

ONAH: THE TORAH'S SENSITIVITY TO ANOTHER'S PAIN

Background

Because Rebbe Eliezer was put in *cheirem*, he suffered pain. From that pain that he suffered, he cried out and Rabban Gamliel died.

Questions

What did Rabban Gamliel do wrong? He was the *Nasi*; it was his job to enforce the rule of following the majority. Rebbe Eliezer was violating that rule, so as the *Nasi*, Rabban Gamliel acted as he should have acted. Granted this caused pain to Rebbe Eliezer, but Rabban Gamliel did nothing wrong. In fact, Rebbe Eliezer was the one in the wrong because he ignored the ruling of the majority.

Even more pointedly, when Rabban Gamliel was at sea, he stood up and said, "Not for my honor, nor for the honor of my father's house did I do this..." and the sea calmed down. That means that in Shamayim, they agreed. HASHEM was saying that it was true. What he did was for the good of *Klal Yisroel*, and it was the right thing to do. So why did Rabban Gamliel die because of this decision?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף נט/ב

אמרו אותו היום הביאו כל טהרות שטיהר רבי אליעזר ושרפום באש ונמנו עליו וברכוהו ואמרו מי ילך ויודיעו אמר להם רבי עקיבא אני אלך שמא ילך אדם שאינו הגון ויודיעו ונמצא מחריב את כל העולם כולו מה עשה רבי עקיבא לבש שחורים ונתעטף שחורים וישב לפניו ברחוק ארבע אמות אמר לו רבי אליעזר עקיבא מה יום מיומים אמר לו רבי כמדומה לי שחבירים בדילים ממך אף הוא קרע בגדיו וחלץ מנעליו ונשמט וישב על גבי קרקע זלגו עיניו דמעות לקה העולם שלישי בזיתים ושלישי בחטים ושלישי בשעורים ויש אומרים אף בצק שבידי אשה טפח תנא אך גדול היה באותו היום שבכל מקום שנתן בו עיניו רבי אליעזר נשרף ואף רבן גמליאל היה בא בספינה עמד עליו נחשול לטבעו אמר כמדומה לי שאין זה אלא בשביל רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס עמד על רגליו ואמר רבונו של עולם גלוי וידוע לפניך שלא לכבודי עשיתי ולא לכבוד בית אבא עשיתי אלא לכבודך שלא ירבו מחלוקות בישראל נח הים מזעפו אימא שלום דביתהו דרבי אליעזר אחתיה דרבן גמליאל הואי מההוא מעשה ואילך לא הוה שבקה ליה לרבי אליעזר למיפל על אפיה ההוא יומא ריש ירחא הוה ואיחלף לה בין מלא לחסר איכא דאמרי אתא עניא וקאי אבבא אפיקא ליה ריפתא אשכחתיה דנפל על אנפיה אמרה ליה קום קטלית לאחי אדהכי נפק שיפורא מבית רבן גמליאל דשכיב אמר לה מנא ידעת אמרה ליה כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא כל השערים ננעלים חוץ משערי אונאה

That day they brought all of the questions that Rebbe Eliezer had ruled upon (based on his position) and burned them. The Rabbonon then voted and excommunicated Rebbe Eliezer. They then asked, "Who should go and tell Rebbe Eliezer that he is excommunicated?" Rebbe Akiva said to them, "I will go, lest someone who isn't appropriate tells him and they will destroy the world." What did Rebbe Akiva do? He wore black clothes, draped himself in black, and sat in front of Rebbe Eliezer at a distance of four amos.

Rebbe Eliezer said to him, "Akiva, what is special about today?" Rebbe Akiva answered, "Rebbe, it seems that your friends have separated from you." Rebbe Eliezer then tore his clothes, took off his shoes and sat on the floor, a distance of four amos from Rebbe Akiva. His eyes filled with tears and the world's crops were smitten, a third of the olives, a third of the wheat, and a third of the barley.

Rabban Gamliel (the Nasi) was travelling by ship, and a storm arose threatening to drown him. He said, "It appears to me that this is only out of honor for Rebbe Eliezer." He stood on his feet and said, "Master of the Universe, it is clear and revealed before You that I didn't do this (put Rebbe Eliezer into cheirem) for my honor, nor for the honor of my father's house, but rather for Your honor so that there shouldn't be arguments in Yisroel." Immediately, the storm abated.

Aima Shalom, the wife of Rebbe Eliezer, was the sister of Rabban Gamliel. From the time that Rebbe Eliezer was put into cheirem, she didn't allow him to put his head down for Tachanun. One day she thought it was Rosh Chodesh, so she didn't stop her husband. She walked in and found him with his head on his arm. She said to him, "Get up, for you have killed my brother." Shortly thereafter, the word came from the Nasi's house that Rabban Gamliel had died. Rebbe Eliezer said to her, "How did you know?" She answered, "This is the tradition I have from my father's fathers' houses: that all of the gates are closed, with the exception of the gates of oppression."