheat and barley. And one of them said to leaders of the city: I will provide the residents with wine, salt, and oil. And one of them said to the leaders of the city: I will supply the residents with wood. The Gemara comments: And the Sages gave special praise to he who gave the wood, since this was an especially expensive gift. As Rav Hisha would give all of the keys [*aklidei*]^l to his servant, except for the key to his shed for storing wood, which he deemed the most important of them all. As Rav Hisha said: One storehouse [*akhleva*]^l of wheat requires sixty storehouses of wood for cooking and baking fuel. These three wealthy men had between them enough commodities to sustain the besieged for twenty-one years.

There were certain zealots among the people of Jerusalem. The Sages said to them: Let us go out and make peace with the Romans. But the zealots did not allow them to do this. The zealots said to the Sages: Let us go out and engage in battle against the Romans. But the Sages said to them: You will not be successful. It would be better for you to wait until the siege is broken. In order to force the residents of the city to engage in battle, the zealots arose and burned down these storehouses [*ambarei*]^l of wheat and barley, and there was a general famine.

With regard to this famine it is related that Marta bat Baitos^p was one of the wealthy women of Jerusalem. She sent out her agent and said to him: Go bring me fine flour [*semida*].^l By the time he went, the fine flour was already sold. He came and said to her: There is no fine flour, but there is ordinary flour. She said to him: Go then and 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*].^l She said to him: Go then and bring me coarse flour. By the time he went, the coarse flour was already sold. He came and said to her: There is no coarse flour, but there is barley flour. She said to him: Go then and bring me barley flour. But once again, by the time he went, the barley flour was also sold.

PERSONALITIES

Vespasian Caesar – אַסְפִּינּוּס קִיסָר: Vespasian served as the Roman emperor from 69–79 CE. He founded the Flavian dynasty and was responsible for the destruction of the Temple and the accompanying devastation of Judea. Vespasian's family was part of the Roman equestrian order, and he distinguished himself in battle and rose in the ranks of the Roman army, eventually being appointed to suppress the Great Revolt of the Jews in Judea. While his military operations were successful, he had yet to conquer Jerusalem when he left Judea after being declared emperor in the summer of 69 CE. He entrusted the siege and ultimate conquest of Jerusalem to his son, Titus, who later became emperor as well.

Nakdimon ben Guryon – נְקִדִּימוֹן בֶּן גּוּרְיוֹן: Nakdimon ben Guryon, whose Hebrew name appears to have been Boni, was

one of the wealthiest men living in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. Tractate *Ta'anit* tells of the great sums of charity that he donated to the community and the miracle of the sun that was performed for him as a result.

Ben Kalba Savua – בֶּן כַּלְבָּא שָׁבוּעַ: The family of ben Kalba Savua was one of the wealthiest and most powerful at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and in the period following, as is known from the story of Rabbi Akiva marrying one of the daughters of this family. It is said to trace its descent back to Caleb, the son of Jephunneh. The name Kalba seems to be based on this lineage rather than the explanation given in the Gemara here.

Ben Tzitzit HaKesat – בֶּן צִיצִית הַכֶּסֶת: Ben Tzitzit HaKesat was one of the wealthiest Jews at the time of the destruction of

the Second Temple. The midrash in *Bereshit Rabba* notes that a genealogical scroll was found in Jerusalem listing the house of Tzitzit HaKesat as descending from King Saul's general, Abner, the son of Ner.

Marta bat Baitos – מָרְתָּא בַת בַּיְתוֹס: Marta bat Baitos is mentioned in several places in the Talmud. Due to her great wealth, she has served throughout the ages as the archetype of a very wealthy woman. The house of Baitos was one of the most powerful and wealthy families of priests in Jerusalem, and many members of this household served as High Priest or in other important positions in the Temple. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, Marta married Yehoshua ben Gamla as a result of trickery on his part. After becoming betrothed to him, she sought to secure him the position as High Priest.

הוּה שְׁלִיפָא מְסָאנָא, אֲמַרְהָ: אִיפּוֹק
וְאַחֲזִי אִי מִשְׁבַּחְנָא מִיַּד לְמִיכַל, אִיתִיב
לָהּ פְּרִתָא בְּכֻרְעָא וּמָתָה.

קָרִי עָלֶיהָ רַבִּין יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּי: "הֲרֵפָה בְּךָ
וְהִעֲנִיגָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִסְתָּה כֶּף רַגְלָהּ."
אִיפָא דְאַמְרִי: גְּרוּגְרוֹת דְּרַבִּי צְדוֹק אֲכָלָהּ,
וְאִיתְנִסָּא וּמָתָה. דְּרַבִּי צְדוֹק יְתִיב אֲרֻבְעִין
שָׁנִין בְּתַעֲנִיתָא דְּלֹא לִיחָרֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם, כִּי
הוּה אֲכִיל מִיַּד הוּה מִיתְחִי מֵאֲבָרָא,
וְכִי הוּה בְּרִיא, מִיַּתִּי לִיה גְּרוּגְרוֹת, מִיִּץ
מִיָּהוּ וּשְׂדֵי לָהּ.

כִּי הוּה קָא נִחָא נִפְשָׁה, אִפִּיקְתָּהּ לְכָל
דְּהָבָא וּבִסְפָא שְׂדִיתֶיהָ בְּשׁוּקָא, אֲמַרְהָ:
הָאִי לְמָאִי מִיבְעִי לִי! וְהֵינִי דְכַתְּבִי:
"בְּסֻפָּם בְּחֻצוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל."

אֲבָא סִקָּרָא רִישׁ בְּרִינִי דִירוּשָׁלַם בֵּר
אֲחֵתֶיהָ דְּרַבִּין יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּי הוּה, שְׁלַח
לִיה: תָּא בְּצִינְעָא לְגַבִּי, אֲתָא, אֲמַר
לִיה: עַד אֵימַת עֲבָדִיתוּ הָכִי, וְקִטְלִיתוּ
לִיה לְעֵלְמָא בְּכַפְנָא? אֲמַר לִיה: מָאִי
אֵיעֲבִיד, דָּאִי אֲמִנָּא לָהּ מִיַּד קִטְלוּ לִי!
אֲמַר לִיה: חֲזִי לִי תַקְנָתָא לְדִידִי דְאִיפּוֹק,
אֲפֻשֶׁר דְּהוּי הַצֵּלָה פּוֹרְתָא.

אֲמַר לִיה: נָקוּט נִפְשְׁךָ בְּקִצְרִי, וְלִיתִי בּוֹלִי
עֲלֵמָא וְלִישְׁיִילוּ בְּךָ, וְאִיִּיתִי מִיַּד סְרִיא
וְאֲגִי גִבְךָ, וְלִימְרוּ דְנַח נִפְשְׁךָ, וְלִיעִיִּלוּ בְּךָ
תַּלְמִידֶיךָ וְלֹא לִיעוֹל בְּךָ אִינִישׁ אַחֲרִינָא,
דְּלֹא לְרַגְשָׁן בְּךָ דְּקָלִיל אֵת, דְּאִינְהוּ יַדְעִי
דְּחִיָּא קָלִיל מִמֵּיתָא.

עֲבִיד הָכִי נִכְנֵס בּוֹ רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר מִצַּד אַחַד
וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ מִצַּד אַחֵר, כִּי מָטוּ לְפִתְחָא
בְּעוּ לְמִדְקָרִיָּה, אֲמַר לָהּ: יֹאמְרוּ "רַבִּין
דְּקָרוּ!" בְּעוּ לְמִדְחַפְיָה, אֲמַר לָהּ: יֹאמְרוּ
"רַבִּין דְּחַפּוּ!" פִּתְחוּ לִיה בָּבָא, נָפֵק.

כִּי מָטָא לְהֵתֶם, אֲמַר: שְׁלָמָא עֲלֵךְ מְלָכָא,
שְׁלָמָא עֲלֵךְ מְלָכָא! אֲמַר לִיה: מִיחִיבָתָּ
תְּרִי קִטְלָא, חֲדָא, דְּלֹא מְלָכָא אֲנָא וְקָא
קְרִית לִי מְלָכָא! וְתוּ, אִי מְלָכָא אֲנָא, עַד
הֲאִידְנָא אֲמָאִי לֹא אֲתִית לְגַבִּי? אֲמַר
לִיה: דְּקִאֲמַרְתָּ לָּאֻ מְלָכָא אֲנָא,

She had just 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, which stuck to her foot, and, overcome by disgust,
she died.

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai read concerning her a verse
found in the section of the Torah listing the curses that will
befall Israel: "The tender and delicate woman among you
who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon
the ground" (Deuteronomy 28:56). There are those who say
that she did not step on dung, but rather she ate a fig of Rabbi
Tzadok, and became disgusted and died. What are these figs?
Rabbi Tzadok observed fasts for forty years, praying that Jeru-
salem would not be destroyed. He became so emaciated from
fasting that when he would eat something it was visible from
the outside of his body. And when he would eat after a fast they
would bring him figs and he would suck out their liquid and
cast the rest away. It was one such fig that Marta bat Baitos found
and that caused her death.

It is further related that as she was dying, she took out all of her
gold and silver and threw it in the marketplace. She said: Why
do I need this? And this is as it is written: "They shall cast their
silver in the streets and their gold shall be as an impure thing;
their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the
day of the wrath of the Lord; they shall not satisfy their souls,
neither fill their bowels" (Ezekiel 7:19).

The Gemara relates: Abba Sikkara^a was the leader of the
zealots [biryonim]^l of Jerusalem and the son of the sister of
Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai sent
a message to him: Come to me in secret. He came, and Rabban
Yohanan ben Zakkai said to him: Until when will you do this
and kill everyone through starvation? Abba Sikkara said to
him: What can I do, for if I say something to them they will
kill me. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to him: Show me a
method so that I will be able to leave the city, and it is possible
that through this there will be some small salvation.

Abba Sikkara said to him: This is what you should do: Pretend
to be sick, and have everyone come and ask about your welfare,
so that word will spread about your ailing condition. Afterward
bring something putrid and place it near you, so that people
will say that you have died and are decomposing. And then,
have your students enter to bring you to burial, and let no one
else come in so that the zealots not notice that you are still
light. As the zealots know that a living person is lighter than a
dead person.

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai did this. Rabbi Eliezer entered
from one side and Rabbi Yehoshua from the other side to take
him out. When they arrived at the entrance of the city on the
inside, the guards, who were of the faction of the zealots, wanted
to pierce him with their swords in order to ascertain that he was
actually dead, as was the common practice. Abba Sikkara said to
them: The Romans will say that they pierce even their teacher.
The guards then wanted at least to push him to see whether he
was still alive, in which case he would cry out on account of the
pushing. Abba Sikkara said to them: They will say that they
push even their teacher. The guards then opened the gate and
he was taken out.

When Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai reached there, i.e., the
Roman camp, he said: Greetings to you, the king; greetings to
you, the king. Vespasian said to him: You are liable for two
death penalties, one because I am not a king and yet you call
me king, and furthermore, if I am a king, why didn't you come
to me until now? Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to him: As
for what you said about yourself: I am not a king,

PERSONALITIES

Abba Sikkara – אֲבָא סִקָּרָא: Apparently Abba Sikkara was
not his actual name but rather a nickname, *sikkara* being
the Aramaic form of the word *sicarius* or murderer (55b). In
midrashim he is called ben Batiah, similar to ben Avatiah,
meaning son of a watermelon, as he is called in tractate
Kelim (17:12). These appear to be nicknames given to him
due to his great size. The present passage identifies him as
one of the leaders of the Great Revolt.

LANGUAGE

Zealots [biryonim] – בְּרִיּוֹנִים: The source of this word has
not been found. Some propose that it may be a shortened
and altered form of *praetoriani*, the term for Caesar's guard,
and was borrowed to mean menacing figures who show
no obedience to authority.

Perek V
Daf 56 Amud b

BACKGROUND

In truth you are a king – **איברא מלכא את**: A similar account is relayed in Roman history books. According to these writings, the Sages, among whom the Romans included Josephus, predicted that Vespasian would eventually become emperor of Rome.

A messenger arrived – **אתי פריסתקא**: During the year that Vespasian became emperor, known as the year of the four Caesars, a revolt erupted in the empire in the course of which the emperor Nero was killed and a dispute commenced over the issue of who was to succeed him. The legions stationed in the Balkans, Syria, and Judea chose Vespasian as emperor and the Egyptian governor gave him his immediate support. After a period of time Vespasian was informed from Rome that his followers in the Roman army had killed the reigning emperor Vitellius, and he was then recognized by all as the ruler of the empire.

Yavne – **יבנה**: Yavne is an ancient city mentioned in the Bible. Apparently, it is Yavne'el, located in the tribal territory of Judah. It was a Philistine city for many years, and it is listed as one of the places whose walls were breached by King Uziah of Judea.

Yavne is located slightly more than a kilometer from the Mediterranean coast, due west of Jerusalem. It was conquered by Vespasian during the campaign to quash the Great Revolt, which culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple. It seems that several Sages who did not support the revolt settled there. When Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai joined them, Yavne became the spiritual center of Eretz Yisrael and the seat of the Sanhedrin for many years, apparently until the bar Kokheva rebellion. The main yeshiva there was called the vineyard in Yavne, as the students would sit in rows, evoking the rows of grapevines in a vineyard.

The dynasty of Rabban Gamliel – **שושילתא דרבן גמליאל**: Although the *Nesi'im* from the house of Hillel were moderate in their political views, they still joined the Great Revolt. Since Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel was considered the leader of the people and as such was responsible for what happened in Eretz Yisrael, he was sentenced to death. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai made a unique request, that despite Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel's execution, his family should not be held responsible and killed or exiled.

Doctors to heal Rabbi Tzadok – **אסותא דמסין ליה לרבי**: As with all cases of malnutrition, Rabbi Tzadok's many years of fasting exacted a heavy toll on his physiology, manifested not only in extreme weight loss from the depletion of fat cells, but also in the shrinkage of his stomach and an inability to adequately digest food. A person in this condition who tries to eat normally will become sick and possibly die. For this reason doctors had to monitor his gradual transition to a normal diet.

NOTES

Lebanon – **לְבָנוֹן**: It was understood that Moses wished to see the Temple Mount, referred to as "that good mountain," and the Temple itself. The Temple is referred to as "Lebanon" because it achieves atonement for and thereby whitens [malbin] Israel's sins, which are depicted in the Bible as being scarlet red. In addition, the Temple was built from the cedars of Lebanon, as is mentioned in the book of Kings.

LANGUAGE

Snake [*derakon*] – **דְּרָקוֹן**: From the Greek δράκων, *drakon*, meaning snake. The word also means dragon.

Messenger [*peristaka*] – **פְּרִיסְתָּקָא**: From the Middle Iranian frēstak, meaning envoy or messenger.

איברא מלכא את, דאי לאו מלכא את
לא מימסרא ירושלים בידך, דכתב:
"והלבנון באדיר ופול", ואין "אדיר"
אלא מלך, דכתב: "והיה אדירו ממנו"
וגו', ואין "לבנון" אלא בית המקדש,
שנאמר: "ההר הטוב הזה והלבנון";
ודקאמרת אי מלכא אנא אמאי לא
קאתית לגבאי עד האידנא – בריוני
דאית בן לא שבקינן.

אמר ליה: אילו חבית של דבש ודרקון
כרוך עליה, לא היו שוברין את החבית
בשביל דרקון? אישתיק. קרי עליה רב
יוסף, ואיתימא רבי עקיבא: "משיב
חכמים אחור ודעתם יסכל", איבעי ליה
למימר ליה: שקלינן צבתא ושקלינן ליה
לדרקון וקטלינן ליה, וחביתא שבקינן
לה.

אדחכי אתי פריסתקא עליה מרומי,
אמר ליה: קום, דמית ליה קיסר, ואמרי
הנה חשיבי דרומי לאותביך ברישא.
הוה סיים חד מסאני, בעא למסימא
לאחריןא לא עייל, בעא למשלפא
לאידך לא נפק, אמר: מאי האי?

אמר ליה: לא תצטער, שמועה טובה
אתיא לך, דכתב: "שמועה טובה תדשן
עצם". אלא מאי תקנתי? ליתא איניש
דלא מיתבא דעתך מיניה ולחליי קמך.
דכתב: "ורוח נבאה תיבש גרם", עבד
הכי, עייל. אמר ליה: ומאחר דחבמיתו
בולי האי, עד האידנא אמאי לא אתיתו
לגבאי? אמר ליה: ולא אמרי לך? אמר
ליה: אנא נמי אמרי לך!

אמר ליה: מיל אצילנא ואניש אחרינא
משדנדא, אלא בעי מינאי מדי דאתן
לך. אמר ליה: תן לי יבנה וחכמיה,
ושושילתא דרבן גמליאל, ואסותא
דמסין ליה לרבי צדוק. קרי עליה רב
יוסף, ואיתימא רבי עקיבא: "משיב
חכמים אחור ודעתם יסכל", איבעי
למימר ליה לשבקיננו הדא זימנא.

in truth, you are a king,⁸ if not now, then in the future. As if you are not a king, Jerusalem will not be handed over into your hand, as it is written: "And the Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one" (Isaiah 10:34). And "mighty one" means only a king, as it is written: "And their mighty one shall be of themselves, and their ruler shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jeremiah 30:21), indicating that "mighty one" parallels "ruler." And "Lebanon" means only the Temple, as it is stated: "That good mountain and the Lebanon" (Deuteronomy 3:25).⁹ And as for what you said with your second comment: If I am a king why didn't you come to me until now, there are zealots among us who did not allow us to do this.

Understanding that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was prepared to ask him not to destroy the Temple, Vespasian said to him: If there is a barrel of honey and a snake [*derakon*]¹ is wrapped around it, wouldn't they break the barrel in order to kill the snake? In similar fashion, I am forced to destroy the city of Jerusalem in order to kill the zealots barricaded within it. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was silent and did not answer. In light of this, Rav Yosef later read the following verse about him, and some say that it was Rabbi Akiva who applied the verse to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai: "I am the Lord ... Who turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish" (Isaiah 44:25). As Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai should have said the following to Vespasian in response: In such a case, we take tongs, remove the snake, and kill it, and in this way we leave the barrel intact. So too, you should kill the rebels and leave the city as it is.

In the meantime, as they were talking, a messenger [*feristaka*]¹ arrived⁸ from Rome, and said to him: Rise, for the emperor has died, and the noblemen of Rome plan to appoint you as their leader and make you the next emperor. At that time Vespasian was wearing only one shoe, and when he tried to put on the other one, it would not go on his foot. He then tried to remove the other shoe that he was already wearing, but it would not come off. He said: What is this?

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to him: Be not distressed or troubled, for good tidings have reached you, as it is written: "Good tidings make the bone fat" (Proverbs 15:30), and your feet have grown fatter out of joy and satisfaction. Vespasian said to him: But what is the remedy? What must I do in order to put on my shoe? Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to him: Have someone with whom you are displeased come and pass before you, as it is written: "A broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). He did this, and his shoe went on his foot. Vespasian said to him: Since you are so wise, why didn't you come to see me until now? Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to him: But didn't I already tell you? Vespasian said to him: I also told you what I had to say.

Vespasian then said to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai: I will be going to Rome to accept my new position, and I will send someone else in my place to continue besieging the city and waging war against it. But before I leave, ask something of me that I can give you. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to him: Give me Yavne⁸ and its Sages and do not destroy it, and spare the dynasty of Rabban Gamliel⁸ and do not kill them as if they were rebels, and lastly give me doctors to heal Rabbi Tzadok.⁸ Rav Yosef read the following verse about him, and some say that it was Rabbi Akiva who applied the verse to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai: "I am the Lord ... Who turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish" (Isaiah 44:25), as he should have said to him to leave the Jews alone this time.

LANGUAGE

Flour mixed with bran [*sipuka*] – סיפוקא: The *Arukh* and others have a version that reads *siposka*, which apparently is derived from the Middle Iranian *sapōsak*, meaning bran.

NOTES

Who is like You – מי כמכה – This exposition is based upon the spelling of the word “gods [*elim*]” without a *yod*, so that it can be read as *ilem*, mute. Therefore, the Sages expound the verse to mean: Who is like You, Who remains silent among the mute (Maharsha).

והוא סבר, דלמא כולי האי לא עביד,
והצלח פורתא נמי לא הוי.

And why didn't Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai make this request? He maintained that Vespasian might not do that much for him, and there would not be even a small amount of salvation. Therefore, he made only a modest request, in the hope that he would receive at least that much.

אסוותא דמסין ליה לרבי צדוק מאי
היא? יומא קמא אשקויה מיא דפארי,
למחר מיא דסיפוקא, למחר מיא
דקימחא, עד דרווח מיעיה פורתא
פורתא.

The Gemara asks: What was he requesting when he asked for doctors to heal Rabbi Tzadok? How did they heal him? The first day they gave him water to drink that contained bran [*parei*]. The next day they gave him water containing flour mixed with bran [*sipuka*].¹ The following day they gave him water containing flour. In this way they slowly restored his ability to eat, allowing his stomach to broaden little by little.

אזל שדריה לטיטוס. ואמר אי אלהימו
צור חסיו בו – זה טיטוס הרשע שחירף
וגידף כלפי מעלה.

Vespasian went back to Rome and sent Titus in his place. The Gemara cites a verse that was expounded as referring to Titus: “And he shall say: Where is their God, their rock in whom they trusted?” (Deuteronomy 32:37). This is the wicked Titus,² who insulted and blasphemed God on High.

מה עשה? תפש זונה בידו ונכנס לבית
קדשי הקדשים, והציג ספר תורה
ועבר עליה עבירה, ונטל סייף וגידר את
הפרוכת, ונעשה נס והיה דם מבצבץ
ויוצא, וכסבור הרג את עצמו, שנאמר
”שאגו צורריך בקרב מועדיך שמו
אותותם אותות”.

What did Titus do when he conquered the Temple? He took a prostitute with his hand, and entered the Holy of Holies with her. He then spread out a Torah scroll underneath him and committed a sin, i.e., engaged in sexual intercourse, on it. Afterward he took a sword and cut into the curtain separating between the Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies. And a miracle was performed and blood spurted forth. Seeing the blood, he mistakenly thought that he had killed himself. Here, the term himself is a euphemism for God. Titus saw blood issuing forth from the curtain in God's meeting place, the Temple, and he took it as a sign that he had succeeded in killing God Himself. As it is stated: “Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; they have set up their own signs for signs” (Psalms 74:4).

אבא חנן אומר: “מי כמוך חסין זה” – מי
כמוך חסין וקשה, שאתה שומע נאוצו
וגידופו של אותו רשע ושונאך. דבי רבי
ישמעאל תנא: “מי כמכה באלים ה” –
מי כמוכה באלמים.

Abba Hanan says: The verse states: “Who is strong like You, O Lord?” (Psalms 89:9). Who is strong and indurate like You, as You hear the abuse and the blasphemy of that wicked man and remain silent. Similarly, the school of Rabbi Yishmael taught that the verse: “Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods [*elim*]” (Exodus 15:11), should be read as: Who is like You among the mute [*ilmim*], for You conduct Yourself like a mute and remain silent in the face of Your blasphemers.

מה עשה? נטל את הפרוכת ועשא
במין גרוגות, והביא כל כלים שבמקדש
והניחן בהן, והושיבן בספינה לילך
להשתבח בעירו, שנאמר: “ובכן ראיתי
רשעים קבורים ובאו וממקום קדוש
יהלכו וישתבחו בעיר אשר בן עשו,
אל תיקרי קבורים” אלא קבוצים, אל
תיקרי “וישתבחו” אלא “וישתבחו”.

What else did Titus do? He took the curtain and formed it like a large basket, and brought all of the sacred vessels of the Temple and placed them in it. And he put them on a ship to go and be praised in his city that he had conquered Jerusalem, as it is stated: “And so I saw the wicked buried, and come to their rest; but those that had done right were gone from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city; this also is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 8:10). Do not read the word as “buried [*kevurim*].” Rather, read it as collected [*kevutzim*]. And do not read the word as “and were forgotten [*veyishtakehu*].” Rather, read it as: And they were praised [*veyishtabehu*]. According to this interpretation, the verse speaks of those who will gather and collect items “from the holy place,” the Temple, and be praised in their city about what they had done.

איבא דאמרי: קבורים ממש, דאפילו
מילי דמטמון איגלייא להון.

There are those who say that the verse is to be read as written, as it is referring to items that were actually buried. This is because even items that had been buried were revealed to them, i.e., Titus and his soldiers, as they found all of the sacred vessels.

BACKGROUND

The wicked Titus – טיטוס הרשע: Titus was the eldest son of Vespasian, replacing him as Caesar after his death for a short reign of approximately two years. Although Roman sources praise him for his positive attributes, prior to his rise to power he displayed great cruelty and was steeped in promiscuity. The many negative

references to him in the Talmud are due to his having ordered the destruction of the Second Temple. The destruction of the Temple after Jerusalem had been captured was not necessary from a military standpoint, and it even contradicted the prevailing Roman policy of respecting the sacred sites of conquered countries.