

STAGES OF CHANGES – PART I: DENIAL

Background

This event took place during the period of Chanukah. The Greek/Syrians were occupying Israel, attempting to Hellenize the Jewish people. But even before the Yivanim entered Yerushalayim, there were many Hellenists amongst the Jews – Jews who were more Greek than the Greeks. One of the most powerful of this group was Yakum, the nephew of the Nasi Yossi ben Yozer.

Clearly, this is not the first time that Yakum debated religion with his uncle. Despite being brought up as a Jew, Yakum bought into the hedonistic culture of the Greeks. He built his life, fame, and fortune on being a Hellenist. Clearly, this wasn't something he just came to; rather, he thought about it, talked about it, discussed it, and firmly accepted the Greek culture as his way of life.

Questions

What about this conversation changed this man so radically, completely, and quickly? What transformed him so that not only did he change his entire outlook on life, he actually recanted all that he had done till then?

מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה סה פסקה כב

יקום איש צרורות היה בן אחותו של ר' יוסי בן יועזר איש צרידה והוה רכיב סוסיא בשבתא אזל קומי שריתא למצטבלא א"ל חמי סוסי דארכבי מרי וחמי סוסך דארכבך מוך א"ל אם כך למכעיסיו ק"ו לעושי רצונו א"ל עשה אדם רצונו יותר ממך אמר לו ואם כך לעושי רצונו קל וחומר למכעיסיו נכנס בו הדבר כארס של עכנא הלך וקיים בעצמו ארבע מיתות בית דין סקילה שריפה הרג וחנק מה עשה הביא קורה נעצה בארץ וקשר בה נימא וערך העצים והקיפן גדר של אבנים ועשה מדורה לפניו ונעץ את החרב באמצע והצית האור תחת העצים מתחת האבנים ונתלה בקורה ונחנק קדמתו האש נפסקה הנימה נפל לאש קדמתו חרב ונפל עליו גדר ונשרף נתנמנם יוסי בן יועזר איש צרידה וראה מטתו פרוחה באויר אמר בשעה קלה קדמני זה לגן עדן

Yakum, the nephew of Rebbe Yossi Ben Yozer, was riding on a horse on Shabbos as the Yivanim were taking Rebbe Yossi out to be killed. Yakum said to his uncle, "Look at the horse my master places me on, and look at the one that your Master places you on."

R' Yossi responded, "If so to those who anger Him, how much more so to those who do His will?"

Yakum exclaimed, "Is there anyone who does His will more than you?" to which R' Yossi answered, "If so to those who do His will, how much more to those who anger Him?"

These words entered Yakum like the poison of a snake. He then fulfilled on himself the four types of death given by Bais Din. When R' Yossi was about to die, he saw the bed of Yakum flying in the air and exclaimed, "He is entering Gan Eden before me."