



When the Shechina Departs

The secrets hidden in Yechezkel's *ma'aseh merkava* (Yechezkel 10) are a mystery, but at the level of *pshat* they express a simple and terrible reality. The *Shechina* 'gathers itself' from its dwelling in the *Beit HaMikdash*, crosses the threshold and leaves the house, fills the courtyard, and then leaves through the gateway, climbs on a chariot and flies away. It is a description of the *Makom* (G-d) leaving its *makom* (place), leaving behind an empty house.

The introduction to Midrash Eicha Rabbah reveals the inner story: When the *Shechina* was leaving the *Beit HaMikdash*, It cuddled and kissed the walls of the *Mikdash* over and over again, crying and saying: "Woe! Goodbye to my *Mikdash*, goodbye to my royal house, goodbye to my dear home of splendor."

Leaving the house seems inevitable. It has lost its right to exist and will be destroyed. But the departing lover tearfully caresses and kisses every stone along the way – sobbing, longing, yearning, from the very moment of separation.

As happens in disintegration processes, the internal collapse precedes the external one. This *Mikdash* would still stand for many years after Yechezkel's prophecy, but in emptiness.

Similarly, of the second *Mikdash* it is said (Yoma 39) that the doors of the heartbroken *Mikdash* terrify themselves and open again and again as if, suicidally, beckoning the invading enemy to enter. Eventually, the destroyer will be told from heaven: "You burned a Sanctuary that was already burned, you ground flour that was already ground" (Sanhedrin 96b).

The *mishnayot* (Ta'anit, chapter 4), which discuss the reasons for the fasts commemorating the destruction, describe the story

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The *Midrash* compares the breaking of the tablets and the burning of the Torah to tearing up the betrothal and marriage contracts. The abolition of the *tamid* daily offering symbolizes the end of daily family routines. (And what do we end up missing but the smallness of everyday life, the sound of rejoicing or quarrel, the routine of life itself?) And placing an idol in the Sanctuary is the final nail in the coffin of trust and loyalty. The physical ruin completes the spiritual destruction of this home.

At its core, this is the loss of having a home in this world, a place of belonging, shelter, familiarity. A place in the world we could call our own. The exile of the Divine from its home heralds the exile of the people, setting them on a long and arduous journey of suffering, yearning and longing.

When the king of Yehuda heard that Nevuchadnezzar was coming, he took the keys of the *Beit HaMikdash*, ascended to the roof of the Sanctuary and said: "Master of the Universe, in the past we were faithful to You and Your keys were handed over to us. Now that we are not faithful, Your keys are handed over to You." One tradition says he threw the keys up to Heaven and

they have not yet descended. Another says the likeness of a hand came from Heaven and took the keys from him (Yerushalmi Shekalim 17b).

16 years ago, during the disengagement from Gush Katif, many women and girls gathered in the synagogue in Neve Dekalim. Someone approached Moriah, the officer in charge, and handed her a beautiful wedding ring found on site. Efforts to find the owner proved in vain.

In the years that followed, Moriah continually tried to return the ring. Last year, she decided that social networking might have created a new opportunity to find the owner. She posted on Facebook describing how, in the midst of the destruction, she found this wedding ring, and how, close to Tisha B'Av, 16 years later, she is still looking for its owner.

I shared that post in a Zoom *shiur* I gave that day. The wedding ring left behind in the ruins of the houses reminded me of the Temple keys thrown by the priests at the time of the destruction. Then, in the middle of the *shiur*, someone excitedly announced, "They found the owner! Moriah just posted it!"

It felt like a shot of encouragement. A hint of impending redemption.

The keys to the Sanctuary had been thrown back...

Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel teaches Torah at midrashot in Israel.