YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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**Lecture 363: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(173) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (149)**

In the previous *shiur*, we dealt with various aspects of the description of the chariot in the book of *Yechezkel* and in other books of the prophets, and their significance. In *Yechezkel* 1 the chariot is described in a static manner, whereas in *Yechezkel* 10 it is described as departing from the Temple.

In this *shiur* we wish to deal with the account of the departure of the *Shekhina* from the Temple, as it is described in *Yechezkel* in chapters 10 and 11.

**The Removal of the Shekhina from the Temple**

The term used by the prophet to express the chariot is "the glory of the Lord," a term that the prophet mentions in chapter 8: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain" (*Yechezkel* 8:4). Already in chapter 9, parallel to the description of the preparations for the burning of Jerusalem and after the detailed description of all the abominations taking place in the Temple, Scripture describes the movement of the glory of the God of Israel and its ascent from upon the *keruv*: "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the *keruv*, whereupon it was, to the threshold of the house" (*Yechezkel* 9:3). We are apparently dealing with a move from the *keruv* to the threshold.

Later in chapter 10, the prophet describes the mounting and going up of the *keruvim* and then again the departure of the glory of the Lord:

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*. (*Yechezkel* 10:15-18)

We need to examine which *keruvim* are we dealing with here? It seems clear from the previous verses that the glory of God moved from the *keruv* to the threshold and from there to the courtyard. Is there a return here to the *keruvim* in the Holy of Holies, or are we dealing with the *keruvim* that replaced the living creatures (in chapter 1) of the throne of glory? Scripture goes on to describe the departure of the glory of God eastward: "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" (*Yechezkel* 10:19). The *keruvim* lift up their wings together with the wheels and mount up and stand at the east gateleading to the house of God. The spirit brings the prophet to the gate of the house of God facing east.

The description of the removal of the chariot continues in chapter 11: "Then did the *keruvim* lift up their wings, and the wheels were beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city" (*Yechezkel* 11:22-23). The *Shekhina* leaves the Temple and moves eastward through the eastern gate to the Mount of Olives which is to the east of the house of God.

Scripture describes in graded fashion the chariot's departure from the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the house, and from there it leaves Mount Moriya and the ridge of the Temple, and moves eastward to the mountain east of the city, the Mount of Olives. It turns out that the description is accurate and precise because in the chapters of redemption which describe the *Shekhina* returning to Jerusalem and the Temple, Scripture describes the return through the same stations that it had left:

Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looks toward the east; and, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east; and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth did shine with His glory. And the appearance of the vision which I saw was like the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Kevar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. And a spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. (*Yechezkel* 43:1-5)

The verses speak of the going up of the *Shekhina.* The removal of the *Shekhina*, as it is described in *Yechezkel* 10-11, is expounded upon in many sources in *Chazal*.

In all sources, references is made to the ten journeys that the *Shekhina* made which are based on the verses in *Yechezkel*. It would appear, based on the order of the verses, that *Chazal* understood that the *Shekhina* first went out from the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the house, and from there toward the courtyard. As we noted earlier, it is possible that from there it went back to the two *keruvim* in the Holy of Holies. Shmuel Ha-Kohen[[1]](#footnote-1) explains, in the wake of the Midrash, that this return is an expression of the difficulty of parting, and that, as it were, the *Shekhina* was unable to detach itself. This is what is stated in the *petichta of Eikha Rabba*:

This may be likened to a king who had left his palace in anger. After he had gone, he returned and fondled and kissed the walls of the palace and the pillars of the palace, and he cried and said: Stay in peace my palace, stay in peace my royal house, stay in peace my dear house, stay in peace from now on, stay in peace. So also, when the *Shekhina* had gone from the Temple, she returned and fondled and kissed the walls of the Temple and the pillars of the Temple, and she cried and said: Stay in peace My Temple, stay in peace My royal house, stay in peace My dear house, stay in peace my Temple, stay in peace. (*Eikha Rabba*, *Petichta*, letter 25)

Based on the various midrashic sources, this appears to be the order of the ten journeys made by the *Shekhina*:

1. From the *kaporet* to the *keruv*;

2. and from the *keruv* to the threshold of the building;

3. and from the threshold of the building to the courtyard;

4. and from the courtyard to the altar;

5. and from the altar to the roof of the *Heikhal*;

6. and from the roof of the *Heikhal* to the wall of the courtyard;

7. and from the wall of the courtyard to the city;

8. and from the city to the Mount of Olives;

9. and from the Mount of Olives to the wilderness;

10. and from the wilderness upward – to heaven.

According to the midrashim, the *Shekhina* rose up from its place, from the Mount of Olives or from the wilderness. If we accept the reading, according to which the ascent was from the wilderness, this could be interpreted as the *Shekhina's* return to the place where the covenant between God and His people had originally been made, in the hope that the people would return to the acts of loving kindness that they had performed in their youth, "your going after me in the wilderness."

The various midrashim, each one in its own formulation, describe how the *Shekhina* waited on the Mount of Olives, in the hope that perhaps the people of Israel would repent. *Eikha Rabba* speaks of three and a half years (*Petichta* 25); according to Rabbi Yochanan in the Gemara (*Rosh ha-Shana* 31a), the *Shekhina* waited in the wilderness for six months, and according to *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (*Divrei Yirmeyahu,* pp. 114-115)*,* the waiting at the Mount of Olives was thirteenand a half years.

The *Shekhina*, as it were, struggled with the matter, when it left the Temple, hoping that perhaps the people would repent.

**Mobility Rather Than Permanence**

There is room to ask ourselves how it is possible that the *Shekhina*, which is the essence of the Temple, could have abandoned it. It should be noted that essentially there is no permanence for the *Shekhina* in the Temple.

When King Shelomo dedicates the house of God in the belief that it would be permanent, and that the people of Israel in every situation, even in exile and even when at war, would continue to pray to it, God answers in I *Melakhim* 9 that the very existence of the Temple is conditioned on the fact that the king and the people would observe the word of God and adhere to the Torah and to *mitzvot*, and if not the Temple will be destroyed.

Temporariness and lack of permanence are reflected also in the structure of the ark and the *keruvim.* Different opinions have been offered regarding the identities of the *keruvim.* Without deciding which is the most fitting position, it should be noted that Scripture describes the *keruvim* as having wings.[[2]](#footnote-2) What this means is that at any given time, should it become necessary, they can lift themselves up, fly away and leave the Temple. Therefore, the *keruvim* with their wings symbolize by way of their structure the very opposite of permanence – temporariness; their being found in the Holy of Holies is a direct consequence of Israel's conduct.

A similar idea finds expression in the Torah's command regarding the staves of the ark. In contrast to the staves of all the other vessels of the *Mishkan*, there is a Torah prohibition to remove the staves from the rings of the ark. Regarding all the other vessels of the *Mishkan*, the role of the staves is to carry the vessels from place to place when the *Mishkan* sets off on a journey. As for the ark, on the other hand, the staves are an integral part of the vessel, and they are not to be removed from it. In our opinion, the reason for this difference lies in the desire that at any given time, should it become necessary, the ark must be ready for movement, to leave the Temple, and therefore there is a Torah prohibition to remove the staves. According to this explanation, both the ark and the *keruvim* reflect in their very structure and form the ability to move on a moment's notice, the very opposite of permanence.

In this context, there is room to examine two aspects of the house of God built by Shelomo. The one, that Shelomo is commanded to add to the *keruvim* of the *kaporet* two additional large and tall *keruvim*, which fill the entire breadth of the Holy of Holies, and half of its height. These *keruvim* are part of the structure, and therefore they are not mobile. The question is what is the meaning of this assertion.

On the one hand, it might be argued that this permanence comes to express the *Shekhina's* reaching the rest and the inheritance (*Devarim* 12:9), the eternal connection between God and His people in His very presence in a permanent building on Mount Moriya in Jerusalem.

On the other hand, this permanence can be mistakenly interpreted as an insurance policy, as we find explicitly in the days of Yehoyakim: "Trust you not in lying words, saying: The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, are these" (*Yirmeyahu* 7:4).

Another innovation was introduced by King Shelomo at the time of the dedication of the house of God. When the priests put the ark of the covenant in its place in the Holy of Holies, the prophet notes: "And the staves were so long that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the Sanctuary; but they could not be seen without; and there they are to this day" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 5:9). What is the meaning of this lengthening of the staves?

The Radak (ad loc.) offers two explanations. One explanation is that since it was no longer necessary to move the ark, they lengthened the staves, seeing that they were no longer used. The second explanation is so that the High Priest could enter between them on Yom Kippur. Is it possible that the fact that it was no longer necessary to carry the ark on the shoulders could be misinterpreted as a sign of the *Shekhina*'s permanence in the place? That in the future as well there will be no need to remove the ark from the Holy of Holies, as it is already now in its permanent state that will never change? We have no answers to the two suggestions we proposed. But it is possible that the change that took place with Shelomo at the time of the building of the house of God was that all parts of the Temple began to be perceived as permanent.

**Leaving the Temple Toward the East**

The passage in *Yechezkel* 10 emphasizes that the glory of the Lord reaches the east gate of the house of God, and from there it rests on the mountain that lies to the east of the city, and *Chazal* complete the picture by saying that the glory of the Lord continued from there to the wilderness. The clear practical meaning of this is that the departure is from the west to the east. From the Holy of Holies by way of the Holy, the porch, the threshold, and the altar, in the direction of the east gate of the Temple, and from there to the Mount of Olives.

Is there any spiritual significance to the direction of the *Shekhina's* departure?[[3]](#footnote-3) It should be pointed out that throughout Scripture, turning eastward usually signifies distancing from God. This can be by way of Divine direction or by human choice.

Thus we find in the story of Adam: "So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden the *keruvim*, and the flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way to the tree of life" (*Bereishit* 3:24). The banishment is toward the east. So too we find with Kayin: "And he dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (*Bereishit* 4:16).

It is very interesting to see that the chosen side of Avraham's family lives mostly west of the Jordan, while the rejected side faces east. With Avraham we find that Lot went to the cities of the plain, and that Avraham sends the sons of the concubines to the land of the east. Esav chooses for himself Mount Se'ir. The two and a half tribes, Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe, choose to settle on the east side of the Jordan because of their flocks (as a continuation of Lot and Esav). The most sanctified place in the Temple, the Holy of Holies, is found in its westernmost section, and therefore all of the service in the Temple was performed while turning from east to west.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It is therefore no coincidence that the clear direction of the removal of the *Shekhina*'s chariot from the Temple in *Yechezkel* is from the west to the east, the glory of the Lord moving from the east gate of the house of God to the Mount of Olives to the east of the Temple.

**When Did the *Shekhina* Depart from the Temple?**

According to the plain sense of the verses, Yechezkel's prophetic journey took place in the sixth year of Yehoyakhin's exile, about five years before the destruction of the First Temple. *Chazal* expound the verse in *Divrei ha-Yamim* relating to the days of King Yoshiyahu: "And he said to the Levites that taught all Israel, that were holy to the Lord: Put the holy ark in the house which Shelomo the son of David king of Israel did build; there shall no more be a burden upon your shoulders; now serve the Lord your God, and His people Israel" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 33:3), as saying that King Yoshiyahu hid away the ark together with the *keruvim.* This took place about thirty years before the destruction. According to this understanding, the question arises as to how does the prophecy of Yechezkel describe the removal of the *Shekhina* together with the *keruvim* if they were already hidden away years earlier. There are, however, other opinions as to what happened to the ark, for example the view of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that "the ark went into exile with them to Babylonia." This understanding might influence how we relate to Yechezkel's prophecy, to what extent does his prophetic vision describe concrete reality.

On the other hand, there are midrashim (such as the *petichta* to *Eikha Rabba*) which speak of Amonites and Moavites who entered the Holy of Holies in the aftermath of the destruction, and there they found two *keruvim*. They took them and put them in a box, and then returned them to the streets of Jerusalem. According to these midrashim, Yechezkel's vision of the *Shekhina's* ascent above the *kaporet* and the *keruvim* was a prophetic vision that was based on concrete reality.

In any case, according to all opinions, the *Shekhina* leaves the Temple before the actual destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. For a number of years, then, the physical structure of the Temple stood in its place, but the *Shekhina* did not rest within it.

In the next *shiur* we will complete our examination of Yechezkel's prophetic journey, concentrating on chapter 11.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. In his article, "*Eser Masa'ot Nas'a ha-Shekhina*," *Sinai* 88, 3, 4 (1981), pp. 104-119. In his article he cites and explains many midrashim, some of which we have brought here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Shemot* 25:9; *Yechezkel* 10:16-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This issue requires a separate *shiur*. In the previous *shiur* we brought the main points in a most concise manner. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Gemara in *Bava Batra* 25a brings a disagreement between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael regarding the location of the *Shekhina*. Rabbi Akiva maintains that the *Shekhina* is in the west. The passage there deals with the issue of prayer. This is not the forum in which to expand upon the matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)