



# Likkutei Sichos

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## Of Tears and Laughter

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<sup>1</sup> And *siyum* of tractate *Makkos*.

## 1.

### DOUBLED CONSOLATION

Regarding the double expression of the verse,<sup>2</sup> “**Comfort, comfort** My people, says your L-rd,” the Midrash says:<sup>3</sup> “They were doubly struck and will be doubly comforted” — the consolation will be doubled. We need to clarify: What is the meaning and implication of a double consolation?

On the other hand, the obvious question is well known: Since the punishment was “doubled,” what is the *chiddush*<sup>4</sup> in us being “doubly comforted”?

This question will be resolved by prefacing with an explanation of a narrative found at the end of tractate *Makkos*, where a doubled expression of consolation is also used:<sup>5</sup> “Akiva, you have consoled us; Akiva, you have consoled us.” There, the destruction and exile is also being discussed, and regarding this subject, the double expression, “you have consoled us,” is recorded.

There is a well known principle that establishes that matters in the Written Torah are expounded and explained in the Oral Torah — and the same is true in our case.

## 2.

### RABBI AKIVA AND THE SAGES

At the conclusion of tractate *Makkos*, the Talmud states:<sup>6</sup>

Once, Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking along the road, and they heard the noise of the multitudes of Rome, from Puteoli at a distance of one hundred and twenty *mil*. The other Sages began weeping and Rabbi Akiva began laughing. They said to him: Why are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva said to them: And you, why are you weeping? They said: These gentiles,

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<sup>2</sup> *Yeshayahu* 40:1; the *Haftorah* for this week’s *Sedrah* {*Parshas Vaeschanan*}.

<sup>3</sup> *Yalkut Yeshayahu* on *Yeshayahu* 40:1.

<sup>4</sup> {A novel explanation; the Sages do not teach us that which is obvious.}

<sup>5</sup> {*Makkos* 24b.}

<sup>6</sup> {*Makkos* 24a ff.}

who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly, and for us, Hashem's House, His footstool<sup>7</sup> {the Temple} has burnt and shall we not weep? Rabbi Akiva said to them: That is why I am laughing. If for those who violate His will it is so {that they are rewarded}, for those who perform His will, even more so {will they be rewarded}.

On another occasion, they were ascending to Yerushalayim. When they arrived at Mount Scopus {and saw the site of the Temple}, they tore their garments {in mourning}. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerge from the site of the Holy of Holies. They began weeping, and Rabbi Akiva began laughing. They said: Why are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva answered: Why are you weeping? They said: This is the place about which it says:<sup>8</sup> “And the stranger who approaches shall die,” and now foxes walk in it; and shall we not weep? Rabbi Akiva said: That is why I am laughing, as it says,<sup>9</sup> “I will take to Me faithful witnesses to attest: Uriah the kohen, and Zechariah the son of Yeverechiyahu.” Now, what is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah prophesied during the First Temple period, and Zechariah prophesied during the Second Temple period. Rather, Scripture established that fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah is contingent on fulfillment of the prophecy of Uriah. In {he prophecy of Uriah it says:<sup>10</sup> “Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field...” In the prophecy of Zechariah it says:<sup>11</sup> “There shall yet be elderly men and women sitting in the streets of Yerushalayim.” Until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, I was afraid that the prophecy of Zechariah would not be fulfilled. Now that the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, it proves that the prophecy of Zechariah will be fulfilled. With these words, the Sages said: Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us.

Now, this Talmudic passage is from the part of the Torah known as *Aggadah*,<sup>12</sup> and there is a general principle that we do not derive halachah<sup>13</sup> from an *aggadah*.<sup>14</sup> However, this principle only applies when the derivation contradicts halachah. However, if there is no contradiction, we can indeed derive a halachah from an *aggadah*, and we can rely on it {for practical conduct}.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> {*Eicha* 2:1; Rashi, ad loc.}

<sup>8</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:51; 3:10; 18:7.

<sup>9</sup> *Yeshayahu* 8:2.

<sup>10</sup> *Michah* 3:12.

<sup>11</sup> *Zechariah* 8:4.

<sup>12</sup> {*Aggadah* uses homiletics to expound Scripture.}

<sup>13</sup> {Jewish law.}

<sup>14</sup> *Yerushalmi, Peah* 2:4.

<sup>15</sup> Rabbeinu Tam's *Sefer Hayashar*, ch. 619; see also *Sdei Chemed*, entry “Alef,” “os” 95; *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, “*Aggadah*.”

Furthermore, even if you were to say that we do not learn practical rulings from *Aggadah*,<sup>16</sup> we certainly **can** derive the reasoning of a halachah from it.

In addition to the above, in our case, it is not merely **words** of *aggadah*, but a rabbinical precedent, an account of an actual incident — which is a strong proof — describing how great Sages (who were great halachic savants) conducted themselves. And the Talmud lists their names, including Rabbi Akiva, about whom it is said that “all of it (the entire Oral Torah) follows Rabbi Akiva.”<sup>17</sup> It is, therefore, self-understood that many tenets in this narrative can be applied to halachah.

This is particularly so in the second account, which not only relates that the Sages were weeping and laughing but also describes a specific halachic reaction — “When they arrived at Mount Scopus, they tore their garments {in mourning}” — “for it is a halachic requirement to do so.”<sup>18</sup>

Based on the above, we must clarify, as the Talmud asks in many places, “What are they arguing about?” What are the legal rationales behind the dispute between the Sages and Rabbi Akiva — which spans one extreme to the other, from “weeping” to “laughing”? While the Talmud ultimately concludes that “they said: Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us,” clearly, their initial approach, that “they began weeping,” is based on halachic reasoning. This is evident particularly from the fact that in the first account, it is not mentioned that they said “Akiva, you have comforted us,” and this is also inferred from the fact that Rabbi Akiva’s response in the **first** account did not prevent them from weeping in the subsequent account — “on **another** occasion....”

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<sup>16</sup> Responsa of *Noda B'yehuda*, second, final ed., *Yoreh Deah* ch. 161; and see *Sdei Chemed* and *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Sanhedrin* 86a.

<sup>18</sup> Commentary of Rabbeinu Gershom.

### 3.

#### EIGHT QUESTIONS

We also need to clarify numerous troubling details throughout the above accounts. Among them:

- a) What did Rabbi Akiva mean by asking, “Why are you crying”? It is self-understood that upon hearing the noise of the multitudes of Rome, who had razed the Temple, and especially since (in the second account) they encountered the Temple in a state of desolation — “{they saw} a fox emerge from the site of the Holy of Holies” — they must certainly have been aroused to mourn and cry!
- b) It is furthermore difficult to understand: As related in the second account, “When they arrived at Mount Scopus they tore their garments {in mourning},” which seems (from the non-specific narrative {referring to the Sages as “they”} and the narrative’s continuity) to include Rabbi Akiva — it seems that he also did so. Meaning, even Rabbi Akiva was mourning **at that time**; why did he then ask, “Why are you crying”?
- c) The verse, “And the stranger {a non-kohen} who approaches shall die,” is not talking about a stranger **entering** the Holy of Holies, but about a stranger who performs a service in the Temple.<sup>19</sup> The Sages wanted to emphasize the prohibition of (even) entering the Holy of Holies — therefore, they should have cited the verse “he shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary,”<sup>20</sup> where it explicitly states that even a Kohen Gadol may not enter the **Holy of Holies** during the year {other than on Yom Kippur}.<sup>21</sup>
- d) What was Rabbi Akiva’s initial thought when he said, “Until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, I was afraid that the prophecy of Zechariah would not be fulfilled”? How is it possible to doubt whether a prophecy would eventuate,

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<sup>19</sup> *Mishneh Torah “Hilchos Beis Hamikdash,”* beg. of ch. 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Vayikra* 16:2.

<sup>21</sup> As the *Aruch LaNer* and others ask here.

especially according to the statement of our Sages, that<sup>22</sup> “every statement that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One with {a promise of} **good**, even if conditional, He did not renege”?

- e) Why did Rabbi Akiva specifically quote the prophecy that “Zion shall be plowed as a field,” and not another (earlier) prophecy regarding the destruction (and redemption)?
- f) Why does the Talmud list the names of all the Sages? The main point was that Rabbi Akiva had a different opinion and outlook than the others, so it could have said, as it often says,<sup>23</sup> “There was already an incident in which Rabbi Akiva and **the Elders**, etc.,” or the like.
- g) Why did the Sages only respond (to Rabbi Akiva’s answer), “Akiva you have consoled us” in the second incident, and not in the first?
- h) “The Sages said to him, using this wording: Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us” — why is their response repeated (in its entirety), and why emphasize that “the Sages said to him, **using this wording**”?

*Maharsha* answers (the last two questions): “The phrase, ‘you have comforted us,’ is repeated because each refers to one of the two incidents that were mentioned.” However, this answer also needs explanation: These “two incidents” occurred at different times and locations.<sup>24</sup> The first took place when they were “walking along the road” coming to Rome, and the second — “on another occasion,” when they were “ascending to Yerushalayim.” So how can both incidents be addressed by the Sages at once, in the same answer?

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<sup>22</sup> *Berachos* 7a.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Kiddushin* 40b: “Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were already reclining...”

<sup>24</sup> As the Gemara writes, “on another occasion.”

## 4.

### ALL FOR THE BEST

We can explain simply that both accounts share the same scenario: the opinions of Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, and Rabbi Yehoshua on one side, and the opinion of Rabbi Akiva on the other. In both accounts, Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, and Rabbi Yehoshua saw the negative element in what transpired, while Rabbi Akiva also saw the (ultimate purpose and) good within it. And Rabbi Akiva is consistent with his previously expressed viewpoint, as stated elsewhere:<sup>25</sup> “A person must accustom himself to say: Everything that Hashem does, He does for the good,” and as the Talmud relates there, this was his **practical** conduct.

On this basis, we can explain why the Talmud relates both accounts one after the other, although they occurred at different times and places: It is not only because the same Sages were the subjects in both accounts, but because both accounts express the same point about Rabbi Akiva’s outlook — to perceive in the present, the benefit and good that will emerge from everything in the future.

## 5.

### THREE CLARIFICATIONS

However, according to the above, we need to clarify:

- a) The necessity for all three — what is the novel point of Rabbi Akiva’s opinion in each of the accounts, and in {his statement}, “Say: Everything that Hashem does, He does for the good”?
- b) “A person must always accustom himself to say: Everything that Hashem does, He does for the good” is a principle about which there is no debate. It is

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<sup>25</sup> *Brachos* 60b.

a ruling in *Shulchan Aruch*.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, it is not logical to say that the Sages Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, and Rabbi Yehoshua argue with it. Moreover, since even in the second account, when they said, “Akiva, you have comforted us,” there is no proof that they changed their {original} opinion.

- c) Based on the above, Rabbi Akiva should have emphasized the **core point** of his consistent opinion in his response, that “everything that Hashem does, He does for the good” (and only then {bring} [if necessary] the **specific** proof for it).

## 6.

### WHAT HAPPENED NOW?

This will be clarified by prefacing with a straightforward explanation of the passage in the Talmud.

The reason for Rabbi Akiva’s question — “Why are you weeping” — is as follows: The Sages only began crying once “they heard the noise of the multitudes of Rome...” and not earlier. It is, therefore, clear that their weeping was not because of their newly found knowledge of Rome’s power, for they already knew this before they went “along the road.” [Furthermore, their very **journey** to Rome<sup>27</sup> was in order to nullify decrees against the Jews that came about because of the heavy exile.]

The same is true of the second account: Their **weeping** was not due to the destruction {of the Temple} — especially since the Talmud explicitly says that earlier, they (only) “tore their garments” over the destruction. Rather, the cause of their weeping was “**when...** they saw a fox..., **they began** weeping.”

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<sup>26</sup> *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of ch. 230.

<sup>27</sup> In our version of the Gemara, it states that they were “walking along the road.” However, in *Sifrei* and in *Eichah Rabbah*, it states that they were “entering Rome” — and this is the plain meaning of the Gemara.



Therefore, Rabbi Akiva asked, “Why are you crying?” What uniquely occurred **at that moment** that triggered their tears — “**they began** to cry”?

## 7.

### A DESECRATION OF HASHEM

The meaning of the response of the Sages to Rabbi Akiva, “These gentiles... dwell securely and tranquilly, and for us, Hashem’s House, His footstool {the Temple} is burnt by fire”: The fact that the kingdom of Rome was in a position of “{dwelling} securely and tranquilly” was not important enough to cause them to weep. **On the contrary**, the fact that Rome was strong and secure was for the good of the Jewish people, for “Lebanon will fall to a mighty one.”<sup>28</sup> For since “it all depends on the stature of the humiliator, and the one who is humiliated,”<sup>29</sup> {with respect to the destruction of the Temple,} the humiliation was far less {than it would have been otherwise}, since the fall of “Lebanon” (the Temple) was specifically through a **mighty** kingdom.

(Accordingly, it becomes clearer why in the response of the Sages, they did not begin with and emphasize the fact that the kingdom of Rome destroyed the Temple and remained powerful (“{they dwell} in security and tranquility”) — for, on the contrary, this benefitted the Jewish people, lessening the humiliation, etc., as explained above).

The claim of the Sages was that since Rome<sup>30</sup> was dwelling in a state of “security and tranquility,” whereas, “for us, the House of the footstool of **our L-rd** {the Temple} **is burnt** by fire,” this state of affairs constituted a desecration of Hashem’s name (besides casting the image of the Jewish people in disrepute).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, since Rome ascended to power only in order to fulfill {the prophecy that} “Lebanon will fall to a mighty one,” why was Rome still

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<sup>28</sup> *Yeshayahu* 10:34.

<sup>29</sup> *Bava Kama* 8:1.

<sup>30</sup> Who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols — which is prohibited even for gentiles.

<sup>31</sup> See *Eitz Yosef* on *Ein Yaakov* of our Gemara.

powerful, dwelling “in security and tranquility,” even after the Temple had already been burnt?

Similarly, in the second account: Seeing “a fox emerge from the site of the Holy of Holies,” they perceived a desecration of Hashem’s name and the Jewish people — that a “place concerning which it says: “And the **stranger** who approaches shall die” — that no Jew could even approach there, to the extent that even the Kohen Gadol (the “Holy of Holies”<sup>32</sup> of the Jewish people) could not enter there (aside from one day a year, on Yom Kippur, {and furthermore,} “and (only) with this he may enter...”<sup>33</sup>), {yet} even he is considered a **stranger** throughout the year — “and now foxes walk in it”?!

Meaning, the essence of their complaint was: True, it was decreed that the Temple would be destroyed and that the Jewish people would be exiled — but why did it have to come along with such a desecration of Hashem’s name and the Jewish people? (a) The kingdom of Rome did not need to remain {dwelling} “in security and tranquility” even after the Temple had already been destroyed; and (b) the prophecy of destruction — “Zion shall be plowed as a field” — could have been fulfilled through other parts of the Temple, and not, specifically through the Holy of Holies, a place where even concerning the holiest of Jews it says,<sup>34</sup> “And the stranger who approaches shall die.”

## 8.

### SEEING THE GOOD WITHIN THE BAD

To this Rabbi Akiva responded: “If for those who violate His will it is so {that they are rewarded}, for those who perform His will, even more so {will they be rewarded}.” True, it was a desecration of the name of Hashem and the Jewish people for the Romans to live comfortably in their country while Hashem’s House was burnt with fire. However, the resultant reward and good will be with greater strength, because “if for those who violate His will it is so, for those who perform His will, **even more so.**” Meaning, Rabbi Akiva perceived the good

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<sup>32</sup> See *Divrei HaYamim I* 23:13; and see *Vayikra* 21:10-15; and *Toras Kohanim*, loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup> {That is, there were many conditions for the entry of the Kohen Gadol, even on Yom Kippur.}

<sup>34</sup> See *Eitz Yosef* on *Ein Yaacov*.

that would result from the success of Rome, and even from the desecration of the name of Hashem's name and the Jewish people.

The same holds true of the second account: Since the prophecy of the destruction was fulfilled in the fullest sense, to the extent that a fox emerged from the site of **the Holy of Holies**, surely the prophecy of redemption of Zechariah would be fulfilled in the optimal fashion. Rabbi Akiva did not doubt that the prophecy would be materialize, Heaven forbid; his doubt was how it would materialize — whether it would take place in the optimal way or not,<sup>35</sup> as we find regarding many biblical prophecies.

To illustrate this idea as it applies to the prophecy that “{Zion} shall be plowed as a field,” the {resultant} growth may be {as depicted by the verse}, “and you will gather your produce”;<sup>36</sup> or the growth may be “one hundred fold”;<sup>37</sup> or the growth may even be greater — {it will grow} “**wheat** {as big as} kidneys.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the prophesied growth may **only** take place **in the times of Moshiach**, “the plowman shall meet the reaper.”<sup>39</sup>

And by seeing how the prophecy of destruction (of Uriah) was fulfilled, Rabbi Akiva perceived that the prophecy of redemption would also be fulfilled in the optimum manner.

Accordingly, it becomes evident why Rabbi Akiva specifically makes reference to the prophecy that “Zion shall be plowed as a field”: The purpose of plowing a field is not to ruin it; on the contrary, plowing is necessary to bring the field to its full potential — “the land will give forth produce,” for plowing leads to a field growing properly.<sup>40</sup> And the more a field is plowed, the more effective the sowing will be, and the better the subsequent growth. The same is true in our case: The destruction of the Temple is likened to plowing, for only because of (and through) it does the benefit and growth of redemption come. Therefore,

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<sup>35</sup> See *Anaf Yosef* on *Iyun Yaakov*, s.v., “*hayisi misyarei*.”

<sup>36</sup> *Devarim* 11:14.

<sup>37</sup> *Bereishis* 26:14.

<sup>38</sup> *Toras Kohanim*, “*Bechukosai*,” 26:4; *Taanis* 23a; et. al.

<sup>39</sup> *Amos* 9:17; see the end of *Yalkut Shimoni* on *Amos* 9:17; *Taanis* 5a; Rashi on *Bava Basra* 15b.

<sup>40</sup> See *Chiddushei Aggados Maharsha* on *Shabbos* 139a.

since the destruction (the plowing) was absolute, and even reached the site of the Holy of Holies,<sup>41</sup> this proved to Rabbi Akiva that the redemption (the growth) would also occur with utmost perfection.

## 9.

### SHOULD THE FUTURE INFLUENCE THE PRESENT?

On this basis, we can explain that the difference of opinion in the dispute between Rabbi Akiva and the other Sages was contingent on a general question relevant to numerous mitzvos:

Should we consider (and accordingly act upon) **future** mitzvos and obligations in **the present**, as in the following **analogous** case: If someone is ill and doctors inform him that fasting on Tzom Gedaliah would prevent him from fasting on Yom Kippur, may he (and should he) still observe the prophetically mandated<sup>42</sup> fast of Tzom Gedaliah, even if it means that he will be unable to fulfill the future biblical obligation of fasting on Yom Kippur? Or must he refrain from fasting on Tzom Gedaliah in order to ensure his ability to fast on Yom Kippur?<sup>43</sup>

We can posit that this is also the basis of the dispute between Rabbi Akiva and the other Sages concerning the desecration of the name of Hashem and of the Jewish people at present, which will **eventually** cause great benefit for the Jewish people and a greater sanctification of Hashem's name: Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, and Rabbi Yehoshua argue that since at present there is a great desecration of Hashem's name, this outweighs any benefit that will accrue later, and we must deal with the present situation. And since now there is the opposite of a sanctification of Hashem's name and the Jewish people, it is so distressing that it leads to weeping.

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<sup>41</sup> See *Zohar*, vol. 3 (96b), that the Holy of Holies is called "Zion."

<sup>42</sup> *Sdei Chemed* "Asifas Dinim," entry "Yom Hakippurim," sec. 1, par. 10.

<sup>43</sup> See *Sdei Chemed*, *ibid.*, at length.

Rabbi Akiva argues that the ultimate outcome determines the present situation. Therefore, he maintains here that since the current desecration of Hashem's name and the Jewish people will later cause a great elevation and increase in the sanctification of Hashem's name and the Jewish people — at the time of the Future Redemption — this determines {the approach towards} the current situation, to the point that “he was laughing.”

## 10.

### BEAUTY VS. COMPLETENESS

We can suggest that their dispute is **also** contingent upon another general question, one that is more relevant to our subject:

Should a person fulfill a mitzvah completely, with all its details, if doing so will mar the overall **beauty** of the mitzvah? And conversely, should a person embellish a mitzvah if it will cause him to forgo a (non-essential) detail of the mitzvah? The question is, what is more important: fulfilling the mitzvah with all its details, or the beauty of the overall mitzvah?

[An example of this (although not entirely analogous) is the question raised by later halachic authorities<sup>44</sup> regarding circumcision: If the circumcision will be held in the morning — in compliance with the principle that “the vigilant are early in their performance of mitzvos”<sup>45</sup> — it will lack the advantage of “the king’s glory is in a multitude of people.”<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, if the circumcision will be delayed to a later time of day, it will not be performed in the manner of “the vigilant are early”; however, consequently, it will have the advantage of “the

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<sup>44</sup> See *Sdei Chemed*, “*Klalim*,” entry “*zayin*,” *klal* 1 - 3; entry “*pei*,” *klal* 39.

<sup>45</sup> {*Yoma* 28b.}

<sup>46</sup> {*Mishlei* 14:28; *Yoma* 26a, et al.; performing a mitzvah in the presence of a greater number of people gives glory to Hashem, and is halachically mandated when possible.}

king's glory is in a multitude of people.”<sup>47</sup> Which should be the determining factor?

The same question can be asked in numerous cases — when delaying the mitzvah will allow it to be fulfilled beautifully, in the optimum way.]

And this is also their dispute: Obviously the Jewish people will be rewarded for performing Hashem's will, etc., and at the time of the Future Redemption, the name of Hashem and the Jewish people will be sanctified.

The dilemma is as follows: {On the one hand, there is the present-day desecration of holiness by the apparent victory of evil over good:} The fact that the kingdom of Rome, whose populace worshiped false gods, “dwell securely and tranquilly, and for us, the House... is burnt by fire”; and {they saw} “a fox... emerge from the site of the Holy of Holies... the place concerning which it says, ‘And the stranger who approaches shall die,’” is (already now) a **desecration** of Hashem's name, impairing the ideal of sanctifying Hashem's name. {But on the other hand, the present day desecration will lead to extraordinary profit:} Conversely, the fact that the Jewish people will be greatly rewarded, and the prophecy of Zechariah will be fulfilled in an **exceptionally wondrous** manner, **beautifies** and **augments** (the overall longevity and health {of the elderly of Yerushalayim}, etc.) the sanctification of Hashem's name (which will occur in the future). {So which consideration outweighs the other?}

According to Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, and Rabbi Yehoshua, right now, the ideal of sanctifying Hashem's name was impaired. (Although the situation may not be a *desecration* of Hashem's name, in any event, the name of the Jewish people and of Hashem were not sanctified after the destruction. Therefore, it is immaterial that this present-day impairment will lead eventually to a **beautification and augmentation** in the sanctification of Hashem. Therefore, “they began weeping.”

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<sup>47</sup> “The vigilant are early” is a detail that pertains to the one who performs the mitzvah and, therefore, the mitzvah itself. (For example, Avraham arose early to perform Akeidas Yitzchok.) Similarly, {it has an impact on both the person performing the mitzvah and the mitzvah itself} when it is done swiftly, (as seen in the example of the kohanim “rushing and running to receive the blood and sprinkle it” — Rashi, *Pesachim* 65a, s.v., “*Agav*”). However, when it comes to performing a mitzvah “in a multitude of people,” there is no change in the specific details of reading the Megillah. Similarly, in the case of circumcision, there is no change regarding the Mohel and the circumcision itself.

However, the opinion of Rabbi Akiva is that the **beauty** of the **overall** mitzvah is the pivotal factor, not any detail of the mitzvah. Therefore, the additional **beautification** in the overall sanctification of Hashem's name that will come about eventually outweighs the current flaw in the sanctification of Hashem's name — and therefore, “he was laughing.”

## 11.

### THE BAD ITSELF IS GOOD

The above is the overarching explanation. The second account is necessary, as it contains a *chiddush* not found in the first account, in all three of the above details: Everything that Hashem does, He does for the good — whether in the present, we consider the potential outcome in the future; whether a detail of a mitzvah outweighs the embellishment of the overall mitzvah.

Rabbi Akiva's statement, “everything Hashem does, He does for the good,” means that at the present moment, something may be negative, but its **ultimate purpose** is for the good. As we see from the anecdote in the Talmud<sup>48</sup> regarding Rabbi Akiva himself: The fact that he spent the night in the fields, not in the city; that he lost his donkey and rooster; and that his lamp was extinguished, eventually brought a good result — his life was saved. Meaning, the events themselves were painful and damaging, yet, nevertheless, it was **for** the good.<sup>49</sup>

Accordingly, it is also clear how this {principle that everything is for the good} fits with the ruling of the Talmud<sup>50</sup> that if a negative event occurs, although later it will lead to a good result — “for example that his field was flooded, although when the floodwaters recede it is a good thing for it watered

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<sup>48</sup> *Berachos* 60b.

<sup>49</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 2, p. 394.

<sup>50</sup> *Berachos* 60a; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Berachos*,” ch. 10, par. 4; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 222, par. 4.



his field”<sup>51</sup> — the owner must make the blessing, “Blessed is the true Judge,” since “at the present, it is bad.”<sup>52</sup>

And even Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, and Rabbi Yehoshua agree with Rabbi Akiva that a person should “**say**: Everything Hashem does...,” as explained above.

The novelty in our case is that Rabbi Akiva saw in the negative itself — their seeing “a fox emerge from the site of the Holy of Holies” — not just the eventual good **result** {that would later come}, but that this incident itself was a part of, and the beginning of, the good.

This accords with the exposition of our Sages on the verse,<sup>53</sup> “*Hashem has spent His fury* — on wood and stone, but He did not pour His fury on the Jewish people.” Therefore, regarding {the lament of} Asaf {over the destruction},<sup>54</sup> it does not say, “**a cry** of Asaf” but, “**a song** of Asaf.” When and by what means did Hashem (completely) **spend** His fury? By foxes emerging from the site of the Holy of Holies (and “Yerushalayim shall become heaps of rubble...”).<sup>55</sup>

In the first account, however, although there, too, Rabbi Akiva was “laughing,” and it has an advantage over the principle that “everything that Hashem does, He does for the good” —

[Where: (a) we say, and only know, *that it is* “for the good.” However, we don’t know — it is not apparent or revealed — **what** the good is; (b) it is a negative occurrence in which “**He does** for the good,” but had the entire incident not happened to begin with, it also would have been good. For example, in the case of Rabbi Akiva, had he not had the donkey and the rooster, etc., to begin with, he would have also been saved.

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<sup>51</sup> *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> *Berachos* 60a, as Rashi explains: “It destroys this year’s produce.”

<sup>53</sup> *Eichah* 4:11 and *Eichah Rabbah*, *loc. cit*.

<sup>54</sup> {*Tehillim* 79:1}

<sup>55</sup> {*Michah* 3:12.}



In contrast, in our case — “if for those who violate His will *it is so* {that they are rewarded}, for those who perform His will, all the more so: (a) We see that “*it is so*” — we see explicitly **what** the good is that emerges from this occurrence; and, (b) there is a benefit and enhancement as a result, more than if it had not occurred at all.]

— Nevertheless, the bad itself was not seen as a part of, and the start of, the good, whereas in the second account, this was evident.

## 12.

### THE PAIN IS THE GAIN

We can take the same approach with respect to the other two questions:

According to the explanation that the future outcome determines how a mitzvah is performed in the present, and similarly, according to the reasoning that the beautification of the overall mitzvah outweighs a detail of the mitzvah itself, the underlying logic (**in general**) is that **this** is the **determining factor** and **outweighs** {the other considerations}. In other words, in the present action, and as far as the detail of a mitzvah is concerned, there is a deficiency. Nonetheless, an advantage that will be accrued in the future, and the embellishment of the mitzvah, in general, outweighs this flaw. This is the (general) thinking {of Rabbi Akiva} in the first account.

In our case, however, in the second account, according to Rabbi Akiva’s logic, it is not just that they {viz., a future advantage and a mitzvah’s embellishment} outweigh other factors. Rather, in the present performance of the mitzvah, Rabbi Akiva sees **only** the future advantage. Meaning, to Rabbi Akiva, it appears as if the present action is already initiating the embellishment of the sanctification of Hashem’s name and the Jewish people in the future. He

sees this in what appears to be a flaw in the ideal of sanctifying Hashem's name and name of the Jewish people.<sup>56</sup>

### 13.

AKIVA, YOU HAVE COMFORTED US

This is why the Sages only said, “Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us,” in the second account and not in the first: The *chiddush* of Rabbi Akiva's understanding of the incident in which a fox emerged from the site of the Holy of Holies over the understanding of the other Sages, who began weeping, was in two respects, the second *chiddush* being greater than the first: From the perspective of the Sages, this incident involved the diametric opposite of good, which aroused weeping. Rabbi Akiva's perspective, however, was that we must not only see the good that will eventually emerge from this (the ultimate sanctification of Hashem's name and the Jewish people), but, moreover, we must also understand that the elevation and benefit that will occur at the redemption is not something that is brought about by a secondary (negative) occurrence. Rather, it is all one event — “Zion **shall be plowed as a field**” — the devastation itself has the advantage of a plowed a field, which serves as a **precursor** to the field being sowed and harvested.

This is the double consolation: (a) The elevation **and beautification of the future**; and, (b) that this enhancement and consolation is embedded within the current event.

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<sup>56</sup> This resembles what is stated in the *Responsa of the Chacham Tzvi*, sec. 106, at the end, that one should postpone performing a mitzvah in order to fulfill it later in a more optimal way, and this does not contradict the principle that one may not forgo the fulfillment of a commandment. However, one should not neglect fulfilling one mitzvah in order to fulfill another one at a later time, even if the other one is greater. See Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 94, par. 5, {where he states that one who is traveling should delay their prayers until they arrive at their destination, in order to pray while standing.} He explains, “This does not violate the charges that ‘mitzvos should not be deferred’ and ‘those who are eager perform a mitzvah at the earliest opportunity,’ since his intent is to fulfill the mitzvah in an optimum manner.” This means that the act of waiting itself is part of the preparation and preciousness of the commandment. (This differs from the situation described in Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 25, par. 4. There, one would be postponing the fulfillment of one mitzvah (*tefillin*) not to enhance that specific mitzvah but to prioritize another more frequent mitzvah (*tallis*). Hence, in that case, the law is that one should not postpone the mitzvah of *tefillin*.) This is not the place for further discussion on this matter.

The support for this perspective is, “as it says,<sup>57</sup> ‘I will take to Me faithful witnesses to attest: Uriah the kohen, and Zechariah the son of Yeverechiyahu’... Scripture established that {fulfillment of} the prophecy of Zechariah is contingent...”: Scripture itself says that these are not two separate things, but rather one thing — analogous to testimony (which is given by **two** witnesses, who become a **single** body of “testimony”)<sup>58</sup> — the prophecy {of redemption} by Zechariah and the prophecy {of destruction} by Uriah are one body of testimony.

However, the first account — in which Rabbi Akiva “was laughing” based on his reasoning that “if for those who violate His will it is so, for those who perform His will, all the more so” — follows only his opinion. The other Sages, however, maintained their own opinion, especially since according to Rabbi Akiva, we must derive and perceive the advantage and good of one thing (“for those who perform His will”) from a second thing (“those who violate His will”). And Rabbi Akiva did not cite a proof-text, as he did in the second account (from which the Sages could reason that it was most certainly true in the first account).

## 14.

### RABBI AKIVA’S UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

Accordingly, we can understand why the Talmud **specifies** the name of each Sage. By knowing their identities, we can understand the cause of their dispute: Rabban Gamliel was the *Nasi*<sup>59</sup> — a Yisrael (from the tribe of Yehudah); Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya was a Kohen — a tenth generation descendent of Ezra;<sup>60</sup> Rabbi Yehoshua was a Levi (from among the singers {in the Temple});<sup>61</sup> Rabbi Akiva was a descendant of converts.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Yeshayahu* 8:2.

<sup>58</sup> Note *Sotah* 2b: “Every place where {the word} “witness” is stated {in the Torah without specifying a number} there are two {witnesses} here...”

<sup>59</sup> {The leader of the Jewish people.}

<sup>60</sup> *Berachos* 27b.

<sup>61</sup> *Arachin* 11b; see also the mishnaic commentators on *Maaser Sheini*, ch. 5, mishnah 9.

<sup>62</sup> *Seder Hadoros*, s.v., “Rabbi Akiva.”

Who has the ability to perceive (and bring about) within the unholy forces — the opposite side {of good} — the nullification of its negativity even while the negative force retains its full strength, and the advantage attained through the destruction that leads to a doubled consolation? Specifically, someone who personally had a connection with a similar experience. (As the Gemara says,<sup>63</sup> it was specifically Ovadiah who had prophesied about the downfall of Edom, for “Ovadiah was an Edomite convert. And regarding this association, people say: ‘From the forest itself comes the axe to chop it.’”) In contrast, a native Jew — whether a Kohen, a Levi, or a Yisrael — cannot see this {connection with negativity} in himself; for them, this phenomenon is something novel.

Similarly, this is the difference between their halachic opinions concerning: What is the determining factor, the present or the future? Which is more significant, a detail of a mitzvah or the beautification of the overall mitzvah?: Specifically, Rabbi Akiva, who, besides being a descendent of converts, only began to learn Torah at the age of forty<sup>64</sup> — had he looked and assessed himself in his present state, he would never have achieved the greatness that he later reached. Only because he foresaw the outcome and excellence that could eventually come about (and which did materialize) in the future, and he perceived it with clarity and certainty, like the image of “water erodes stones,”<sup>65</sup> was he inspired to begin learning Torah in the {extraordinary} manner described by our Sages.

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<sup>63</sup> *Sanhedrin* 39b.

<sup>64</sup> *Avos DeRabbi Nassan* 6:2; and see *Pesachim* 49b; see also *Shitah Mekubetzes* in the name of the *Ritva* on *Kesubos* 62b, that originally he {Rabbi Akiva} was neither modest nor upstanding.

<sup>65</sup> *Avos D'Rabbi Nassan*, 6:2. {This verse (from *Iyov* 14:19) is mentioned in the midrash there, which describes Rabbi Akiva's humble beginning and what led him to eventually become one of the greatest Sages in Jewish history. The midrash relates: “Once, he was standing at the mouth of a well and he asked: Who carved a hole in this stone? They replied to him: It is from the water, which constantly drips onto it, day after day. And they asked: Akiva, don't you know this from the verse, “Water erodes stones”? Rabbi Akiva immediately applied this, as a *kal vachomer*, to himself. He said: If something soft can carve something hard, then even more so, the words of Torah, which are like steel, can engrave themselves on my heart, which is but flesh and blood.”}

## 15.

I WILL THANK YOU, HASHEM, FOR YOU WERE ANGRY

On this basis, this is the advantage of the doubled consolation (“comfort, comfort My people”) over the exile, in general, and the destruction, which was a double punishment: The fact that the Jewish people were “doubly struck” means that aside from the actual destruction and exile (and the opposite of a sanctification of Hashem’s name and the Jewish people that was caused), there was also an **extreme** desecration of Hashem’s name and the name of the Jewish people. This desecration was far worse than the desecration caused through the destruction itself and by exile. (This point was explained earlier, regarding the above-mentioned account related at the end of tractate *Makkos*: “These gentiles, who bow... dwell securely and tranquilly, and for us... a fox emerges from the site of the Holy of Holies.”)

So, correspondingly, the consolation will also be twofold: We will be consoled when we see the visible benefit and goodness of the actual destruction and exile — how it was all in order to bring about the revelations of the Future Redemption. And we will be “doubly consoled” when we see the visible benefit and advantage of the **increase** (“they were doubly struck”) of the destruction and exile. Meaning, not only will we understand that the great descent and exile was worthwhile for us to reach the **augmentation** and **embellishment** of the Redemption, but we will also recognize the goodness and benefit in the intensification of the destruction and exile themselves — and concerning this, we will declare,<sup>66</sup> “**I will thank You, Hashem, for You were angry with me.**”

On this basis, we can say that in our *parshah*,<sup>67</sup> there is an allusion to this consolation. As our Sages say<sup>68</sup> (and as quoted by Rashi) regarding the pronouncement:<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Yeshayahu* 12:1.

<sup>67</sup> {*Parshas Vaeschanan*.}

<sup>68</sup> *Sanhedrin* 38b.

<sup>69</sup> *Devarim* 4:25.

When you beget children and children's children, and you will be **long established** {גוֹשְׁנֵי־הָאָרֶץ} in the land — He hinted<sup>70</sup> to them that they would be exiled from the land at the end of 852 years, the numerical value of the word גוֹשְׁנֵי־הָאָרֶץ, but He exiled them earlier, at the end of 850 years. Hashem did this two years earlier than the numerical value of גוֹשְׁנֵי־הָאָרֶץ in order to prevent {what is described in the next verse,} “you shall utterly perish”<sup>71</sup> from being fulfilled. As it says,<sup>72</sup> *Hashem hastened...* He was **charitable** with us for **He hastened to bring it** {the exile} two years before its time.

Meaning, this communicates not only the benefit of the exile itself — that exile will bring about, as the passage continues, that<sup>73</sup> “from there you will seek Hashem your L-rd, and you will find Him, if you seek Him... and you will return to Hashem your L-rd...” — but also the benefit of **hastening** {the start of} the exile. This hastening subverted the fulfillment of the verse, “you shall utterly perish.”

And by dint of our actions and work during the exile, we will merit, in a revealed manner, the fulfillment of the prophecy, “comfort, comfort...”; and moreover, the fulfillment of the prophecy,<sup>74</sup> “I, I am the one who comforts you,” with the coming of our righteous Moshiach.

— From a talk delivered on the 20th of Menachem Av, Shabbos *parshas Eikev*, and Shabbos *parshas Re'eh*, 5734 (1974)

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<sup>70</sup> Rashi's wording.

<sup>71</sup> {*Devarim* 4:26.}

<sup>72</sup> *Daniel* 9:14.

<sup>73</sup> *Devarim* 4:29-30.

<sup>74</sup> {*Yeshayahu* 51:12.}