

LUMINARIES

*Personalities
in the
Rebbe's Torah*

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לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ת שלום ע"ה בן ר' דובער הי"ד
לברטוב
נלב"ע ביום כ"ז מר חשוון ה'תשע"ז

ולעילוי נשמת זוגתו
מרת פעטיא נחמה בת ר' חיים
שניאור זלמן ע"ה לברטוב
נפטרה ט"ז אדר א' ה'תשפ"ד
תנצב"ה

הרה"ת חיים שניאור זלמן וזוגתו מרת
צפורה חיה שיחיו לברטוב

Rebbi Yehoshua

Rebbi Yehoshua Ben Chananya, one of the most oft-quoted Tannaim in the Mishnah, was a student of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai and a pillar of the Sanhedrin in Yavneh, reconstructed after the *Churban Bayis Sheini*. Rebbi Yehoshua was known for his vast knowledge and deep wisdom. He led Jewish efforts with the Roman authorities as well as the philosophers and heretics of his time, displaying his wisdom, even in mundane matters, which he had acquired through his study of Torah.

Rebbi Yehoshua lived in tumultuous times. As a young man, he survived the Churban, and then devoted himself to reestablishing the Sanhedrin and upholding the spiritual foundation of the Jewish people. Rebbi Yehoshua's prominence in Torah and great stature stabilized and strengthened the world of Yiddishkeit and the development of *Torah Shebaal Peh*.

Ashrei Yoladto

Rebbi Yehoshua was born to his father Chananya and his saintly mother in the generation before the *Churban*. He was destined for greatness. Even before he entered the world, his expectant mother visited every Beis Midrash in the city and requested that the Chachomim daven for her child to be a Talmid Chochom.¹

The Yerushalmi tells us that after he was born, his mother would take his carriage to the Beis Midrash so that the baby would hear and be surrounded by words of Torah. When his teacher Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai lists the merits and virtues of his students, he says about Rebbi Yehoshua – “*Ashrei yolad'to*” [happy is she who gave birth to him] referring to Rebbi Yehoshua's mother's investment in his *chinuch*. The Rebbe explains that this term defines Rebbi Yehoshua's greatness. He lived up to the potential of his moment of birth - the pure moment of “*Yoladto*” - when a person's vast potential shines, before time and circumstances get in the way.²

Citing the story of Rebbi Yehoshua's carriage in the Beis Medrash, the Rebbe spoke of the importance of surrounding toddlers and even young babies with articles of Torah and Kedusha. The Rebbe explained that the environment of young children affects them very deeply and tends to set them on the right path. The Rebbe also learnt from this story the importance of bringing children to holy events and places. While they do not understand what is going on, and may even disturb their parents, their young ears will *hear* the words of Torah and its impact will stay with them throughout their lives. The “*Ashrei Yolad'to*” said of Rebbi Yehoshua's mother, is not just a historical anecdote, but a lesson for every Jewish mother today.³

In the Times of the Beis Hamikdosh

Rebbi Yehoshua was one of the few Chachomim who led the Jewish people both before and after the *Churban*, in Yerushalayim and Yavneh. While Rebbi Yehoshua is more known for his time as Av Beis Din and a member of the elite circle of Chachomim in Yavneh, he served as one of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai's star Talmidim even *b'zman haBayis*. Along with his colleague Rebbi Eliezer, he helped Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai sneak out of Yerushalayim to meet the general Aspasyanus and arrange that Yavneh and its Chachomim should be spared.⁴

As a Levi, Rebbi Yehoshua was one of the *Meshorerim* (singers) and used to sing on the *Duchan* in the Beis Hamikdosh.⁵ Describing the joy and elation of Simchas Beis Hashoeva, Rebbi Yehoshua said, “...we did not taste the taste of sleep, we would drowse each other's shoulders...”

The Rebbe explains why we are told this about Rebbi Yehoshua when many other Chachomim did the same thing. He was one of the “*Greste*” [greatest] Chachomim of his generation, the Rebbe answered, as we see from his success in debates and discussions with the elders of Athens and other philosophers and heretics, and from the fact that he left no one after him who could take his place in this regard. He is mentioned as one of the Simchas Beis Hashoeva participants – to emphasize that even, and especially, the greatest of the Chachomim took part in Simchas Beis Hashoeva.⁶

Yavneh

Rebbi Yehoshua was a close disciple of the Nossi, Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai, and is listed among his five beloved Talmidim mentioned and praised in Pirkei Avos. Though we find that Rebbi Yehoshua had ruled on a halachic question that had come up in the Beis Hamikdosh,⁷ which suggests that he already had *semicha* before the *churban*,⁸ his prominence and impact rose when the Sanhedrin moved to Yavneh.

After the leadership of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, the *nesius* returned to the family of Hillel Hazaken, and Rabban Gamliel was made Nossi, while Rebbi Yehoshua was Av Beis Din.⁹

He served on the Sanhedrin together with his long-standing friend Rebbi Eliezer (ben Hurkanus) and, later, Rebbi Elazar Ben Azaria and others. Rebbi Akiva, who for some of this time had his own Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, was a Talmid and later a Chaver to Rebbi Yehoshua and Rebbi Eliezer as well.¹⁰

Even while serving under Rabban Gamliel, Rabban Gamliel referred to him as “*Rabbie Bechochmo*” [my master in wisdom-Torah], and while there was controversy and



COINS MINTED IN THE YEAR AFTER THE CHURBAN SHOW THE EMPEROR ASPASYANUS (VESPASIAN) AND THE DESCRIPTION “JUDEA CAPTA” (JUDEA HAS BEEN CAPTURED) WITH A ROMAN SYMBOLICALLY STANDING OVER THE DEFEATED JEW.

disagreement between these Chachomim, there was outstanding respect for Rebbi Yehoshua as one of the greats of Chachmei Yavneh.

While serving in Yavneh, two famous Machlokesin occurred, leading to changes in hierarchy. First was a Machlokes between the Chachomim, Rebbi Yehoshua included, and Rebbi Eliezer regarding the Tum'ah of the oven of Achnai. Rebbi Eliezer did not accept the Chachomim's position and spent the rest of his days separate from the Chachomim.¹¹

Another famous story involves Rebbi Yehoshua himself. After two incidents in which it seemed that Rabban Gamliel had not treated Rebbi Yehoshua with the proper respect, one regarding the date of Yom Kippur and the second regarding the status of Maariv, Rabban Gamliel was ousted from his position as Nossi and replaced with Rebbi Elazar Ben Azariah. Rebbi Yehoshua was not considered for the position because that would have been disrespectful to Rabban Gamliel in the circumstances. Eventually, Rabban Gamliel and Rebbi Yehoshua reconciled, and Rabban Gamliel returned to his position.¹²

Rebbi Yeshoshua and his peers learned together, debated, taught, and devised ways to help their brethren. In addition, the Chachomim took many trips together to Rome, cities in Eretz Yisroel, and other important cities around the Mediterranean.

The Rebbe highlights Rebbi Yehoshua's greatness seen from an incident that occurred on one of these trips. It was Sukkos, and the only Lulav they had was that of Rabban Gamliel. When Rabban Gamliel shared it with his colleagues, he first gave it to Rebbi Yehoshua, even though Rebbi Elazar Ben Azariah was a Kohen, teaching us that a great Talmid Chochom comes before a Kohen, even one that is as great as Rebbi Elazar Ben Azariah.¹³

Interestingly, in the Rebbe's Torah, as a Levi, Rebbi Yehoshua represents the spiritual concept of Leviim. His trips with Rabban Gamliel (Yisrael), Rebbi Elazar Ben Azariah (Kohen), and Rebbi Akiva (Ger), shadow the journeys of Klal Yisrael as a whole. The Rebbe also taught that as a Levi, he represented the concept of *Dibbur* - speech, the medium between thought and action (Kohen and Yisrael), which explains the many fasts he took upon himself just for speaking disrespectfully of Beis Shammai.¹⁴

While Rebbi Yeshoshua was surrounded by friends and colleagues, both *chaverim* and *talmidim*, he shone as one of the greatest of Chachmei Yavneh. The Rebbe says in a *sicha*, that the term '*Chachameha* - [Yavneh's] Sages,' refers primarily to Rebbi Yehoshua.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's strategy, the Rebbe explained, was to replace the Beis Hamikdosh with Torah - Yavneh - something that would bring *Elokus* into the world

and would ultimately lead us to the third Beis Hamikdosh. In building Yavneh and saving its Chachomim, specifically Rebbi Yehoshua, the plan was set in place to lead the Yidden to *geulah*, starting with making peace in the world, something with which Rebbi Yehoshua would occupy his life.¹⁵

Rebbi Yehoshua and the Romans

Rebbi Yehoshua stood out among his peers as a great thinker and debater. He served as a proud representative of Torah and Yiddishkeit to the court in Rome and the heretics and philosophers in Eretz Yisroel and around the world. He was venerated in both the political and diplomatic spheres, from the Roman Caesars and their courts to academic and philosophical circles.

In the Gemara and Midrash we find many stories of Rebbi Yehoshua in Rome, both on his own and with his colleagues,



RUINS OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF YAVNE WHERE THE SANHEDRIN WERE SEATED, DISCOVERED NEAR THE MODERN CITY.



TZIYUN OF REBBI YEHOShUA BEN CHANANYA.

on trips to defend Yidden and Yiddishkeit under Roman rule. Over time, Rabbi Yehoshua became acquainted with many Roman scholars and logicians and would often engage with them in discussion and debate.

The Gemara tells us about a discussion Rabbi Yehoshua held even with the evil Roman Emperor Adriyanus, who made harsh decrees against Torah and Mitzvos and destroyed the city of Beitar. Rabbi Yehoshua's relationship with the emperor was so strong that the emperor allowed the Yidden to rebuild the Beis Hamikdosh. Unfortunately, the Kutim ruined it through libel and lies, and Rabbi Yehoshua needed to quell an uprising that could have resulted in terrible loss of life.

In addition to his frequent visits to Rome, we hear of Rabbi Yehoshua traveling to Athens, Greece and Alexandria, Egypt. He spoke many languages and had vast scientific knowledge and philosophical prowess. All of this came from his knowledge in Torah.

The Rebbe explained that Rabbi Yehoshua's dealings with the Roman authorities in his wise and diplomatic fashion were the embodiment of Torah bringing Shalom to the world, and crucial for the Jewish people right after the *Churban*, setting them on the path that would lead toward *geulah*.¹⁶ The Rebbe explained that each of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai's five Talmidim corresponds to the five Chumashim, and Rabbi Yehoshua – *Ashrei Yoladto* – represents *Sefer Shemos*. Moshe's arguments and discussions with Pharaoh and the royal court on behalf of the Yidden were paralleled by Rabbi Yehoshua's interactions with the Romans. His Egyptian and royal upbringing specially equipped Moshe with the power to break the *Klipah* of *Mitzrayim*, similarly, Rabbi Yehoshua was able to use their own wisdom and skills against them.¹⁷

In one story that the Gemara tells, Rabbi Yehoshua's response to the emperor is pitted against that of the “*Savei debai Atuna*” [the elders of Athens]. Rabbi Yehoshua was given permission by the emperor to debate them and prove the supremacy of Torah over Greek thinking. The Gemara tells at length how he found them, outsmarted them, and ended up carting them all off away to Rome. This story is often cited as an example of the Chochmas HaTorah overpowering the Chochma of the world. It was no coincidence that they were Greek, linking this contest with the battle of Torah against *Malchus Yavan* and its wisdom.¹⁸ In this incident and many others, we see the great wisdom Rabbi Yehoshua displayed in dismissing and refuting those who opposed Hashem and his Torah, as he went on to do with the *Apikorsim*, the *Minim*, and learned philosophers and clerics.

The Gemara at the end of Sotah says that with the passing of Rabbi Yehoshua, “*Batlah Eitzah U'Machshavah*” [counsel and thought were lost] referring to his unique expertise and influence. The Rebbe connects this to the *Sfirah* of *Binah*

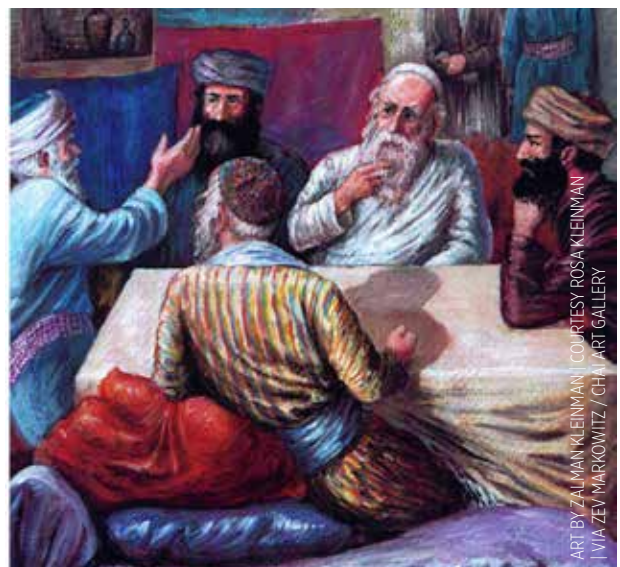
- understanding, from which he got the power to comprehend and expound on Torah.¹⁹ Rabbi Yehoshua's greatness in this regard led to him being ranked as one of the foremost *Chachmei Yisroel*.²⁰

The Rebbe made an important point about Rabbi Yehoshua's knowledge of scientific wisdom, from animal biology to astronomy. The Rebbe explained that all his knowledge came from Torah! While Greek scholars experimented with actual snakes to discover the duration of a snake's pregnancy, Rabbi Yehoshua knew the answer through the logic of a *kal vachomer* in Torah. Of course, he was right and they were wrong. He was uniquely able to deduce from Torah the workings of the world and the complexities of man.

In the *sicha*, the Rebbe laments what people say, that Torah cannot have an opinion on scientific or worldly matters. Rabbi Yehoshua proves that is not true. Just the opposite, in fact, everything comes from Torah, and only through a greater understanding in Torah can one find the truth.²¹

Rebbi Yehoshua – Master of All

Rebbi Yehoshua stands out as one of our most fascinating and multifaceted leaders. He is one of the most oft-quoted Tannaim in Mishnayos and teacher of the great Tannaim Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael. At the same time, he was a great scholar in astronomy and the sciences and a sharp and clever debater who defended the Torah and its ways in Bei Avidan and similar heretical strongholds. He worked as a



A PAINTING DEPICTING THE CHACHOMIM EXPOUNDING ON THE HAGGADAH THROUGH THE NIGHT.

blacksmith, barely surviving on his earnings and sometimes even needing to venture out to sea to secure his living. He was also Av Beis Din of the Sanhedrin, one of the most influential Chachomim in Eretz Yisrael, and a polished diplomat at the royal court. It seems that he eventually opened a Yeshiva in Peki'in where he taught Torah in his golden years.

Rebbi Yehoshua's influence wasn't just rooted in his halachic teachings or *askanus*. In addition to being from the *Marei Mishnah* [masters of Mishnah], he was also from the prominent *Marei Kabbalah* [masters of Kabbalah]. The Gemara tells a story about Rebbi Yehoshua and Rebbi Yossi Hakohen walking and discussing the divine secrets of *Maaseh Merkavah*. "*Posach Rebbi Yehoshua*" – As Rebbi Yehoshua began speaking, and though it was in the middle of the summer, heaven brought forth clouds and a rainbow emerged. Malachim gathered to listen, just like people gather for the celebrations of a Chosson and Kallah.²²

The Rebbe explains that *Marei Kabbalah* serve as a home for the *Shechina* because their Torah is learned with total *bitul*. Therefore, Hashem speaks through them. The Rebbe goes on to explain that in the world of *Marei Kabbalah*, specifically Rebbi Yehoshua who was not a Kohen like Rebbi Yossi, and had come to the level of *Marei Kabbalah* through his own

work, was able to "open" (*posach*) – to reveal new things, and make a profound impact even on the physical world.

On a similar note, the Rebbe tells us that Rebbi Yehoshua worked within the world, as we see in the famous Machlokes between Rebbi Yehoshua and Rebbi Eliezer. Rebbi Yehoshua declared "*Torah Lo Bashomayim Hee*" [Torah is (does) not (get decided) in the heaven]. The Rebbe connects this to the kind and pleasant demeanor he displayed to all people, including the many gentiles in which he came in contact.²³

It is interesting to note that Rebbi Yehoshua's special mission in this world is hinted at in his very name. The Rebbe points out that Rebbi Yehoshua bears the name of Hashem (Yud-Kai). In the famous passage in the Haggadah about the Chachomim sitting all night, the Talmidim come and remind them of Krias Shema. This is because the name of Hashem as fully expressed in the Tannaim (Rebbi Yehoshua and friends) needs to be drawn down into the Talmidim until it brings them to Krias Shema – Yichuda Ilaah – a feeling of Hashem's oneness.²⁴ The Rebbe also links the name Yehoshua to *Yeshuah* – salvation, connected to the ultimate *Yeshuah* – the redemption from *galus* and the dawn of *geulah*.²⁵

IN HIS TORAH

תְּנִיא, רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אָמַר... בְּנִסָּן נִגְאָלוּ, בְּתִשְׁרֵי עֵתִידִין לִיגָאֵל... רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
אָמַר... בְּנִסָּן נִגְאָלוּ בְּנִסָּן עֵתִידִין לִיגָאֵל. (ראש השנה יא א)

Rebbi Eliezer says: In Nissan the Jewish people were redeemed from Mitzrayim; and in Tishrei the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption with the coming of the Moshiach. Rebbi Yehoshua disagrees and says: In Nissan the Jewish people were redeemed from Mitzrayim; and in Nissan in the future the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption.

ר' אליעזר אומר אם ישראל עושין תשובה נגאלין ואם לאו אין נגאלין אמר
 ל' רבי יהושע אם אין עושין תשובה אין נגאלין אלא הקב"ה מעמיד להן מלך
 שגזרותיו קשות כהמן וישראל עושין תשובה ומחזירין למוטב. (סנהדרין צז ב)

Rebbi Eliezer says: If the Jewish people do Teshuva they are redeemed, and if not they are not redeemed. Rebbi Yehoshua said to him: If they do not do Teshuva, will they not be redeemed at all? Rather, Hashem will establish a king for them whose decrees are as harsh as those issued by Haman, and the Jewish people will have no choice but to return, and this will restore them to the right path.

The Rebbe explains that these two disputes are connected. Each shows us the perspectives of the two Tannaim.

Rebbi Eliezer believes that *geulah* is based completely on the *avodah* of the people down below — going so far as to say that only if Yidden do Teshuvah will Moshiach come. Appropriately, different than the *geulah* from Mitzrayim, which came from above – during the month of Nissan, Rebbi Eliezer holds that Moshiach will come in the month of Tishrei – a month focused on the *avodah* of Yidden.

Rebbi Yehoshua, on the other hand, emphasizes the point that everything comes from Hashem, and as such, even if the Yidden wouldn't do *teshuva*, they would still be redeemed. This explains why Rebbi Yehoshua sees the *geulah* coming in the month of Nissan – a time of *giluy* from above and beyond anything reachable through *avodah*.

Nissan encompasses the elements of Tishrei, but on a higher and more abstract level. Rebbi Yehoshua also believes strongly in *avodas hamatah*, and even in the scenario where Yidden aren't doing *teshuva*, Rebbi Yehoshua suggests that Hashem will arrange a situation in which they must. In other words, he brings together the advantage of Tishrei – *teshuva* – with the level of Nissan – incredible *giluy Elokus*.²⁶

1. Rashi, Avos 2:8.
2. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim 5736 (Sichos Kodesh pg. 168).
3. Sicha Shabbos Bereishis 5734 (Toras Menachem pg. 190). The Rebbe also mentioned this story in the context of bringing babies to Shul for Aseres Hadibros on Shavuos, as described in the preceding article. (Likkutei Sichos vol. 23, pg. 258).
4. Gittin 56a.
5. Erechin 11b.
6. Likkutei Sichos vol. 17, pg. 272. The Rebbe also mentions that from here we can learn that they didn't sleep in the sukkah.
7. Zevachim 113a.
8. Toldos Tana'im Va'amoraim, Rebbi Yehoshua.
9. Bava Kama 74b. Sanhedrin 17b.
10. See Hadran 13 Shevat 5725.
11. Kiddushin 32b.
12. Rosh Hashanah 25a, Brachos 27b.
13. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Re'eh 5734, Toras Menachem pg. 224.
14. Likkutei Sichos vol. 39, pg. 180.
15. Sicha Vov Tishrei 5740, Sichos Kodesh pg. 46.
16. See above sicha – Vov Tishrei 5740.
17. Sicha Shabbos Parshas Devorim 5742, Hisvaaduyos p. 1975.
18. Reshimos Choveres 3, pg. 13.
19. Sicha Leil Erev Chag Hashavuos 5716, Toras Menachem p. 294.
20. Likkutei Sichos vol. 17, pg. 272.
21. Sicha Chof Av 5732, Sichos Kodesh pg. 439.
22. Chagigah 14b.
23. Sicha Rosh Chodesh Elul 5742, Hisvaaduyos pg. 2132.
24. Reshimos Choveres 38, pg. 12.
25. Sefer Hasichos 5748, pg. 331.
26. See Likkutei Sichos vol. 12, pg. 143. Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, pg. 235. Three Maamorim of the Hemshech Hachodesh 5726, et. al.