

KAMTZA
— and —
BAR KAMTZA

*The Hidden Goodness of Tisha B'Av
and the Secret of the Tzimtzum*



— R' JOEY ROSENFELD —

The Day Whose Inside Is Hidden From Its Outside

Be'ezras Hashem, we are preparing ourselves for Tisha B'Av, whether it arrives this year in the form that we have known throughout the generations, as a day of fasting, mourning, tears, churban, and exile, or whether we merit the full revelation of its inner content through the coming of Mashiach Tzidkeinu. Either way, Tisha B'Av is coming, and Tisha B'Av demands of us a very particular kind of preparation. It is not only a day on which we remember what was lost. It is a day on which we confront the mystery that the very place of loss is also the place where the deepest redemption is hidden. Of all the days of the year, Tisha B'Av may be the day whose inner reality is furthest removed from its outward appearance. Everything about the day seems to testify to absence, destruction, concealment, and grief, and yet Chazal insist that hidden within this very day is the deepest secret of geulah.

The revealed face of Tisha B'Av is known to us. We know its halachos. We know its restrictions. We know the fasting, the sitting low, the mourning, the kinah, and the grief over the Beis HaMikdash and over all of the suffering that has unfolded from that churban throughout the generations. The external experience of the day is the experience of a world in which the house of Hashem is not standing openly in its place, the Shechinah is not revealed as it should be, and Klal

Yisrael still wanders through the long corridors of exile. Yet at the very same time, we know that this external appearance does not exhaust the meaning of the day. There is a *pnimiyus* to Tisha B'Av that is not yet revealed to us in its fullness. The day which appears to be the deepest descent of Jewish history is also the day that Chazal refer to as a *moed*, and the day upon which Mashiach is born.

This means that Tisha B'Av is built upon the distinction between *chitzoniyus* and *pnimiyus*, between the way a thing appears outwardly and the way it exists in its root. In its *chitzoniyus*, Tisha B'Av is mourning. In its *pnimiyus*, it is *geulah*. In its *chitzoniyus*, it is *churban*. In its *pnimiyus*, it is the hidden light of Mashiach. But these two dimensions are not two separate realities. An inside and an outside are always two dimensions of one thing. The outside is the vessel that contains the inside, and the inside is the light that gives meaning to the vessel. A container is only necessary when there is something being contained, and content can only become manifest through some form of containment. The outside of Tisha B'Av is therefore not disconnected from its inside; the mourning itself is the garment within which the hidden *moed* is concealed.

The avodah of Tisha B'Av is therefore very delicate. It is not to deny the *chitzoniyyus* of the day, because the pain is real, the churban is real, and the exile is real. But it is also not to become so swallowed by the *chitzoniyyus* that we forget that there is an inside to the day. We are asked to stand honestly inside the mourning while remaining faithful to the hidden light that the mourning contains. We cry because the light is hidden, but the very fact that we know it is hidden means that we know it is still present. We grieve the concealment, but we do so with the knowledge that concealment itself is a vessel for a revelation that has not yet arrived. This is the paradox of Tisha B'Av: the day whose outer face is destruction and whose inner root is the beginning of redemption.

The Letter Tes and the Goodness Concealed Within It

The secret of Tisha B'Av is already hinted to in the letter that corresponds to the day. The month of Av can be read through the order of the aleph-beis, and Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the month, corresponds to the letter tes. The Zohar HaKadosh teaches that the letter tes carries within it the secret of *tuvu ganiz begavei*, that its goodness is hidden inside itself. The form of the letter reflects this inner reality. The tes bends inward. It appears almost like a vessel whose content has folded back into itself, a container in which the light is

present but not outwardly revealed. The good is not absent, but concealed. The light is not missing, but hidden within the containment.

This is the secret of the Ohr HaGanuz, the hidden light that is present specifically within concealment. Externally, the number nine represents multiplicity reaching its fullest expansion before being gathered back into the unity of ten. Nine is three times three, the spread of detail and extension before the yud arrives and reabsorbs multiplicity into a higher oneness. At the level of *chitzoniyyus*, nine can appear as expansion, distance, separation, and the full complexity of a world that has moved outward from its source. Yet the Zohar reveals that precisely inside this extension there is a hidden tov. The furthest point of multiplicity becomes the place where the most concealed goodness is stored.

This is Tisha B'Av itself. The day looks externally like destruction, but hidden within it is the goodness of redemption. It looks like mourning, but concealed within it is the birth of Mashiach. It looks like exile, but its inner root is the secret of geulah. The tes teaches us that the deepest tov is not always located where the light is obvious. Sometimes the most hidden goodness is located specifically where goodness is least visible, where the form folds inward, where the light appears to have retreated into itself, and where the vessel seems to contain only darkness. Tisha B'Av is the day of the

tes because its goodness is not yet revealed on the surface. It is *ganuz begavei*, hidden inside the very concealment that defines the day.

For that reason, the avodah of Tisha B'Av is not only to contemplate darkness, but to search for the hidden good that rests within it. This does not mean that a person pretends to taste the light before it is revealed, or that one bypasses the genuine pain of the day. It means that even while standing in the *chitzoniyus* of the churban, one remains aware that the *pnimiyus* of the day is not destruction but birth. *Olamecha tireh bechayecha*, “seeing your worlds in your days” means that a person can begin to see the light of their future world even within this world, to draw some glimmer of the hidden future into present life. Tisha B'Av asks us to believe that even when the light cannot yet be tasted, it is already present in the hidden inwardness of the day.

The Sugya of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

One of the central sugyos through which Chazal explain the churban of Yerushalayim is the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. The Gemara teaches: *Akamtza u'Var Kamtza charuv Yerushalayim*, that because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, Yerushalayim was destroyed. On the level of *chitzoniyus*, the Gemara tells a tragic story of interpersonal failure. A man makes a seudah and intends to invite his friend Kamtza, but

the messenger mistakenly brings Bar Kamtza, who is his enemy. When Bar Kamtza arrives, the host publicly humiliates him and demands that he leave. Bar Kamtza pleads to remain, first offering to pay for what he eats, then half the seudah, and then the entire seudah, but the host refuses. The chachamim are present and remain silent, and Bar Kamtza concludes that they agree with his humiliation.

This reading is true and necessary. The sugya is certainly about *sinas chinam*, about humiliation, resentment, cruelty, and the refusal to make space for another person. It is about what happens when a person becomes so trapped in their own narrative that another person's pain no longer matters. It is about the catastrophic power of interpersonal failure, especially when others who could intervene remain silent. On this level, Kamtza and Bar Kamtza is a story about the external symptoms of Tisha B'Av: hatred without cause, fractured relationships, the inability to forgive, and the spiritual devastation that emerges when one Jew is pushed out of the seudah of another.

But if Tisha B'Av itself has a *chitzoniyyus* and a *pnimiyyus*, then the Gemara that explains Tisha B'Av also has an outside and an inside. On the outside, Kamtza and Bar Kamtza are two figures in a tragic story that exposes the consequences of baseless hatred. On the inside, they are also two stages in the deepest drama of creation itself. They are two expressions of

concealment, two relationships to the Tzimtzum, and two ways in which the hiddenness of HaKadosh Baruch Hu enters into reality. The *chitzoniyus* of the story explains the visible cause of churban. The *pnimiyus* of the story opens a window into the spiritual root of churban: the failure to understand the purpose of the Tzimtzum.

The Infinite Light and the Desire for Nishmas Yisrael

In order to understand this, we have to return to the beginning of creation. Before the creation of the world, there was only the infinite light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The essence of Hashem Himself is beyond all speech, beyond all grasp, and beyond even the category of infinitude as we understand it. But in the realm of what can be spoken, we speak of the Ohr Ein Sof, the Infinite Light that saturated all possibility. There was no above and below, no right and left, no time and space, no separation, no otherness, and no possibility for anything to exist as something distinct from Divine infinitude. Everything was utterly nullified in the absolute revelation of Hashem's light.

Then it arose in the desire of HaKadosh Baruch Hu to create the world. The reason for this desire is not because Hashem needed the world, *chas veshalom*, but because He desired Nishmas Yisrael. He desired the work of Klal Yisrael. He

desired the pleasure, so to speak, that would emerge when Jewish souls would awaken love, longing, Torah, mitzvos, tefillah, and *deveikus* from within the lowest realm. Hashem desired a *dirah betachtonim*, a dwelling place specifically down below, where His light would be revealed not only in the obvious regions of spiritual illumination, but within a world that appears separate, concealed, and distant from Him.

In order for such a world to exist, the infinite light had to be concealed. HaKadosh Baruch Hu was *metzamtzem* Himself, so to speak. He contracted, concealed, and held back the full revelation of His light in order to create the appearance of a *chalal*, a vacant space, a womb of existence in which something other than absolute revealed Godliness could appear. This is the Tzimtzum. But the Tzimtzum is not merely an abstract kabbalistic structure. It is the most radical expression of Hashem's love for Klal Yisrael. *Abavah mekalkeles es hashurah* means that love causes the lover to move beyond the ordinary order. HaKadosh Baruch Hu loves Nishmas Yisrael so deeply that He was willing to conceal Himself in order to give us space to exist, choose, search, struggle, and reveal Him from below.

The Tzimtzum therefore exists because Hashem wants us. It is not a withdrawal born of absence, but a concealment born of love. It is the act through which HaKadosh Baruch Hu

makes room for the volitional work of the human being, and more specifically for the avodah of Nishmas Yisrael. The world exists because Hashem desired that there should be a place where His light is not obvious and where Klal Yisrael would reveal Him anyway. The concealment exists for the sake of revelation, and the Tzimtzum exists for the sake of the light that Yisrael will uncover within it.

Yesh, the 231 Gates, and the Garment of Creation

Before creation, everything was Ayin, the absolute nothingness of Ohr Ein Sof, where no independent existence could stand. Through the Tzimtzum, HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the possibility of Yesh, of somethingness, of a reality that could appear to have its own existence. But the deepest and truest Yesh that Hashem desires is Nishmas Yisrael. Yisrael can be read as *yesh reish-lamed-aleph*, the Yesh of the 231 gates. These 231 gates are the primordial combinations of the letters, the root of the Olam HaMalbush, the garment through which Hashem begins to express Himself outward. Every letter is simultaneously Tzimtzum and revelation: it limits, defines, shapes, and conceals, but precisely through that limitation expression becomes possible.

The levush of the 231 gates is the first garment of expression. Hashem, so to speak, garbs His infinite light in the *osiyos*, in the letters and combinations through which measured reality

can begin to appear. This is *Hashem melech ge'us lavesh*, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu garbs Himself in majesty in order to reveal His Malchus. The letters are concealments, but they are also the only way in which the hidden light can become accessible to a world of form, measure, and meaning. The whole purpose of this levush is Nishmas Yisrael, because the Jewish soul is the one that can enter the world of letters, Torah, mitzvos, speech, tefillah, and action, and reveal the light of Hashem through the very structures that conceal Him.

This means that Klal Yisrael is the reason the Tzimtzum continues. The nature of Ohr Ein Sof is to overwhelm all boundaries and return everything to absolute unity. Left to the sheer force of infinitude, the world would be swallowed back into Ayin. The only reason reality remains in its measured state is because HaKadosh Baruch Hu desires the avodah of Yisrael within the Tzimtzum. He continues to hold Himself back so that we can reveal Him here. The Tzimtzum is the gift that makes our avodah possible, and Klal Yisrael is the inner purpose for which that gift is sustained.

When the Purpose of Tzimtzum Is Forgotten

If the purpose of the Tzimtzum is Nishmas Yisrael revealing Hashem within concealment, then the Tzimtzum itself becomes threatened whenever that mission is forgotten. If Klal Yisrael no longer seeks HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the low places, in the difficulties, in the dark territories of the mind, heart, relationship, and world, then the concealment no longer serves its purpose. If we only want Hashem in revelation, in clarity, in spiritual comfort, and in places where His presence still feels obvious, then we have misunderstood why the Tzimtzum exists. Hashem did not create concealment so that we would flee from it. He created concealment so that we would reveal Him there.

Churban is what happens when the vessel can no longer hold the light. It is not merely destruction in the ordinary sense. It is the undoing of the garment, the tearing of the levush, the revelation of a light so overwhelming that measured reality cannot stand before it. When Hashem removes the garment of concealment, the infinite light floods back in, and the vessel of finite reality is undone. The world is not destroyed because Hashem is absent, but because His presence is revealed in a way that the vessel can no longer contain. This is the frightening *pnimiyus* of churban.

This is also the secret behind the danger of the fiftieth gate of impurity. The Ramak seems to imply that there is a fiftieth gate of tumah, while the Vilna Gaon teaches that there cannot be such a gate, because the fiftieth gate is the Sha'ar HaNun, the revelation of the highest light. The Leshem explains that both are true. There is no fiftieth gate of impurity in the sense of a place utterly devoid of Godliness, because there is no such place. But there is a fiftieth gate in the sense that when the descent reaches a point at which the mission of concealment has been completely forgotten, Hashem must begin again. The Tzimtzum is undone, the light of the beginning returns, and the vessel of the current order cannot remain. That return itself is churban.

The Beis HaMikdash as the Central Manifestation of Tzimtzum

If the purpose of the Tzimtzum is Nishmas Yisrael, then there must be a place within creation where this secret becomes concentrated. There must be a point in space where the paradox of concealment and revelation stands most openly, where the infinite light of Hashem is received specifically through a finite place. That point is the *Even Hashesiyah*, the root point of the *reshimu* and the foundation from which measured existence unfolds. Atop it stands the Kodesh HaKodashim, where *makom ha'aron eino min hamidah*, the

place of the Aron is not within measure. There, measure and beyond-measure exist simultaneously. There, the Tzimtzum and the transcendence of Tzimtzum touch one another.

Around the Kodesh HaKodashim stands the Beis HaMikdash. The Beis HaMikdash is the great secret of Tzimtzum in this world, because it is a physical house in which the Shechinah rests. But how can a physical house contain HaKadosh Baruch Hu? *Hinei hashamayim u'shmei hashamayim lo yechalkelucha*, the heavens and the heavens of the heavens cannot contain You. Certainly no building can contain the infinite glory of Hashem. The answer is that Hashem chooses to be *metzamtzem* His Shechinah there. *Tzamtzem Shechinaso bein badei ha'aron*. Out of love for Yisrael, He constricts His revealed glory so that we can encounter Him as Avinu Malkeinu, bring korbanos before Him, serve Him, and receive His Malchus.

The Beis HaMikdash is therefore not merely a holy building. It is the central garment of Divine love in this world. It is the place where HaKadosh Baruch Hu agrees, so to speak, to be encountered within measure for the sake of Nishmas Yisrael. It is the place where the infinite enters the finite without destroying it, where the Shechinah rests within the world without the world being nullified out of existence. The entire possibility of avodah depends upon this secret. If Hashem did not conceal and garb His light, we could not stand before

Him, serve Him, speak to Him, bring korbanos, or become a people whose actions matter. The Beis HaMikdash is the place where the love that motivated the Tzimtzum becomes embodied in stone, space, and avodah.

Rebbe Nachman and the Tearing of the Garment

Rebbe Nachman explains this with astonishing clarity in Torah Reish-Yud-Tes. The pasuk in Eichah says “*bitza imraso*”, and the Midrash explains “*bitza purpurei dilei*”, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu tore His garment. Rebbe Nachman asks, so to speak, what is the garment of Hashem? The garment is the Tzimtzum. Since the Beis HaMikdash cannot actually contain the infinite glory and greatness of Hashem, it can only stand because Hashem, out of His love for Yisrael, constricts and garbs His greatness in order to rest His Shechinah there and reveal His Malchus. This is the meaning of *Hashem melech ge’us lavesb*, that Hashem garbs His grandeur in order to become King for us.

When Klal Yisrael sins and forgets the purpose of the Tzimtzum, Hashem no longer garbs and constricts His glory in that same way. He reveals His greatness, tears the garment, and the Beis HaMikdash cannot remain. The destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is therefore the tearing of the levush of the Tzimtzum. Externally, Tisha B’Av is the destruction of the building. Internally, it is a sparking of the undoing of the

Tzimtzum itself. The vessel breaks because the mission of the vessel has been forgotten.

This is an essential point. The Beis HaMikdash is not destroyed because Hashem is weak, absent, or distant. It is destroyed because the garment that allowed the infinite light to be received within measure is torn. When the garment is intact, the Shechinah can rest in the Mikdash and Klal Yisrael can reveal Hashem through the avodah of this world. When the garment is torn, the infinite light is no longer contained in that form, and the physical structure cannot hold it. Churban, according to this reading, is the revelation of Hashem's light in a mode that finite vessels can no longer bear.

The Necessity of the Tzimtzum

Until the final geulah, we do not want the Tzimtzum to be fully undone. The Tzimtzum is not a mistake. It is the space of our avodah. It is the place in which we can reveal Hashem specifically where He seems hidden. “*Yafah sha'ah achas ba'olam hazeh mikol chaye ha'olam haba*” means that one moment of avodah in this world is more precious than all the pleasures of the World to Come, because only in this world can a person find Hashem inside the apparently empty *chahal*. Only here can one transform the vacant space into life.

Chalal and *chayim* share the same gematria, and the entire task of existence is to transform the *chalal* into *chayim*.

This is the *dirah betachtonim*. Hashem wants to be revealed in the territories of the mind and heart where He appears absent. He wants to be found in the struggles, resentments, confusions, yetzer hara, disappointments, failures, and broken places where a person feels least able to see Him. He wants us to descend into the spaces where we feel unable to forgive, unable to soften, unable to lean in, unable to find light, and there discover that He is present as well. The Tzimtzum exists so that these places should exist, and these places exist so that Hashem should be revealed there through our avodah.

When we only want Hashem in revelation, we have forgotten the purpose of concealment. When we only want to encounter Him in holiness, clarity, and comfort, we have misunderstood the gift of the Tzimtzum. The Tzimtzum was not given so that we could admire the idea of concealment while refusing to enter its lived reality. It was given so that Klal Yisrael could reveal that even the places that appear most distant from Hashem are still held within Him. This is where the sugya of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza begins to open in its pnimiyus.

Two Ways of Understanding the Tzimtzum

There are two major ways to speak about the Tzimtzum. In the writings of **Rav Chaim Vital**, the Tzimtzum is described as a concealment or removal of light, so to speak, which allows for the appearance of a vacant space. Hashem conceals the full revelation of the Ohr Ein Sof, and through that concealment there can be a *chalal* in which worlds, vessels, and free will can emerge. In this language, the Tzimtzum appears primarily as a withdrawal or hiddenness of light for the sake of creating space.

But the Arizal had another student, **Rav Yisrael Sarug**, who reveals the world of the Malbush. In that system, the Tzimtzum is not primarily described as a removal, but as an expression. Hashem reveals a levush. The garment emerges from within the One who wears it. Concealment itself is a form of revelation. The early Sages describe this with the phrase “*kehadein kamtza d’levushei minei u’bei*”, like the locust whose garment emerges from within itself. The locust has an outer covering, an exoskeleton, that appears to separate its inside from the outside, but that covering emerges from within the creature itself.

This gives us a very different lens on the Tzimtzum. The Tzimtzum is not outside Hashem, *chas veshalom*. It is a levush that emerges from within the revelation itself. Hashem reveals

His capacity for concealment, and that concealment itself is a further expression of His infinitude. The infinite is so infinite that it can reveal itself through its opposite as well. At the root of the Tzimtzum, the concealment is still transparently connected to the light. The garment itself reveals the One who wears it. This is the secret of Kamtza.

Kamtza as the Shoresh of the Tzimtzum

Kamtza is related to *kimutz*, contraction, withholding, and gathering inward. It is also connected to the phrase “*kehadein kamtza d’levushei minci u’bei*”, the locust whose garment emerges from within itself. Kamtza represents the shoresh of the Tzimtzum, the original Divine garment that emerges from within the light itself. At this level, concealment is still experienced as revelation. One can look at the Tzimtzum and understand that Hashem is hiding Himself out of love, that the garment is not a denial of the light but the way in which the light becomes accessible to creation.

This is why, in the Gemara, the host wants Kamtza at the seudah. Kamtza is welcome because Kamtza represents the form of concealment that we can tolerate. It is the holy idea of Tzimtzum, the root of the *chalal*, the concept that Hashem makes space for us because He desires our avodah. At this level, the Tzimtzum still feels like Torah. It still feels like a deep secret. It still feels like HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The

concealment is not yet experienced as loneliness, humiliation, confusion, resentment, and pain. It remains near enough to its source that its Divine origin can still be perceived.

The distinction between Kamtza and Bar Kamtza now begins to emerge in an entirely different light. Kamtza represents the shoresh of the Tzimtzum itself, the original concealment which remains transparently connected to its source. Bar Kamtza, however, represents the offspring of the Tzimtzum, the secondary effects that emerge as concealment descends through level after level until it manifests as the actual difficulties, fractures, resentments, humiliations, confusions, and obscurities of lived existence. The tragedy of the story is that while Kamtza is welcome at the seudah, Bar Kamtza is not. The root of concealment is acceptable, but its consequences are rejected. The source of the Tzimtzum can be tolerated, but the actual labor demanded by the Tzimtzum is refused.

Bar Kamtza as the Offspring of the Tzimtzum

Bar Kamtza means the son of Kamtza, the child of Kamtza, the consequence of Kamtza. If Kamtza is the original Tzimtzum, Bar Kamtza is what comes about when that Tzimtzum descends into the lower worlds. Bar Kamtza is the Tzimtzum after it has become the real experiences of life: concealment that no longer feels holy, constriction that no

longer feels like a secret, limitation that no longer appears as a garment of love. It is the place where a person feels alone, excluded, humiliated, confused, resentful, and unable to locate Hashem within the experience itself.

This is the place where the avodah becomes most serious. It is not difficult, relatively speaking, to speak about the Tzimtzum when it remains in its root as a luminous concept. A person can learn the sugya of the Tzimtzum, speak about Hashem making space, and even feel the beauty of a concealment that emerges from love. But when that same Tzimtzum becomes the painful reality of another person's presence at my seudah, or the humiliation of a Jew in front of the chachamim, or the resentment that I cannot let go of, then the question becomes whether I actually understand the purpose of the Tzimtzum. The avodah is not only to understand that concealment comes from Hashem. The avodah is to reveal Hashem within the consequences of concealment themselves.

According to this reading, the churban begins when Bar Kamtza is rejected. This means that the destruction begins when Klal Yisrael can no longer tolerate the work of finding Hashem in the lower offshoots of the Tzimtzum. It is not enough to invite Kamtza, to accept the root concept of concealment. The Beis HaMikdash exists in order to reveal Hashem in this world, and this world is not the clean root of

the Tzimtzum. This world is Bar Kamtza. It is the complicated, painful, fractured, and difficult offspring of the Tzimtzum. If Bar Kamtza cannot be brought into the seudah, then the seudah has failed to fulfill its purpose.

The Seudah of This World

The Gemara tells us that there was **a man who made a seudah**. This world itself is a seudah. It begins with the intended seudah of the Etz HaDa'as Tov V'Ra, which was meant to be eaten in its proper time on Shabbos. It continues through the seudah of Purim, where concealment itself becomes the place of *v'nahafoch hu*. It culminates in the seudah of Livyasan, where the entire history of the world is transformed into a meal of clarified pleasure before Hashem. A seudah is the place where physicality is taken in, broken down, elevated, and returned to its source. The world is a seudah because the world is the place where concealment must be eaten, digested, refined, and transformed.

The seudah in the Gemara is made by ***habu gavra***, a certain man, a language that can be read in this context as pointing to Gevurah. This world is created through din, measure, limitation, and Tzimtzum. The whole banquet of existence unfolds through the concealment that allows there to be vessels, boundaries, and separate experiences. At that seudah, **Kamtza is meant to be invited**. The shores of the

Tzimtzum belongs at the table. The world needs the root of concealment because without it there is no world, no avodah, no beirur, and no possibility of revealing Hashem from below.

But the messenger brings Bar Kamtza. The servant brings the offspring of the Tzimtzum, the lived consequence of concealment. This is the actual test of the seudah. Can the world make room not only for the holy root of concealment, but for the apparently difficult consequences that emerge from it? Can the host tolerate not only the concept of Tzimtzum, but the person who embodies the discomfort, humiliation, and difficulty of the Tzimtzum as it appears in life? Can the seudah of this world include the Bar Kamtza, or only the Kamtza? The answer to that question determines whether the Beis HaMikdash can stand.

Bar Kamtza's First Teaching: The Sweetening of Dinim

When Bar Kamtza is humiliated, he does not immediately leave. He begins by trying to break the din into smaller pieces. He offers to pay for what he eats. When that is refused, he offers to pay for half the seudah. When that is refused, he offers to pay for the entire seudah. On the level of pshat, he is desperately trying to avoid public humiliation. On the deeper level, Bar Kamtza is teaching one of the

primary ways of dealing with the Gevuros that emerge from the Tzimtzum.

When a din appears as one overwhelming whole, it often feels impossible to sweeten. A resentment, fear, conflict, or pain can seem too large to hold and too heavy to transform. The koach of Yitzchak Avinu is the ability to break the din into parts, to grind it smaller and smaller until it becomes possible to work with. This is the secret of *shochakan yafeh yafeh ad sheyehei dak min badak*, grinding and refining until the substance becomes fine upon fine. It is the same secret as breaking the great boulder into many smaller stones, or grinding the ketores, or chewing the maror. The din becomes sweetened when it is no longer encountered as an undifferentiated wall but as something that can be handled piece by piece.

Bar Kamtza's offers follow this pattern. Let me pay for what I ate. Let me take responsibility for one defined part. If not, let me pay for half. If not, let me pay for the whole thing. He is trying to reveal a way of living with the offspring of the Tzimtzum. The moment may not become perfect, but it can become manageable. The pain may not disappear, but it can be broken down into something that allows for compassionate compromise, for some movement, for some possibility of containing the difficulty without destroying the entire seudah. The host's refusal means that even this way of

sweetening the dinim is rejected. The Bar Kamtza cannot be tolerated even when he offers to be broken into smaller, more manageable pieces.

The Silence of the Chachamim

The chachamim are present at the seudah, and they remain silent. On the simple level, this silence is a failure to protest the humiliation of another Jew. On a deeper level, the silence must be understood in relation to the Tzimtzum itself. Rebbe Nachman teaches in Torah Samech-Daled that the root of the Tzimtzum can only be approached through silence. At the shoresh of the *chalal hapanui*, where the mind confronts the paradox of Hashem revealing Himself through concealment, the response is *shtok*, silence. *Shtok, kach alah b'machshavah*. There are questions that belong to the root of the Tzimtzum, and there the only true response is holy silence.

But the silence that belongs to Kamtza does not necessarily belong to Bar Kamtza. At the root of the paradox of concealment, silence may be the only honest response. But when concealment descends into the pain of another Yid, into humiliation, rejection, loneliness, and actual suffering, silence can become a failure. There the *avodah* is not only silence. There the work is *tza'akas Bnei Yisrael*. There one must become the voice of the kav of infinite light entering the

chalal, speaking into the place where Hashem's light needs to be drawn down. Silence may be holy at the root of the Tzimtzum, but in the offshoots of the Tzimtzum, silence can become abandonment.

This is why Bar Kamtza interprets their silence as agreement. He sees that the chachamim may know how to be silent before Kamtza, before the root paradox of concealment, but they do not yet know how to speak on behalf of Bar Kamtza, the Jew who is actually suffering inside the consequences of concealment. When another Yid is being pushed out of the seudah, the task is not to remain in the silence of the *shoresh*. The task is to bring the light of Hashem into the place of the actual pain. The failure of the chachamim is therefore part of the same spiritual pattern. They can tolerate Kamtza, but they do not yet know how to redeem Bar Kamtza.

The Descent Into Rome

When Bar Kamtza sees that Klal Yisrael cannot yet make space for him, he goes to Rome. On the surface, this is an act of revenge. In the *pnimiyus* of the sugya, it is also a descent into the place where the next stage of the clarification must occur. Rome is Edom, the field of Eisav, the territory of *Tohu*, *dimyon*, yetzer hara, and the lowest expressions of worldly power. But Mashiach is hidden in Rome. The light of redemption rests specifically in the place where the

concealment appears most distant from holiness. If Klal Yisrael cannot confront Bar Kamtza at the seudah, perhaps the confrontation will be forced through Edom itself.

The Gemara itself reveals that hidden within this descent is an awakening of Mashiach. *Nero Caesar* ultimately leaves Rome, converts, and from him comes Rebbe Meir. Rebbe Meir is described as *ruach apeinu Mashiach Hashem*. He is the one who can learn Torah from Acher, who can enter the territory of *klipah* and extract the fruit while discarding the shell. *Rimon matza, tocho achal, klipaso zarak*. Rebbe Meir knows how to enter the place of Bar Kamtza, take the inner light, and reject the outer peel. The emergence of Rebbe Meir from this chain of events shows that Bar Kamtza's descent into Rome is not devoid of redemptive possibility. Even within the movement that leads toward churban, there is already a hidden awakening of the light that will eventually heal it.

This is consistent with the entire structure of Tisha B'Av. The place that appears to generate destruction is also the place in which Mashiach is concealed. The same day that contains the churban contains the birth of geulah. The same Bar Kamtza who becomes the agent of destruction also becomes the path through which the neshamah of Rebbe Meir emerges. This reality is teaching that the light of redemption is hidden not outside the concealment but within it. The question is

whether Klal Yisrael can descend deeply enough into the concealment to extract the light without being swallowed by the klipah.

The Korban With a Mum

Bar Kamtza tells the Caesar that the Jews are rebelling and suggests that he send a korban to the Beis HaMikdash. On the way, Bar Kamtza places a *mum*, a blemish, on the animal. According to one opinion in the Gemara, the blemish is on the lip. According to another opinion, it is in the eye. The Gemara emphasizes that this *mum* is considered a blemish for Klal Yisrael but is not considered a blemish for the Romans. Bar Kamtza thereby creates a situation in which the korban is halachically problematic for Yisrael but not visibly problematic according to the standards of Edom.

This is the next stage in the unfolding of the sugya. The question of Bar Kamtza is the question of how we encounter a *mum*. Before the Tzimtzum, there is no possibility of blemish, because there is no separate vessel in which defect could appear. At the root of the Tzimtzum, there is the possibility of blemish but not yet an actual blemish. This is the secret of *mum ein bach*, that there is no blemish in You. But once the Tzimtzum descends into the lower worlds, the possibility of blemish becomes actualized. Imperfection

becomes part of the field of avodah. A *mum* is the lived reality of Elokim, of *din*, of limitation, of a world in which vessels can appear cracked, incomplete, and unfit.

The gematria of *mum* is Elokim (86). A *mum* is not merely an external defect; it is a manifestation of *din* within the world of Tzimtzum. To live in this world is to encounter *mumim*, in ourselves, in others, in our relationships, in our histories, and in the brokenness of our own avodah. The question is not whether blemishes exist. The question is how they are understood and what is done with them. The highest avodah is not to pretend that there is no *mum*, but to discover how even the *mum* can become part of the path back to Hashem. The byproducts of the Tzimtzum include the reality of blemish, and therefore the tikkun of the Tzimtzum must include the tikkun of how we relate to blemish.

The Relativity of the Mum

Bar Kamtza's *mum* is extremely precise. It is a *mum* for Yisrael but not a *mum* for Edom. This forces Klal Yisrael into the territory of relative perception, where something can be disqualifying from one point of view and not disqualifying from another. The Rashash teaches that everything depends upon *erchei hakinuyim bilvad*, the relative positioning of terms and categories. What is considered low in one world may be considered high in

another. What is a deficiency in relation to one level may be an advantage in relation to another. The lowest point of the higher world becomes the highest point of the lower world.

This is not a careless relativism in which all categories are erased. It is the deep structure of spiritual reality after the Tzimtzum. Once reality descends into worlds, vessels, levels, and distinctions, terms such as *tumah*, *taharah*, *mum*, *sheleimus*, high, and low must be understood in relation to the level being discussed. The same point can be light in relation to what is below it and vessel in relation to what is above it. The same reality can be whole from one perspective and deficient from another. This is the world of Binah, the world of details, contexts, and distinctions, and it is precisely there that the avodah of Bar Kamtza unfolds.

Bar Kamtza presents Klal Yisrael with a *mum* that demands courage. There may have been a path, *mipnei darkei shalom* or *mipnei shalom malchus*, to accept the korban in that moment as a *hora'as sha'ah*, an extraordinary act of revealing Hashem within the lower complexity of history. Such a move would not have meant that *mumim* are suddenly permitted in the ordinary order. It would have meant that Klal Yisrael had found the *yeshus d'kedushah*, the holy courage, to reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu within the strange and uncomfortable territory of relative blemish. It would have required *vayigbah libo b'darchei Hashem*, the elevation of heart that allows a

person to act boldly for the sake of Heaven when the moment demands it.

The Lip and the Eye

The two opinions about the location of the *mum* deepen the same point. One opinion says that the *mum* was on the lip, *beniv sefasayim*. The mouth is the place of expression, and in the language of the Arizal it points to the emergence of the first vessels in Olam HaAkudim. The lip is the boundary between inwardness and outwardness, the place where thought becomes speech and hiddenness begins to enter expression. If the *mum* is on the lip, then Bar Kamtza is pointing to the blemish that appears at the first instantiation of the *keilim*, at the earliest point where Divine light begins to be expressed through vessels.

The other opinion says that the *mum* was in the eye. The eyes point to Olam HaNekudim and to the Sheviras HaKeilim, the place where the vessels break. If the *mum* is in the eye, then Bar Kamtza is pointing to the blemish that emerges in the world of Nekudim, where the light becomes too intense for the vessels and shattering occurs. Either way, the *mum* directs us to the same essential question: can Klal Yisrael find Hashem not only in the clean root of Tzimtzum but also in the vessels that become blemished as the Tzimtzum descends?

Can the light be revealed in the place where the *keilim* themselves appear broken?

This is the true test of Bar Kamtza. Kamtza is the root of concealment where the garment still clearly belongs to Hashem. Bar Kamtza is the brokenness that emerges later, the *mum* on the lip or the eye, the defect in expression or vision, the place where the vessel no longer seems whole. If Klal Yisrael can reveal Hashem there, then the Tzimtzum has fulfilled its purpose. If not, then the Tzimtzum becomes threatened, because the world has refused the very avodah for which concealment was created.

R' Zecharya ben Avkulas and the Refusal of Decision

At this moment, the chachamim consider bringing the korban despite the mum for the sake of peace with the government. Rav Zecharya ben Avkulas objects, saying that people will say blemished animals may be offered on the mizbeach. They then consider killing Bar Kamtza so that he will not report back to the Caesar. Rav Zecharya objects again, saying that people will say one who places a mum in a korban is killed. As a result, nothing is done. The korban is not brought, Bar Kamtza is not stopped, and the chain of events continues toward churban.

Rav Yochanan says about this: *Anvasanuso shel Rav Zecharya ben Avkulas bechrivah es beiseinu, sarfah es heichaleinu, vehiglisanu mei'artzeinu*. The humility of Rav Zecharya ben Avkulas destroyed our house, burned our sanctuary, and exiled us from our land. This statement is the climax of the sugya. Rav Zecharya's failure is not simply that he was cautious. Caution is often necessary. His failure is that he could not descend into the moment of Bar Kamtza. He remembered the regular structure of the Tzimtzum, the established system, the ordinary order of how holiness must be protected. But the moment demanded the courage to reveal Hashem within the difficult offspring of the Tzimtzum, where the system itself required a deeper application.

His *anavah* was therefore not simple humility. It was an inability to become the vessel through which the light of Hashem could enter the lower confusion of the moment. In the root of the Tzimtzum, one can remain silent, humble, restrained, and deferential before the mystery. But in the offshoots of the Tzimtzum, when another Jew is humiliated, when the Beis HaMikdash is at stake, when the *mum* appears in a relative and complicated form, there must sometimes be an *azus d'kedushah*, a holy courage to act. Rav Zecharya remembered Kamtza but could not enter Bar Kamtza. According to Rav Yochanan, that inability is what destroyed the house.

The Name Avkulas and the Structure of Tzimtzum

Even the name Avkulas can be read as hinting to this structure. The outer letters, *aleph* and *samech*, hint to Ohr Ein Sof. The next inner letters, *beis* and *lamed*, spell lev, which is connected to the chalal, as in *libi chalal b'kirbi*. The innermost letters are kav, the ray of light that enters the chalal after the Tzimtzum. In this remez, the name contains the basic order of the Tzimtzum: *Ein Sof, chalal, and kav*. Rav Zecharya ben Avkulas remembers the structure. He understands the regularity of how the infinite light becomes concealed, how the chalal is formed, and how the kav returns into the vacant space.

But the challenge of the sugya is not merely to remember the structure of the Tzimtzum. The challenge is to understand what the Tzimtzum demands once it descends into Bar Kamtza. It is one thing to know the order of *Ein Sof, chalal, and kav*. It is another thing to become the kav in a moment of actual concealment, to draw light into the practical confusion of this world. Rav Zecharya remembers the higher light, *zecher Kah*, and he remembers the structure of the concealment. But he cannot act within the lower manifestation of that concealment. He cannot bring the light into the place where the *mum*, the Roman government, the humiliation of Bar Kamtza, and the danger of churban all converge.

This is why his name is so bound to the churban in Rav Yochanan's statement. The Beis HaMikdash does not stand on the knowledge of Tzimtzum alone. It stands when the knowledge of Tzimtzum becomes avodah within the lower worlds. It stands when the kav enters the chalal, when the light enters the place of actual darkness, when the Torah descends into the broken detail and reveals Hashem there. Rav Zecharya knew Kamtza, but he could not redeem Bar Kamtza. That is why the garment was torn.

Rav Yochanan and the Drawing Down of Chein

It is specifically Rav Yochanan who identifies this failure. Rav Yochanan is the light of *chein*, the grace and beauty that draws Divine light downward into this world. His name itself carries the sense of Hashem's *chein*, the capacity for the light of Hashem to be received in the lower realms in a way that illuminates rather than overwhelms. Rav Yochanan understands that the Beis HaMikdash stands only when Klal Yisrael can reveal Hashem not only in Kamtza but also in Bar Kamtza. Not only in the root of the Tzimtzum, but in its offshoots. Not only in the holy concealment that still feels close to its source, but in the painful symptoms of concealment where people are actually hurting.

This is the *chein* that leads toward the rebuilding of the Mikdash. The Beis HaMikdash is the place where infinite

light is drawn into finite vessels without destroying them. That requires the ability to find the light in the finite vessel itself, even when that vessel is complicated, cracked, or blemished. Rav Yochanan sees that Rav Zecharya's failure was not simply a legal hesitation, but an inability to draw down the light into the moment. His critique is therefore the beginning of the *tikkun*. The Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt through the opposite movement: through a Klal Yisrael that learns how to bring the light of Hashem into the actual Bar Kamtza of human life.

Chadesh Yameinu K'Kedem

This brings us back to the end of Eichah, where we cry out: *Chadesh yameinu k'kedem*, renew our days as of old. On the surface, this is a tefillah for restoration, that Hashem should return us to what once was. But in this reading, *kedem* can be heard as an allusion to *k'ebadein k'amtza d'levushei m'inei u'bei*. We are asking HaKadosh Baruch Hu to renew our days by revealing how every Bar Kamtza is rooted in Kamtza. We are asking Him to show us that the offshoots of concealment remain rooted in the original garment that emerged from Him. We are asking to understand not only the beginning of the Tzimtzum, but all of its consequences.

Chadesh yameinu refers to our actual days, the lived details of this world, the daily encounters with confusion, difficulty,

resentment, disappointment, humiliation, brokenness, and constriction. These are the days that need renewal. They are the Bar Kamtza of existence, the extensions of concealment as they unfold in time, relationship, body, mind, and history. *K'kedem* means that these days must be renewed by being returned to their root, by being seen again in the light of the original Tzimtzum, the garment of love that emerged from HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself. We are not asking to escape our days. We are asking that our days be restored to their source.

According to this reading, the *tikkun* of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza is not merely an interpersonal rectification, although it certainly includes that dimension. It is the restoration of the relationship between the source of the Tzimtzum and its manifestations within the lower worlds. It is the recognition that the same light which is visible in the shresh of concealment remains present within all of its consequences as well. The avodah of Tisha B'Av is therefore to learn how to encounter HaKadosh Baruch Hu not only in those places where His presence remains discernible, but specifically within those places where concealment has become most intense. For it is there, within the Bar Kamtza itself, that the purpose of the Tzimtzum is fulfilled and the hidden light of redemption begins to emerge.

The Inner Avodah of Tisha B'Av

Tisha B'Av externally is the day of churban, but internally it is the day when we begin to understand the Tzimtzum. It is the day we learn that HaKadosh Baruch Hu concealed Himself because He wanted Nishmas Yisrael. It is the day we realize that the Beis HaMikdash is the garment of that love, the place where the infinite light agreed to be received within measure so that Klal Yisrael could serve Hashem from below. It is the day we cry because the garment was torn, but it is also the day we begin to search for the hidden *tov* inside the tear. The *chitzoniyus* of Tisha B'Av is that the vessel broke. The *pnimiyus* is that the breaking itself reveals how urgently we must recover the purpose of the vessel.

The test of Tisha B'Av is whether we can descend into Bar Kamtza. Can we find Hashem in the byproducts of concealment, in the places where life does not look like Torah and does not feel like kedushah? Can we strengthen another Yid in their place of constriction instead of remaining silent? Can we break overwhelming *dinim* into pieces small enough to sweeten? Can we encounter the *mum* without losing faith in the hidden *sheleimus*? Can we reveal HaKadosh Baruch Hu not only in the light of Kamtza but in the darkness of Bar Kamtza as well?

This is how the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt. Not only through longing for the revealed light, but through learning how to reveal the light in concealment. Not only through mourning the loss of the Mikdash, but through becoming the kind of vessel that can receive the Shechinah again. The Beis HaMikdash is destroyed when the Tzimtzum is misunderstood, when the lower world is rejected, when the Bar Kamtza is pushed out of the seudah. The Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt when Klal Yisrael learns to find Hashem precisely there, in the lower world, in the offshoots, in the details, in the places where the concealment feels most real.

The Redemption of Bar Kamtza

The geulah of Tisha B'Av is not merely the rebuilding of a structure, although it certainly includes the physical rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash in its place. It is also the redemption of Bar Kamtza itself. It is the revelation that the places we rejected, the places we considered too broken, too complicated, too humiliating, too concealed, were themselves waiting to reveal the light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The churban began when we could only tolerate Hashem in Kamtza, in the root of concealment where His presence still felt noble and beautiful. The geulah begins when we discover Him in Bar Kamtza as well, in the consequences of

concealment, in the difficult and broken realities through which human beings actually live.

When the offspring of the Tzimtzum is reunited with its source, the tear in the garment begins to be repaired. When Bar Kamtza is recognized as rooted in Kamtza, the levush can be restored. When the consequences of concealment are understood as part of the original garment of Divine love, the Beis HaMikdash can once again become the place where the Shechinah rests in this world. The hidden tov of the letter *tes* can then emerge from concealment. The *moed* hidden within the mourning can reveal itself. The churban itself can become the birthplace of redemption.

This is why Tisha B'Av is the day of the hidden inside. The outside of the day speaks in the language of loss, but the inside of the day is the secret of Hashem's desire to be found in the lowest place. The mourning is real because the garment was torn. The hope is real because the garment can be restored. The tears are real because Bar Kamtza was rejected. The geulah is real because Bar Kamtza can be redeemed. The hidden goodness of Tisha B'Av is the revelation that even the deepest Tzimtzum is not outside Hashem, and that every consequence of concealment can be brought back to its source.

May we be zocheh to understand the secret of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, to find HaKadosh Baruch Hu not only in the root of concealment but in all of its offshoots, to strengthen every Yid in their place of constriction, and to reveal the light of Hashem even in the deepest places of Tzimtzum. Through this, may we merit the full revelation of the hidden goodness of Tisha B'Av, the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, and the coming of *Mashiach Tzidkeinu, bimheirah beyameinu*.