YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

and Marvin Rosenberg (Meir Chaim ben Tzipporah Miriam)

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In memory of six friends and family,
strong pillars of the Montreal Jewish community,
who have left us in the past 7 years.
All were אוהבי עם ישראל, אוהבי ארץ ישראל, אוהבי תורת ישראל.

Joseph (Yosie) Deitcher

Avrum (Avy) Drazin

Rabbi Joseph Drazin

Leibel Frisch

Israel (Mutch) Yampolsky

Dr. Mark Wainberg

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**Lecture 365: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(175) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (151)**

Having dealt with various different aspects of the account of the chariot in *Yechezkel*, chapters 1 and 10, in comparison to the description of the chariot in the construction of the house of God, and having described the departure of the *Shekhina* from the *Mikdash* to the Mount of Olives and to the wilderness, we wish in this *shiur* to complete the account of Yechezkel's prophetic journey by examining chapter 11:

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 Yaazniya the son of Azur, and Pelatyahu the son of Benayahu, princes of the people. And He said to me: Son of man, these are the men that devise iniquity, and that give wicked counsel in this city; that say: The time is not near to build houses! this city is the cauldron, and we are the flesh. Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man. And the spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and He said to me: Speak: Thus says the Lord: Thus have you said, O house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind. You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled the streets thereof with the slain. Therefore thus says the Lord God: Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the cauldron; but you shall be brought forth out of the midst of it. You have feared the sword; and the sword will I bring upon you, says the Lord God. And I will bring you forth out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. You shall fall by the sword: I will judge you upon the border of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord. Though this city shall not be your cauldron, you shall be the flesh in the midst thereof; I will judge you upon the border of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord; for you have not walked in My statutes, neither have you executed My ordinances, but have done after the ordinances of the nations that are round about you. And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatyahu the son of Benaya died. Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said: Ah Lord God! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel? And the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, as for your brethren, even your brethren, the men of your kindred, and all the house of Israel, all of them, concerning whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said: Get you far from the Lord! to us is this land given for a possession; therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: Although I have removed them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet have I been to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they are come; therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: I will even gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come there, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from there. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. But as for them whose heart walks after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their way upon their own heads, says the Lord God. 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. And a spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the spirit of God into Kasdim, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from Me. Then I spoke to them of the captivity all the things that the Lord had shown me. (*Yechezkel* 11)

First the prophet sees at the east gate of the house of God twenty-five men, including Yaazniya the son of Ezer and Pelatyahu the son of Benayahu, princes of the people. It is quite possible that the twenty-five people mentioned here are the same twenty-five people that the prophet had seen earlier (*Yechezkel* 8:16), with their backs toward the Temple, and their faces toward the east, worshipping the sun toward the east.

On the face of it, these leaders appear to have come to express their confidence in life as usual and in building houses, because calamity will not come in the near future. The city will not be destroyed and the people will not be sent into exile.

**This City is the Cauldron, and We Are the Flesh”**

The slogan, "this city is the cauldron, and we are the flesh," means that Jerusalem with its walls is the cauldron, and its residents who are protected by those walls are the flesh. Just as the flesh is protected by the cauldron, so too the residents of Jerusalem are protected by the wall that surrounds the city.

The prophet promises that the city will not protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It will not be a cauldron, and the people will not be the meat inside it. The people of Israel will be removed from the city and judged along the borders of Israel.

The prophet speaks and his prophecy comes true before his very eyes. Pelatyahu the son of Benaya dies. The people's leaders are beginning to receive their punishment. The prophet repeats his cry: "Ah Lord God! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" The prophet cries out aloud about the fate, not of Pelatyahu the son of Benaya, but of all of Israel. The prophet sees the beginning of the fulfillment of the harsh decree, and fills with sorrow for his people's fate.

**“To Us Is This Land Given as a Possession”**

Later in the chapter, the prophet refers to another slogan: The inhabitants of Jerusalem say to the people in exile: "To us is this land given as a possession." Jerusalem's residents think that all those who were sent into exile were distanced from Eretz Israel because of their sins, and therefore they forfeited their rights to the land, and only those who have remained in Jerusalem will inherit their share. But the Jews who were exiled in the days of Yehoyakhin count the years to their exile, and not to the king who rules in Jerusalem. They see their living in Babylonia as temporary, and consider Yehoyakhin their king, and not Tzidkiyahu. This is apparently because the prophet Yirmeyahu had told them that they would return to Eretz Israel after completing seventy years in Babylonia.

On the face of it, the interpretation of the exile on the part of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Yehuda is the very opposite of God's intention. The exile was supposed to shock the people and bring about great repair and repentance. Instead, the people blame the exiles themselves for their being exiled, for because of their sins they were removed from the land.

The view expressed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Yehuda assumes that God has defined limits of influence. God’s providence and control are limited to Eretz Israel, while those who were exiled were removed not only from God's land but also from His providence. This notion is similar in its essentials to the pagan belief that every god has his own territory of domination, influence and control. Therefore, when the ark of God was captured by the Pelishtim in the wake of the campaign conducted against Israel at Even ha-Ezer, it inflicted damage in all of the places through which it passed and was found (I *Shemuel* 5-6).

A similar view was probably shared by Yerovam ben Nevat who fixed the locations of the calves in Dan on the northern border of the kingdom of Israel and in Bet-El on the southern border of the kingdom. While his primary objective was to prevent people from going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in practice he created a situation in which the sacred borders are between the calves and not beyond them.

These notions are idolatrous ideas. According to the Torah's outlook, God's control and providence are not limited to a specific place or a specific situation, but rather they are all-inclusive – all lands, all peoples and all times and periods.

**“And I Will Give Them One Heart, and I Will Put a New Spirit Within You”**

In the following verses, the prophet promises that the exiles will eventually return to their land. God will gather them to Eretz Israel, and following their return to the land, they will remove from it all the detestable things and abominations. But despite the lofty Divine revelation, they will continue to cling to their sins: "But as for them whose heart walks after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their way upon their own heads." That is to say, even after they return to their land, they will continue to sin, and therefore God will replace their hearts: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them." God's solution to Israel's clinging to their sins is the removal of their heart. In the wake of this change they will now follow God's statutes and keep all of His commandments and ordinances. It turns out that the exiles will eventually return to their land, and by virtue of the removal of their hearts they will repair their actions.

In this prophecy the prophet Yechezkel who prophesied in the exile relates to the destruction as a punishment for Israel's sins; but this is also the starting point for a new period of redemption. Yechezkel relates to the exiles in Babylonia as the seed from which the redemption will grow anew. The people in Babylonia are the future of the people of Israel.

Surprisingly, the redemption will begin far away from the destroyed Temple, far away from the kingdom of Yehuda, in the Babylonian exile. While this will be only a little sanctuary, it will not have the defects and abominations that were in the Temple itself and brought to its destruction. In the Babylonian exile the people will be restored to life. There the people will receive a new heart and spirit, and they will become God's people.

To some extent, the idea of ​​a little sanctuary negates the territorial conception according to which the revelation of the *Shekhina*, its control and its providence are limited to a specific piece of land. Though it is true that the perfect and sublime place of the *Shekhina* is in the Temple in Jerusalem, human action can make a place for the *Shekhina* even in the Babylonian exile in a little sanctuary.

The "little sanctuary" – which *Chazal* understood as referring to the synagogue and the beit midrash – is actually a place built by the community for secluding with God. It is a place where the community assembles and joins together, where it creates a space for the individual to seek the closeness of God in his prayers. Therefore, it is a kind of Temple where a physical place is created where the community can turn to God, and by virtue of that appeal bring the *Shekhina* to rest there.

**The End of the Prophetic Journey and the Prophet’s Return to Babylonia**

At the end of the chapter, a description is given of the *Shekhina's* removal to the mountain that is to the east of the city: "And a spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the spirit of God into Kasdim, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from Me. Then I spoke to them of the captivity all the things that the Lord had shown me." The same spirit that brought Yechezkel to see the sublime prophetic vision returns him to Babylonia, where the prophet shares the vision that he saw with the people.

In next week's *shiur* we will go back to the prophecies of Yirmeyahu dealing with the second half of Tzidkiyahu's reign.

(Translated by David Strauss)