

HOW THE JEWS CAME TO PLACE SUCH GREAT IMPORTANCE UPON EDUCATION

At the time just before the destruction of the Second Temple, the Romans under the leadership of Vespasian,

had surrounded Jerusalem and were laying seige to it.

Rabbi Yochanen ben Zakkai,

seeing that the End was in sight and that all within the city would be exterminated when the Romans finally breached the gates,

and knowing that the Romans and Jewish Zealots, during the seige,

would only allow the dead and defectors to pass out through the city gates without being put to death,

pretended to be dead and had himself smuggled out through the lines in a coffin using his students as pallbearers.

The guards often pierced the coffins with spears to dissuade people from being smuggled out in coffins alive

and when one of them began to so so with the coffin containing the rabbi, one of the students talked the guard out of it.

Once outside the walls safely, the rabbi went to Vepasian, the Commander of the Legions and greeted him:

“Good day, your Majesty.”

to which Vespasian replied:

“I shall kill you for 2 reasons:

I am not Caeser and calling me Caeser is Treason,

and if I am Caeser, you should still die because you didn't come to me before now.”

At that exact minute, a runner from Rome arrived with the news that the Roman Senate had just appointed Vespasian, Caesar.

Vespasian was so impressed that he told the rabbi:

“Ask me one thing and it shall be yours.”

The rabbi said:

“Give me the College of Yavneh and it’s wise people,

the teachers and educators of the land,

for they will guarantee continuity of the education of the Jewish People amidst the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.”

Vespasian granted his request and permitted Rabbi Yochanen ben Zakkai and those he had asked to be permitted to go with him to leave safely,

and shortly thereafter, Jerusalem was sacked, the Temple destroyed and the Jews enslaved.

The result was that those Jews who survived were “education oriented” and as time went by and they proliferated

a kind of “Evolutionary Influence by War” made by Vespasian,

the very Destroyer of the Jews,

actually caused Education to become so very important to the Jews,

and Education is one of the Tools that has helped us

and permits us to survive.

taught to me by Rabbi Chaim Bloch, 1991