

## Kamza's Culpability

By Rabbi Dovid Markel

The Talmud's (Gittin 55b) statement that "the destruction of Jerusalem came through a Kamza and a Bar Kamza," has always troubled me.

The Talmud tells the story of a tragedy of errors that caused the destruction of the Temple:

"A certain man had a friend Kamza and an enemy Bar Kamza. He once made a party and said to his servant, 'Go and bring Kamza.' The man went and brought Bar Kamza.

When the man [who gave the party] found him there, he said, 'See, you tell tales about me; what are you doing here? Get out.'

Said the other: 'Since I am here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink.' He said, 'I won't.'

'Then let me give you half the cost of the party.' 'No,' said the other.

'Then let me pay for the whole party.' He still said, 'No,' and he took him by the hand and put him out.

Said the other, 'Since the Rabbis were sitting there and did not stop him, this shows that they agreed with him. I will go and inform against them, to the government.'

He went and said to the emperor, 'The Jews are rebelling against you.'"

Because Bar Kamza was angered about the deplorable manner that he was treated, he libeled to the emperor about the Jews, which inevitably led to the destruction of Jerusalem and her Temple.

What is curious about this story is that for all of eternity, Kamza is known to have caused the destruction of the Temple, although it is entirely possible that he knew nothing of the incident!

Why does the Talmud tell us the name of Kamza when he is seemingly not to blame?!<sup>1</sup>

### **Miriam bas Bilga**

Perhaps some light can be shed upon the above story through prefacing another episode that the Talmud recounts about the priestly family of Bilgah: "Bilgah always divided in the south, since their rings were immovable and their alcove was blocked up."

To explain the circumstances behind this curious penalty, the Talmud relates:

"It happened that Miriam the daughter of Bilgah apostatized and married an officer of the Greek kings. When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, she stamped with her sandal upon the altar, crying out, 'Lukos! Lukos! (Wolf! Wolf!) How long wilt thou consume Israel's money! And yet thou dost not stand by them in the time of oppression!' And when

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<sup>1</sup> What is more curious, is that while the Talmud tells us the name of Kamza, it hides the name of the host.

the Sages heard of the incident, they made her ring immovable and blocked up her alcove.”

Still, the Talmud is bothered: Why was the family of Bilgah punished on account of their wayward daughter; “Do we penalize a father on account of his daughter?”

However, explains the Talmud, the actions of Bilgah were indeed her father’s doing, as “The talk of the child in the market-place, is either that of his father or of his mother.”

Surely, if Bilgah acted in such a shameless, audacious and disrespectful manner, it is because she heard these words at home. The apple does not fall from the tree, and surely Bilgah was a product of her upbringing.

### **Kamza & Bar Kamza**

In explaining the error of the servant in inviting Bar Kamza instead of Kamza, and the reason that Bar Kamza came to the party, although he knew of the disdain that the host had towards him, Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidlis (Maharsha) explains the relationship between the two men.

Maharsha recounts, that as the name reflects, Bar (the son of) Kamza, was indeed the son of the Kamza in our story. While the father was a friend of the host, his child was an enemy.

Bar Kamza was therefore not surprised when he received the invitation to the party. He assumed that because of the host’s relationship with his father, he desired to forgive and forget and amend their broken relationship.

Sadly though, this was not the case, and the infuriated proprietor expelled Bar Kamza without even the slightest protest from the distinguished guests.

Bar Kamza however, sought revenge—not only against the guests but against all of Judea. His burning hate caused that he should turn against his own people and cause them countless horrors and deaths.

Kamza’s relationship with Bar Kamza sheds light as to the blame that he too shares in the destruction. “The talk of the child in the market-place, is either that of his father or of his mother.”

Surely, if Bar Kamza was able to act in such a deplorable fashion, it is because the seeds of such vengeful hate were planted in his father’s home.

It is because of these seeds that Kamza—in a sense—deserves to be remembered for all time, as the individual that caused the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

### **The lesson**

The lesson is clear and obvious. We must realize that our children are soil, where our every actions are noticed, absorbed and then later in life regurgitated.

Each singular minute action is a seed that is able to grow from it; either a fruit bearing tree or a monstrous weed.

Although we may think nothing of our actions, their reverberations are enormous. Just as the innocent actions of Kamza eventually caused the destruction of the Temple by his son, a positive action has the ability to be amplified in our children as well—bringing about the redemption.

The Talmud (Sota 11a) exclaims: “The measure in the case of the good is greater than the measure in the case of punishment.”

Just as negative action that is caused by the father is remembered, so too, will surely be the positive.

May we indeed merit that all the positive actions of our fathers bear positive fruit in ourselves, and our goodness again reverberate in our children—with the ultimate positivity of the coming of Moshiach, Now!