



# The Community

Boruch Hashem

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## Rabbi's Article

### Why Rabbi Akiva Laughed

This week's haftorah (-[Link](#)) begins the "Seven of Consolation" series (-[Link](#)), spanning from the Shabbat after the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av (-[Link](#)), to the Shabbat prior to Rosh Hashanah (-[Link](#)). Our haftorah starts with (-Isaiah 40:1), "'Console, console My people,' says your G-d." upon the double language of, "Console, console," our sages explain (-Yalkut Yishaya on the verse), "They were Smote-Double (-Isaiah 40:2), 'For she has taken from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins,' and they were consoled double, 'Console, console My people.'"

Questions: (i) What is the concept of the Double-Consolation? (ii) What is the advantage if a Double-Consolation, when they were Smote-Double?

In order to understand this, let us look into a teaching<sup>1</sup> of the Oral Law --who's job it is to explain the Written Law, in which we find a Double-Consolation as well [By explaining this closing teaching of Tractate Makkot, the Rebbe was making a siyum (-[Link](#)) on the tractate, --which includes a footnote #4, in which the Rebbe also performs the traditional connection between the closing and opening of the tractate]:

*And it once was that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking along the road (in the Roman Empire), and they heard the sound of the multitudes of Rome from Puteoli at a distance of one hundred and twenty mil. And (the other Sages) began weeping and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: For what reason are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva said to them: And you, for what reason are you weeping? They said to him: These gentiles, who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly, and for us, the House of the footstool of our G-d (the Temple) is burnt by fire, 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, for those who perform His will, all the more so.*

*On another occasion they were ascending to Jerusalem (after the destruction of the Temple). When they arrived at Mount Scopus (and saw the site of the Temple), they rent their garments (in mourning). When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox that emerged from (the site of) the Holy of Holies. They began weeping, and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: For what are you laughing? (Rabbi Akiva) said to them: For what reason are you weeping? They said to him: The place concerning which it is written (-Numbers 1:51): "And the foreigner (non-priest) who approaches shall die," and now foxes walk in it; and shall we not weep? (Rabbi Akiva) said to them: That is why I am laughing, as it is written, (when G-d revealed the future to the prophet Isaiah, (-8:2)): "And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to attest: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah." Now what is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah was during the First Temple period, and Zechariah was during the Second Temple period? Rather, the verse established that the prophecy of Zechariah is dependent upon the prophecy of Uriah. In Uriah it is written (-Micah 3:12): "Therefore, for your sake Zion shall be plowed as a field... (and Jerusalem shall become rubble, and the Temple Mount as the high places of a forest --where foxes are found). In Zechariah it is written (-8:4): "There shall yet be elderly men and elderly women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem." 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 is evident that the prophecy of Zechariah (remains) valid. (The Sages) said to him, employing this formulation, "Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us!" --Double-Consolation!*

-cont. on page 1

1. Even though this teaching is seemingly an aggadic teaching (-[Link](#)), of which (-Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah 2:4) one does not learn any law, nevertheless: (a) Only when it would contradict a stated law, otherwise, we can rely on a law learned from aggadah, (ii) even without extrapolated a law, we can at least rely on its logic, (iii) this isn't plain aggadah, but a "story of a teacher," upon which we rely for ruling a law, and (iv) this teaching clearly teaches us a law, "When they arrived at Mount Scopus (and saw the site of the Temple), they rent their garments (in mourning)," RaSHBa"m: "It is the law to do so" (one must rent their garment when seeing the destruction of Jerusalem).

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 2023 ★ ח' מנחם אב תשפ"ג

Eve of Tisha B'Av Fast ([Link](#)): Fast Begins: North Miami: 8:10 PM

Eicha Reading: 8:50 PM · It is forbidden to; eat & drink, wear leather shoes, shower, anoint, and to have marital relations · One should read the [Book of Lamentations](#).

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2023 ★ ט' מנחם אב תשפ"ג

Tisha B'Av Fast ([Link](#)): Read the [Book of Lamentations](#)

All prohibitions apply until tonight · Fast Ends: North Miami: 8:35

FRIDAY, JULY 28, 2023 ★ י' מנחם אב תשפ"ג

[Shabbat Candle Lighting](#): 7:51 PM · [Kabbalat Shabbat](#): 7:45 PM

SATURDAY, JULY 29, 2023 ★ יא' מנחם אב תשפ"ג

TORAH READING: [Va'eschanan](#) (Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11) · HAFTORAH: [Isaiah](#) (40:1-26)

[Shabbat Nachamu](#) (of Comfort) · [Shacharit](#): 9:30 AM · [Mincha](#): 7:45 PM · [Shabbat Ends](#): North Miami: 8:56 PM

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2, 2023 ★ טו' מנחם אב תשפ"ג

[Tu \(15 of\) B'Av](#): Day of Love and Rebirth · Reach out to someone and put a smile on their face

**This Week...**

**Eight Questions:** (1) What was Rabbi Akiva's question of, "Why are you crying," when (a) "they heard the sound of the multitudes of Rome," who were the ones who destroyed the Holy Temple, and (b) "they saw a fox that emerged from (the site of) the Holy of Holies"?! (2) More so, "When they arrived at Mount Scopus they rent their garments," is something that Rabbi Akiva himself did! Hence, why the question, "why are you crying"?! (3) It is the verse (-Leviticus 16:2), "He should not come at all times into the Holy within the dividing curtain," that prohibits (even the High Priest!) to enter the Holy of Holies, and not the verse quoted by the sages, "And the foreigner (non-priest) who approaches shall die," which speaks of doing service in the Holy Temple?! (4) What was Rabbi Akiva's reasoning to, "the prophecy of Zechariah is dependent upon the prophecy of Uriah," especially when (-Brochois 7a), "Every statement emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, (with a promise) of good, even if it was conditional, He did not renege"?! (5) Why, of all the prophetic verses of the destruction does Rabbi Akiva chose, "Therefore, for your sake Zion shall be plowed as a field"? (6) Why does the Talmud name all the sages traveling with Rabbi Akiva, instead of the usual language of (-See Kedushin 40b), "And it once was that Rabbi Akiva and some elders..."? (7) Why only in the second story did the sages state, "Akiva, you have comforted us"? (8a) Why the double terminology<sup>2</sup>, "Akiva, you have comforted us, Akiva, you have comforted us," and (8b) Why the emphasis, "said to him, employing this formulation"?

**Explanation:** These two events simply show us the two different paradigms of (i) Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, and Rabbi Yehoshua, and (ii) Rabbi Akiva, in which the sages saw the negativity in the events, while Rabbi Akiva, who teaches and himself follows (-Brochos 60b), "One must always accustom oneself to say: Everything that G-d does, He does for the best," saw the good in the events! Hence the two events, of different times and places, to emphasize Rabbi Akiva's paradigm of seeing all events for the good to emerge from it.

**Questions:** (i) What is the novelty of Rabbi Akiva's, "to say: Everything that G-d does, He does for the best," in one story over the other? (ii) Rabbi Akiva's rule is one in which there is no dispute, and is the ruling of the Code of Jewish Law (-Tur Shulchan Oruch, end of Simon 230). Hence, what logic is there to say that argued on this? And (iii) Rabbi Akiva should have clearly stated his opinion, "Everything that G-d does, He does for the best," and then, if necessary, to add on the details in each of the these events?

**Explanation:** Rabbi Akiva's question<sup>3</sup>, "Why are you crying," was, "Why now," when, "they heard the sound of the multitudes of Rome," and not before, when they already knew of the might of Rome, as their very traveling to Rome was in order to circumvent a Roman decree against Israel?! So too, in the second event, Rabbi Akiva's question was, "Why now," when they already previously, "they rent their garments"?! Hence, Rabbi Akiva understood that these specific cries were due to: (a) "sound of the multitudes of Rome," and (b) "a fox emerged from (the site of) the Holy of Holies." Thus, Rabbi Akiva's questions, "Why are you crying now, what happened now, that now they, "began to cry"?!

To this question, the sages answered: We understand why Rome achieved might before and during the destruction of the Holy Temple. This was for the honor of Israel and the Holy Temple that (-Isaiah 10:34), "And the Lebanon shall fall through a mighty one," which makes the shame far less than having fallen in the hands of the weak. However, why still are, "These gentiles, who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly," even now, after, "The House of the footstool of our G-d (the Temple) is burnt by fire"?! This is an unnecessary additional disgrace to the name of G-d and to Israel?! So too, the sages understood that, "Zion shall be plowed as a field." However, this could happen in a different part of the Holy Temple! And not in the place of which it is specifically stated, "And the foreigner<sup>4</sup> who approaches shall die," should now have foxes entering?! This is an unnecessary additional disgrace to the name of G-d and to Israel?!

On this outcry of the sages does Rabbi Akiva answer: This, "disgrace to the name of G-d and to Israel," is necessary for the outcome of good, "(If for those who violate His will it is so,) for those who perform His will, all the more so!" So too, it is specifically the, "disgrace to the name of G-d and to Israel," that the fox emerged from the Holy of Holies that proves how Zachariah's prophesy of goodness will be fulfilled to its maximum, and not that it be of course<sup>5</sup> fulfilled, but only to a normal potential. For example, concerning the prophesy of, "be plowed as a field," it could bring to yielding (-Deuteronomy 11:14), "and you will gather in your grain," or greater (-Genesis 26:12), "a hundred fold," or even greater (-Toras Kohanim, Bechukosai 26:4), "the wheat became like kidneys," or to the ultimate yield in the times of the World to Come (-Amos 9:13), "the plowman shall meet the reaper." Therefore, it is through the fashion in which the prophesy of the destruction was fulfilled (the maximum; foxes emerging from the Holy of Holies!) that Rabbi Akiva was able to see in what fashion the prophesy of the redemption will be fulfilled: To its maximum!

With this we also understand why Rabbi Akiva chose<sup>6</sup> specifically the verse of, "Zion shall be plowed as a field." Plowing a field is not in order to ruin the field, but on the contrary, it is in order to bring the field to its ultimate fulfillment (-Leviticus 26:4), "and the land yielded crops," properly. And it is only in comparison to the quality of the plowing that there is the quality of the sprouting. This is Rabbi Akiva's point: Only when we saw that the plowing, the destruction, was to its maximum, do we know that the redemption will be so too. -Cont. on Page 3

2. Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Edeles (MaHaRSH"A: [-Link](#)) answers question 7 and 8, that the precise double-terminology was for the two stories told here. However, we need to understand this answer, since these two events took place in different places (in Rome and in Jerusalem) and different times (when going to Rome and when returning to Jerusalem)?!

3. Answer to Question #1 & 2

4. Answer to Question #3

5. Answer to Question #4

6. Answer to Question #5

According to all of the above, we now have insight into what the dispute between the sages and Rabbi Akiva is<sup>7</sup>. There is a general exploration concerning performing mitzvot, whether we give precedence to the mitzva of the *present* or to a mitzva of the *future*. For example: If a doctor tells a person that by his fasting the *Fast of Gedaliah* (-[Link](#)), which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tishrei will have him not be able to fast on *Yom Kippur* (-[Link](#)), which is on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, what should he do in the *present* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tishrei? Does he fast now the *Fast of Gedaliah*, which is from the *prophets*, even though this will render him unable to fast on *Yom Kippur* which is *biblical*, because we must only focus on the *present*, or does he not fast the *Fast of Gedaliah*, so that he will be able to fast the *future* biblical fast of *Yom Kippur*?

We can say that this is the dispute between the sages and Rabbi Akiva. The sages say that we need to give precedence to the *present*. Hence, even though the *present*, "disgrace to the name of G-d and to Israel," will bring to a *greater sanctification* of G-d's name and of the name of Israel in the *future*, nevertheless, we need to focus on the *present*, and therefore, the sages started crying. While Rabbi Akiva rules that we give precedence to the *greater future* over the, "disgrace to the name of G-d and to Israel," to the point that Rabbi Akiva *laughed!*

Deeper yet, we can say that this dispute between Rabbi Akiva and the sages is founded upon another dispute -- one far more pertinent to our discussion-- in the general approach of how best to observe mitzvot. What takes precedence: Fulfilling a mitzva with all its non-obligatory *details* --even if this will get in the way of the all-encompassing adornment of the mitzvah, or to fulfill the mitzva with its all-encompassing adornment --even if this will get in the way of a non-obligatory detail of the mitzvah? For example: If one will make the circumcision of his son in the *early* morning, he will have this mitzva's *detail* (of the *person* performing the mitzva) of, "The vigilant are *early* (in the performance) of mitzvot," but will be lacking in the all-encompassing adornment of the mitzva (the *mitzva* itself) (-Proverbs 14:28), "The King's glory is in a *multitude of people*." However, if he will forgo the detail of his being *early* to perform the mitzva. and make it later, he will have the all-encompassing adornment of, "The King's glory is in a *multitude of people*."

We can say that this is the dispute between the sages and Rabbi Akiva. For the question here is between the Roman Empire of idol-worshippers', "dwell securely and tranquilly," and the, "fox emerging from the spot of the Holy of Holies," which is a *disgrace* to the name of G-d now, which in turn is but a fault (*detail*) in the essence of sanctifying G-d's name, vis-à-vis, the superior reward of Israel, and the superior wondrous fulfillment of Zachariah's prophesy, an adornment and an increase in the *all-encompassing* sanctification of G-d's name. The sages are of the opinion that if there is *presently* a fault (*detail*) in the sanctification of G-d's name --albeit this isn't a desecration<sup>8</sup> to G-d's name, being that either way there is no sanctification of Israel's name and of G-d's name after the destruction of the Holy Temple and the Land of Israel, we give no credence to that from this fault (lack of a *detail*) will come out in the *future* an *all-encompassing* adornment and increase in the sanctification of G-d's name. Hence, the sages began to cry. While Rabbi Akiva gives precedence to the *all-encompassing* adornment and increase in the sanctification of G-d's name ("for those who perform His will, *all the more so!*"; Zacharias' prophesy fulfilled to the *maximum*), over the *detail* fault (presently: a mighty Rome; foxes in the Holy of Holies) in the sanctification of G-d's name. Hence, the *future all-encompassing* increase *overrules* the *present* lack of a *detail*. Thus, Rabbi Akiva laughed.

Particularly, there is a novelty in the *second* story over the *first*<sup>9</sup>, in all three details:

1. "Everything that G-d does, He does for the best": In the first story Rabbi Akiva's teaching is saying that presently it is *bad*<sup>10</sup>, only that this *bad* is "for the," good *in the future*<sup>11</sup>. With this the sages agree! However, the novelty in the second story is that Rabbi Akiva did not see in the fox emerging from the spot of the Holy of Holies just an *outcome* of goodness. Rather, he saw in this event itself part of, and the beginning of, the good<sup>12</sup>!
2. *Present* vs. Present's focus on the *future* & 3. *Detail* vs *All-encompassing*: In the first story, the reason is that *this* (*future*; *all-encompassing*) is what *overpowers* and *overwhelms*. In other words, the present *lacking* and the *lacking* detail *exists* only that the future and the all-encompassing overpowers this existing lacking. In the second story, it isn't only about *overpowering*, but rather, Rabbi Akiva *only* sees in the *present* the goodness of the future beginning to happen!

This is the reason why only in the second story<sup>13</sup> did the sages say: (i) "Akiva you consoled us," (ii) twice<sup>14</sup>.

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7. Answer to Question #(ii) on previous page

8. For if it would be a desecration to G-d's name, then it would be an *obligatory* 'detail' to stop a desecration to G-d's name.

9. Answer to Question #(i) on previous page

10. In the original story of Rabbi Akiva's story, Rabbi Akiva had to sleep in the forest, his donkey died, his rooster died, and his candle went out, only that the outcome was that the bandits didn't know he was there, and Rabbi Akiva's life was spared. Hence, even the *first* story here has a novelty to the original story: (a) In the original story, At first Rabbi Akiva didn't know what the *good outcome* would be, while here, Rabbi Akiva's seeing Rome in its might knew already what the good for Israel will be. (b) In the original story there was no greater benefit to Rabbi Akiva's having the donkey and rooster die, candle blown out, and his bed taken from him. For if he originally wouldn't have had them, his life would have been spared all the same. In our story, Rome's dwelling in security and tranquility gave Israel the, "How much *more so*..."

11. Which is why when something bad happens, that will bring a future good (present flooded field, leads to a future well aggregated field), he *presently* makes the blessing over a *bad* experience: *Blessed be... the true judge.*"

12. The sages teach (-Eicha Rabba) on the verse (-Lamentations 4:11), "'G-d has spent his fury:' It is written (-Psalms 79:1): 'A *song* of Asaf: G-d, peoples have invaded Your inheritance.' The verse should have said *weeping* of Asaf... 'The Holy One blessed be He destroyed the Sanctuary and the Temple, and you are sitting and playing?' He said: 'I am playing because the Holy One blessed be He vented His wrath on the wood and stones and did not vent His wrath on Israel.'"

13. Answer to Question #7

14. Answer to Question #8



In the second story there were two differences between Rabbi Akiva and the sages --while the second difference does not exist in the first story: (1) The sages saw the present negativity, while Rabbi Akiva saw its outcome of the future goodness. (2) Rabbi Akiva not only saw the future outcome of goodness, but rather, in this story, Rabbi Akiva already saw the future goodness happening now, in the present! This why the sages said twice, "Akiva, you consoled us," with the virtue and adornment in the future, and, "Akiva, you consoled us," with this virtue already existing in the present.

This is why Rabbi Akiva brings them the verse of proof, "And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to attest: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah." Witnesses are when two separate individuals testifying become one identity of a pair of witnesses. Uriah's prophesy of the destruction, and Zachariah's prophesy of the redemption are both one set of witnesses! However, this does not exist in the first story. In the first story Rabbi Akiva is laughing because of the reason that from this one thing of, "If for those who violate His will it is so," we have to extrapolate that separate thing of, "for those who perform His will, all the more so." The sages did not change their opinion for this form of extrapolation. Only in the second story did the sages change their opinion, saying, "Akiva, you consoled us, Akiva, you consoled us."

So too, we can now understand why the Talmud lists all the names of the sages, in order that we understand the reason why they disagree with Rabbi Akiva<sup>15</sup>. *Rabban Gamliel* was the *Prince of Israel*, from the tribe of Judah. *Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria* was a *Kohain*, 10<sup>th</sup> generation descendent of *Ezra the Scribe*. *Rabbi Yehoshua* was a Levite, from the singers in the Holy Temple. And *Rabbi Akiva* was the offspring of converts. Who is capable of seeing in the "vis-à-vis," the *Other Side* of evil, the nullification of evil, within the very strength of evil, this virtue of the destruction in a fashion of *Double-Consolation*? Only one who has experienced this journey within himself! Not the offspring of a Jew, be he a Kohain, Levite, or Israelite. Only one who has experienced in his life this very transformation, the offspring of converts<sup>16</sup>.

So too, with the other two concepts (Present vs. Present's focus on the future & Detail vs All-encompassing). Not only was Rabbi Akiva the offspring of converts, but as well, Rabbi Akiva did not start studying Torah until he was forty years of age. Hence, if, at the age of forty, Rabbi Akiva would have looked at the present, he would have never seen himself being able to become the great Rabbi Akiva! Only through Rabbi Akiva seeing the all-encompassing adornment, as that of (Avos D'Reb Nossom, 6:2<sup>17</sup>), "Water erodes stones," was he able to become the great Rabbi Akiva!

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Let us now return to the opening questions: (i) What is the concept of the *Double-Consolation*? (ii) What is the advantage of a *Double-Consolation*, when they were *Smote-Double*?

*Smote-Double* means that besides the disgrace of G-d's name and the name of Israel of the destruction of the Holy Temple, there is an extra smote, as that of, "These gentiles, who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly." And matching to this is the *Double-Consolation*: In addition to the goodness in the destruction itself, that all of this was for the sake of the revelation of the future redemption, more so, there is the consolation of the revelation of the virtue of the, "extra destruction"! In other words, not only should we feel that the intense descent is worthwhile in order to reach the outcome of the increase adornment in the times of redemption, but rather, we feel the goodness in the increase of destruction itself. And it is upon this that the we state (-Isaiah 12:1), "I will thank You, O L-rd, for You were wroth with me!"

With this we can explain the 'hint' of this concept in our Torah-portion: Rashi (-Deuteronomy 4:25) quotes the Talmud (-Sanhedrin 38a), "And you will be long established (Hebrew וְנוֹשְׁתֶּם): He hinted to them that they would be exiled from it at the end of 852 years, the gematria, numerical value, of the word וְנוֹשְׁתֶּם, but He exiled them earlier, at the end of 850 years. He did this two years earlier than the numerical value of וְנוֹשְׁתֶּם in order that the prophecy about them should not be fulfilled (verse 26), 'that you shall utterly perish.' This is the meaning of what is said (-Daniel 9:14): "And G-d 'hastened' with the evil and brought it upon us, for the L-rd our G-d is charitable (Tzadik=tzedaka). He was charitable with us for He hastened to bring it [the exile] two years before its time." In other words, not only the virtue and the benefit in the exile itself, that the exile brings to (-Deuteronomy 4:29-30), "And from there you will seek the L-rd your G-d, and you will find Him, if you seek... then you will return to the L-rd your G-d...", but also the advantage of the hastening of the exile, which nullifies the, "that you shall utterly perish."

And through our actions and our service in the times of exile, we will merit the actual revelation of, "Comfort, comfort," and even more than this, "I, yea I, am He Who consoles you," with the coming of our righteous Moshiach (-[Link](#)).

#### 15. Answer to Question #6

16. So too, we find that the prophesy of the destruction of Edom could only be given by Obadiah, who was an Edomite convert to Judaism.

17. "What were the origins of Rabbi Akiva? They say that he was forty years old and had still not learned anything. Once, he was standing at the mouth of a well and he said: Who carved a hole in this stone? They said to him: It is from the water, which constantly [falls] on it, day after day. And they said: Akiva, don't you know this from the verse (-Job 14:19), "Water erodes stones"? Rabbi Akiva immediately applied this, all the more so, to himself. He said: If something soft can carve something hard, then all the more so, the words of Torah, which are like steel, can engrave themselves on my heart, which is but flesh and blood. He immediately went to start studying Torah."