YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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**Lecture 362: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(172) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (148)**

In the previous *shiur*, we discussed Yechezkel's prophetic journey to the Temple. Later in chapter 10, the prophet describes what is happening in the chariot and how the *Shekina* is departing from the Temple.

These two themes are combined in this chapter:

And the *keruv* stretched forth his hand from between the *keruvim* to the fire that was between the *keruvim*, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed in linen, who took it and went out. And there appeared in the *keruvim* the form of a man's hand under their wings. And I looked, and behold four wheels beside the *keruvim*, one wheel beside one *keruv*, and another wheel beside another *keruv*; and the appearance of the wheels was as the color of a beryl stone. And as for their appearance, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been within a wheel. When they went, they went toward their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place where the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing the wheelwork. And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the *keruv*, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the *keruvim* mounted up – this is the living creature that I saw by the river Kevar. And when the *keruvim* went, the wheels went beside them; and when the *keruvim* lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood, and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them; for the spirit of the living creature was in them. And the glory of the Lord went forth from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the *keruvim*. And the *keruvim* lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight when they went forth, and the wheels beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Kevar; and I knew that they were *keruvim*. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the faces which I saw by the river Kevar, their appearances and themselves; they went every one straight forward. (*Yechezkel* 10:7-22)

Then a spirit lifted me up, and brought me to the east gate of the Lord's house, which looks eastward; and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men; and I saw in the midst of them Yaaznaya the son of Azur, and Pelatyahu the son of Benayahu, princes of the people. (*Yechezkel* 11:1)

**The Divine Chariot**

The prophet Yechezkel sees a series of Divine visions throughout his book. Direct reference to the subject of the chariot is made in three chapters. In chapter 1, in the fifth year of the exile of King Yehoyakhin, a description is given of the chariot which includes its likenesses, the faces and wings of the creatures, the likeness of the wheels and their movements, and the firmament of the throne of glory. In chapters 10-11, in the framework of the prophet's prophetic journey to Jerusalem and the Temple, an account is given of the Divine chariot's departure from the Temple to the Mount of Olives and the wilderness. In chapter 43, in the framework of the fourth of the Divine visions, which describes in detail the Temple which is once again being built, the role of the priests, the Levites and the Temple, the prince and his status, the produce of the land and its new division, we hear of the return of the *Shekhina* to its home, a restoration of the crown to its former glory. In this prophecy, the prophet hears the voice of God speaking to him from the Temple.

In addition, in chapter 3, the prophet is lifted up by a spirit and he hears the voice of a great rushing, and the words: "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place" (*Yechezkel* 3:12). Later in chapter 3, in verses 22-24, he sees God's glory as it goes to the plain. The fourth vision is in chapter 37 – the vision of the dry bones. God takes the prophet out to a plain filled with bones where the prophet speaks out against the despair of the people and announces the deliverance – the resurrection of the dry bones. These are the Divine visions that are revealed to the prophet Yechezkel over the course of the book.

Regarding the three accounts of the chariot, in chapter 1 the chariot is described as static; whereas in chapters 10-11 it departs from the Temple; and in chapter 43 the Divine chariot returns from the wilderness to the Temple. This teaches us how central and important the issue of the Divine chariot and God's presence on His throne was in Yechezkel's outlook.

**The Description of the Divine Chariot in the Rest of the Books of the Bible**

In addition to these three accounts in the book of *Yechezkel*, there are three more places in which we find descriptions of the throne of glory and the host of heaven which are similar regarding certain details to the prophecy of Yechezkel:

The first one is in I *Melakhim* in the framework of Achav and Yehoshafat's war in Ramat Gil'ad against Ben Hadad the king of Aram. Yehoshafat seeks out the word of God and the prophet Mikhayahu ben Yimla delivers the following prophecy: "And he said: Therefore hear you the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left" (I *Melakhim* 22:19). The prophet describes as it were a discussion among the members of the Divine entourage standing alongside the throne on which God is seated.

The second vision is in the book of *Yeshayahu*:

In the year that king Uziyahu died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple. Above Him stood the seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly. And one called to another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door were moved at the voice of them that called, and the house was filled with smoke. (*Yeshayahu* 6:1-4)

This prophecy is delivered in direct connection to the death of King Uziyahu, in the wake of his entering the Temple to burn incense at which time he became afflicted with leprosy.

The prophet sees God as a king of flesh and blood who sits on a throne high and lifted up, while His train fills the Temple. The seraphim stand before the throne of glory covered by their wings from head to foot, and they praise God with the designation "Lord of hosts," thereby saying that they themselves are from the heavenly hosts that hallow God and tree times utter the term "holy."

*Tehilim* 89 beautifully describes this situation: "A God dreaded in the great council of the holy ones, and feared of all them that are about Him. O Lord God of hosts, who is a mighty one, like You, O Lord? And Your faithfulness is round about You" (*Tehilim* 89:8-9). While in the vision God sits on His throne in the Temple, at the end of the seraphim's singing, the whole earth is filled with His glory. God is elevated and holy, but at the same time He rules over the entire earth.

As a result, the posts of the door move, and the Temple fills with smoke. The Temple that the prophet sees in his vision is apparently the Temple itself. According to the simple understanding the throne of glory over the *keruvim* is in the Holy of Holies. Yeshayahu sees the *Shekhina* in its permanent place in the Temple.

As for the interpretation of this vision, some see it as the prophet's consecration prophecy. In our humble opinion, it is a prophecy regarding the departure of God's glory from the Temple and the land, a departure that will lead to the land's desolation. According to this understanding, the *Shekhina's* departure from the Temple began many years before the exile of Yehoyakhin.

The third vision is alluded to in *Tehilim* 78: "The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in holiness" (*Tehilim* 68:18).[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The Meaning of the Chariot Vision in *Yechezkel***

We will not go here into the details of Yechezkel's chariot vision. This sublime and awe-inspiring vision is obscure and hidden.

It should be noted that in chapter 1 the four creatures had the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle. A significant change in this regard appears in the description of the chariot in connection with the departure of the *Shekhina* from the Temple in chapter 10 – the face of a *keruv* replaces the face of the ox mentioned in chapter 1.

The prophet sees the glory of God, an expression that is familiar to us from the revelation at Mount Sinai: "And the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel" (*Shemot* 24:17); and from the dedication of the *Mishkan*: "And Moshe and Aharon went into the tent of meeting, and came out, and blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people" (*Vayikra* 9:23). Clearly, the expression, "glory of the Lord," describes God's revealed appearance to the eyes of man, and not God's essence.

There are also various expressions that use images and comparisons – the image of the throne, the appearance of a sapphire stone, the appearance of man, the appearance of fire, the appearance of the rainbow, as the color of electrum.

The chariot symbolizes the *Shekinah* which governs the world. It is, as it were, full of eyes, all-seeing and all-knowing. It is defined neither in its place nor in its capabilities. Divine capability is infinite. Divine existence is everywhere. Above the chariot is a throne that symbolizes kingdom and rule.

In some places, we find the phrase "the Lord of hosts, who sits on the *keruvim*" (for example, in I *Shemuel* 4:4, when Chofni and Pinchas take the ark out to the battle against the Pelishtim, and in II *Shemuel* 6:2, when David brings the ark up from Kiryat-Ye'arim to the city of David, and in *Tehilim* 80:2).

The meaning of the description of the chariot, and especially of its departure from the Temple, is that the exile of the *Shekhina* involves a desecration of God's name among the Gentiles. In the wake of the sins described by the prophet in chapter 8, the spiritual reality deteriorated, directly resulting in the departure of the *Shekhina*. The physical exile of the people of Israel from its land – the suffering of the people in foreign lands – is the external manifestation of the departure of the *Shekhina*.

The chariot stands on four creatures, by way of which God leads the world. In his commentary to *Yechezkel* 1, the Abravanel explains that the four creatures appearing on the chariot are essentially four figures:

The flag of Yehuda had a lion, as it is written in his regard: "Yehuda is a lion's whelp" (*Bereishit* 49:9). The flag of Reuven had the face of a man, as it is stated in his regard: "And he found mandrakes in the field" (*Bereishit* 30:14), which have a human form. The flag of Efrayim had the face of an ox, as it is stated: "His firstling ox, majesty is his" (*Devarim* 33:17). And the flag of Dan had the face of an eagle, as it is stated: "Dan shall be a serpent in the way" (*Bereishit*  49:17) – "the viper and flying serpent" (*Yeshayahu* 30:6).

The *Shekhina's* chariot leaves the Temple for an extended journey, symbolizing the impending destruction. The Abravanel adds:

Yechezkel, who saw God during the journey and the departure of the *Shekhina* from His people and the destruction of His house, saw the chariot as if he had seen a king traveling after they prepared for him his chariot and horsemen… He sees four creatures which allude to the four heavenly officers who will control and influence the four kingdoms that will be in the world. (*Ma'ayanei ha-Yeshu'a*, *ma'ayan* 2, *tamar* 2)

According to this opinion, the four animals allude to the four kingdoms.

**The Ark, the *Kaporet* and the *Keruvim* in the *Mishkan*; God’s Throne**

This change connects the vision more directly to the *Mishkan* where the *keruvim* are located in the Holy of Holies. The connection to the *keruvim* is very understandable. The ark and the *keruvim* on top of it appear to be God's throne in this world, sort of a chariot. This is the way the Ramban in his commentary to the Torah sees the role of the ark and the *keruvim*:

What this means is that because He commanded regarding the *keruvim* that they spread their wings upward, and He did not say why at all they should be made, or what purpose they will serve in the *Mishkan –* He therefore says now: "And you shall put the *kaporet*" (*Shemot* 25:21) together with its *keruvim*, as it is all one thing, "above upon the ark," for "in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you," so that it have a throne of glory, for "there I will meet with you," and rest my *Shekhina* on them, "and I will speak with you from above the *kaporet*, from between the two *keruvim*," because it is "upon the ark of the testimony." Now this is like the chariot seen by Yechezkel, who said: "This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Kevar; and I knew that they were *keruvim*" (*Yechezkel* 10:20). Therefore He is called "who sits on the *keruvim*" (I *Shemuel* 4:4), for they spread their wings to show that they are the chariot who bear the glory… and the *keruvim* that were in the *Mishkan* and in the *Mikdash* are a pattern for them, "for one higher than the high watches, and there are higher than they" (*Kohelet* 5:7)…. (Ramban, *Shemot* 25:21)

The Ramban sees the ark with the *keruvim* as a throne of glory, and identifies it with the chariot seen by Yechezkel.

Rabbeinu Bachye also goes in this direction:

And according to the Midrash (*Bemidbar Rabba* 4, 13)… "And they shall make an ark"- the making of the ark is as dear as the heavenly throne of glory. As it is stated: "The place, O Lord, which You have made for Yourself to dwell in" (*Shemot* 15:17). This teaches you that the Temple corresponds to the throne of glory, and the two *keruvim* are dear like the heaven and the earth, in which was the seat of God. (Rabbeinu Bachye, *Shemot* 25:10)

Later he relates to the issue at length and explains how the parts of the ark correspond to the chariot:

And if you understand the view of the Rambam regarding the matter of the *keruvim*, you will find that they correspond to the *keruvim* seen by seen by Yechezkel the prophet, they being the holy creatures. Even though he saw four creatures, they are all one creature, about which Yechezkel said: "This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Kevar; and I knew that they were *keruvim*" (*Yechezkel* 10:20). After having earlier mentioned "four living creatures" (*Yechezkel* 1:5), he restored them later to a single creature and said that they are the "*keruvim*." After mentioning his first apprehension, namely the holy creatures, he mentioned a second apprehension, namely, the wheels that are next to the creatures and below them, as it is written: "Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel at the bottom hard by the living creatures, at the four faces thereof" (*Yechezkel* 1:15). He already mentioned by his first apprehension of the creatures: "And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind" (*Yechezkel* 1:4). And then he mentioned a third apprehension, the highest of all, namely, the apprehension of the electrum, as it is stated: "And I saw as the color of electrum" (*Yechezkel* 1:27). With respect to these three apprehensions that he attained, he mentioned three times "And I saw," this demonstrating that they were three separate apprehensions, from down up: wheels, living creatures, and electrum. These three apprehensions are what is called the Divine chariot… This is the order of Yechezkel's apprehension of the chariot: He first saw the "holy creatures" (*Yechezkel* 1:8), corresponding to the *keruvim* in the *Mishkan* and in the Temple. Then he saw the firmament that was stretched over the creatures (*Yechezkel* 1:22), and then he saw the throne on the firmament (*Yechezkel* 1:26)… The tablets in the ark hint at what is written: "For the Lord is God" (*Yeshayahu* 26:4). And similarly: "For My name is within him" (*Shemot* 23:21). This is clear. And the *keruvim* seen by Yechezkel which are the holy creatures correspond to them. This is what is stated: "And I knew that they were *keruvim*" (*Yechezkel* 10:20). Since he saw the *keruvim* which are the holy creatures, he knew that above them were other *keruvim* which he did not see, for he saw their pattern.

Now the *keruvim* that he saw, and those in the *Mishkan*, and in the *Mikdash*, all follow the pattern of the heavenly *keruvim* which he knew, they being also the throne of glory to receive the Supreme one. (*Shemot* 25:18)

Since the ark, the *kaporet* and the *keruvim* serve as God's throne in the world, the Temple as a whole can be seen as God's royal palace. The royal throne is symbolic in comparison to pagan temples, where we might find an actual throne, upon which sits a statue of the king. Here, altogether different, there is no actual throne, but rather the *keruvim* serve as a seat upon which God sits, as it were. "The Lord of hosts who sits on the *keruvim*." On the throne itself there is nothing; it is merely a place that can be used for sitting.

If the *keruvim* are the throne, then the ark is its footstool. Thus, for example, in the words of David in I *Divrei ha-Yamim*: "Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said: Hear me, my brothers, and my people; as for me, it was in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God; and I had made ready for the building" (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:2). And similarly in *Tehilim* 132: "Let us go into His dwelling place; let us worship at His footstool" (*Tehilim* 132:7). So too in *Tehilim* 99, which begins with the verse: "The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned upon the *keruvim*; let the earth quake" (*Tehilim* 99:1), whereas in verse 5, it is stated: "Exalt you the Lord our God, and prostrate yourselves at His footstool, holy is He" (*Tehilim* 99:5).

Several laws that apply in the Temple come to express the fact that it is the royal palace of God the King, the king of kings:

1. Prostration, through which a person completely effaces himself before the source of all, expressing this idea through the extension of his hands and feet, and similarly the *mitzva* of fearing the Temple, express the feelings of a person who comes to see the house of the King of the universe and to meet Him.

2. One of the reasons offered for the *mitzva* of guarding the Temple is showing honor to the kingdom. "A palace that lacks guards cannot be compared to a place that has guards" (*Sifrei Zuta Korach* on the verse: "And a stranger shall not come near"). The text that would be recited in the Temple in response to a blessing was not "Amen," but rather "Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingship forever" (*Yoma* 3:8). This formulation emphasizes the fact that the site is the royal palace of the King, the king of kings.

3. The Halakha asserts that that there is no sitting in the Temple courtyard, other than for the kings of the house of David (*Yoma* 25a). The reason for this seems to be that the kings of the house of David represent God's kingship. A clear example of this is found in what is stated about King Shelomo: "Then Shelomo sat on the throne of the Lord as king" (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 29:23).

4. On Rosh Hashana, they would blow trumpets and a shofar in the Temple. "The shofar would blow long, and the trumpets would blow short, as the *mitzva* of the day involves the shofar" (*Rosh ha-Shana* 3:4). Blowing the shofar is a clear sign of kingship: "With trumpets and sound of the horn shout you before the king, the Lord" (*Tehilim* 98:6).

We have presented here a few examples of laws applying in the Temple that derive from the notion according to which the entire Temple is the site of God's kingship. As stated, the vessel that expresses this principle in clearest manner is the ark, with the *kaporet* and the *keruvim.* This is the throne and the footstool. According to our approach, the prophet Yechezkel in chapter 10, when he describes the chariot in relation to the *keruvim* (and not to living creatures, as in chapter 1), alludes to this connection and its significance.

In the next *shiur* we will continue our examination of chapters 10 and 11 in *Yechezkel*, and deal with the *Shekhina's* departure from the Temple.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. See Achaz's cutting off of the borders of the bases, and his removal of the laver from them, and his taking down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, which have been interpreted as the departure of the chariot from the Temple (II *Melakhim* 16:17-18). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)