



Rabbi Akiva's Smile

Rabbi Akiva Ben Yosef lived from 50 to 137 CE. (CE means "Common Era" and begins at the year 1.) Until he was forty years old, Akiva was a shepherd and didn't even know how to read. His wife, Rachel, convinced him to go study. It was hard in the beginning, but Akiva studied for many years, and finally became a famous teacher himself.

After the second Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Akiva was travelling through Jerusalem with three other scholars - Rabbi Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah and Rabbi Yehoshuah. As they came to the spot where the Temple had stood, a fox darted out from the holy ruins.

Rabbi Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah and Rabbi Yehoshuah had tears in their eyes when they saw wild animals living in the place where the Temple had stood, but Rabbi Akiva smiled.

"I don't understand!" exclaimed Rabbi Gamliel. "Why are you smiling?!"

Rabbi Akiva answered with a question. "Why are you crying?"

Rabbi Gamliel held back his tears as he spoke. "It's just like the famous verse, '...for Mount Zion lies desolate, foxes prowl over it...'"

Rabbi Akiva's smile grew even wider. "That's it! We've seen that prophecy come to pass, so we can surely expect our future to be bright! Remember this verse? '...old men and old women will once again sit in the streets of Jerusalem...and the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing...'" Now I'm sure that will come to pass as well!"

Akiva's friends dried their eyes. "Thank you!" they shouted, "You've reminded us that our spirits will never be defeated!"



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