YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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*EIKHA*: THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

By Dr. Yael Ziegler

**Shiur #43: *Eikha*: Chapter 3** (continued)

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbie and David Sable

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**Eikha 3:52-66**

**צ֥וֹד צָד֛וּנִי כַּצִּפּ֖וֹר**

**אֹיְבַ֥י חִנָּֽם**

**צָֽמְת֤וּ בַבּוֹר֙ חַיָּ֔י**

**וַיַּדּוּ־אֶ֖בֶן בִּֽי**

**צָֽפוּ־מַ֥יִם עַל־רֹאשִׁ֖י**

**אָמַ֥רְתִּי נִגְזָֽרְתִּי**

**קָרָ֤אתִי שִׁמְךָ֙ יְקֹוָ֔ק**

**מִבּ֖וֹר תַּחְתִּיּֽוֹת**

**קוֹלִ֖י שָׁמָ֑עְתָּ אַל־תַּעְלֵ֧ם אָזְנְךָ֛**

**לְרַוְחָתִ֖י לְשַׁוְעָתִֽי**

**קָרַ֙בְתָּ֙ בְּי֣וֹם אֶקְרָאֶ֔ךָּ**

**אָמַ֖רְתָּ אַל־תִּירָֽא**

**רַ֧בְתָּ אֲדֹנָ֛י רִיבֵ֥י נַפְשִׁ֖י**

**גָּאַ֥לְתָּ חַיָּֽי**

**רָאִ֤יתָה יְקֹוָק֙ עַוָּ֣תָתִ֔י**

**שָׁפְטָ֖ה מִשְׁפָּטִֽי**

**רָאִ֙יתָה֙ כָּל־נִקְמָתָ֔ם**

**כָּל־מַחְשְׁבֹתָ֖ם לִֽי**

**שָׁמַ֤עְתָּ חֶרְפָּתָם֙ יְקֹוָ֔ק**

**כָּל־מַחְשְׁבֹתָ֖ם עָלָֽי**

**שִׂפְתֵ֤י קָמַי֙ וְהֶגְיוֹנָ֔ם**

**עָלַ֖י כָּל־הַיּֽוֹם**

**שִׁבְתָּ֤ם וְקִֽימָתָם֙ הַבִּ֔יטָה**

**אֲנִ֖י מַנְגִּינָתָֽם**

**תָּשִׁ֨יב לָהֶ֥ם גְּמ֛וּל יְקֹוָ֖ק**

**כְּמַעֲשֵׂ֥ה יְדֵיהֶֽם**

**תִּתֵּ֤ן לָהֶם֙ מְגִנַּת־לֵ֔ב**

**תַּאֲלָֽתְךָ֖ לָהֶֽם**

**תִּרְדֹּ֤ף בְּאַף֙ וְתַשְׁמִידֵ֔ם**

**מִתַּ֖חַת שְׁמֵ֥י יְקֹוָֽק**

**They have surely entrapped me like a bird**

**My enemies, for no reason.**

**They cut off my life in a pit**

**And they cast a stone at me.**

**Water floated above my head,**

**I said, “I have been decreed against!”**

**I have called out Your name, God**

**From the depths of the pit.**

**You have heard my voice**

**Do not obstruct Your ear to my groans and my cries.**

**You have been close on the day that I called You**

**You have said, “Do not fear.”**

**You have fought, God, the battles of my soul**

**You have redeemed my life.**

**You have seen God, my perversions**

**You have judged my judgments.**

**You have seen all of their vengefulness**

**All of their thoughts are against me.**

**You heard their taunts, God**

**All of their thoughts are against me.**

**The lips of my enemies and their logic**

**are against me all of the day.**

**When they sit and when they stand, look!**

**I am their plaything!**

**Return to them what they deserve, God**

**Like the work of their hands.**

**Give them anguish of heart**

**Let Your curse be upon them.**

**Pursue them with anger and destroy them**

**From under the heavens of God.**

*The Suffering Individual Re-emerges*

The suffering individual resumes his personal narrative, returning to describe a similar dire physical state that we encountered in 3:1-16. To be sure, he employs different metaphors and new images to describe his miserable plight, but his external circumstances remain substantively the same. Images of encirclement predominate here as before, fostering the oppressive sensation that there is no escape. If previously he was encircled by poison or stone walls, here he is trapped like a bird and enclosed by a pit (3:53). The pit begins to fill with water, which rapidly rises, threatening to engulf him; he is on the verge of drowning and there seems to be no way to escape the rising tide (3:54).[[1]](#footnote-2) The *gever*’s distress is compounded by the stone that is cast upon him in the pit (3:53). While some commentators explain that the enemies ruthlessly lob rocks at the wretched prisoner in the pit,[[2]](#footnote-3) others suggest that they place one large stone upon the pit to seal its sole escape route, blocking any possibility of deliverance.[[3]](#footnote-4)

The animal imagery also recalls the earlier account. Previously, the adversary’s animal-like qualities surface repeatedly; he maims and mauls (3:4, 11), like a bear or a lion (3:10). In this account, the individual compares himself to a hunted animal, an innocent and helpless bird, captured by a predator.[[4]](#footnote-5) Even if the sufferer no longer explicitly likens his enemy to an animal, he portrays the enemy as an evil predator, with bestial qualities, who appears to enjoy tormenting his hapless and vulnerable prey. The sufferer maintains that his enemies act against him for no discernible reason (3:52), perhaps for recreation or applause.

The individual’s unfortunate circumstances may be actual or metaphorical; physical distress mirrors spiritual or emotional distress. Descent into the pit accompanied by the feeling of entrapment evokes the doomed descent into the netherworld, the ineluctable movement toward certain death.[[5]](#footnote-6) The pit also functions as a prison, a symbol of a place from which escape is impossible without outside assistance.[[6]](#footnote-7) The waters that threaten to overwhelm him recall the copious tears that he sheds in the previous verse, which now threaten to drown him in his own endless sorrow. Indeed, the sufferer’s grim situation results in a one-word exclamation of desperate surrender (3:54), *“Nigzarti*!” — “I have been decreed against!” Hope is lost, there is no future; death encroaches steadily and inexorably.

However, in the next verse, this hopelessness abruptly disappears, replaced unexpectedly by a direct plea to God (3:55). On the brink of despair, having reached the bottom of the pit, inexplicably, the individual fills with newfound optimism, calling on God from the depths. This surprising turnaround occurs without so much as a warning; nothing prepares the reader for this sharp transition. It seems that the event that precipitates the transformation is the point of desperation itself, not reason or logic, conscious determination, or forced idealism. As he lies at the very bottom of the pit of despair, the wretched sufferer reaches deep into himself and finds the ability to call on God, summoning the minimal hope and optimism necessary to endure and prevail. This spiritual resilience is certainly not unique to *Eikha*; in fact, it appears to be a fairly common occurrence. Many a psalm describes someone who has relinquished hope, only to be revived by a sudden, baffling recovery, in which he either directly addresses God or enlists God to rescue him. Consider the following two examples:

Ropes of death swirled around me, and streams of evil ones terrified me. Ropes of the netherworld surrounded me, and snares of death confronted me. When trouble was upon me, I called to the Lord and to my God I cried out; He heard my voice from His throne room and my pleas came before Him to his ears. (*Tehillim* 18:5-7)

Many bulls surrounded me, the mighty one of Bashan encircled me. They opened their mouth against me, a lion that tears and roars… For they surrounded me like dogs, a pack of evil ones enclosed me, like a lion [at] my hands and feet. I count my bones while they gaze and look at me. They divide my clothes for themselves and cast a lot for my garments. And you God! Do not distance yourself! My strength! Hasten to help me! Save my life from the sword, my only self from the dog. Save me from the lion, and answer me from the horns of the oxen! (*Tehillim* 22:13-14; 17-21)

The sudden recovery of this individual mirrors and evokes the turnaround of the *gever* at the beginning of this chapter. After recounting the terrible litany of his hardships (3:1-16), the grim reality seems to overwhelm the *gever* as he sinks into hopeless despondency (3:17-18): “My soul rejected peace, I forgot goodness. And I said, ‘My endurance is lost and my hope in God.’” Yet, in the next verse (3:19), the *gever* embarks upon the movement toward self-rehabilitation, probing his memory to find comfort and optimism. In our examination of those verses, we suggested that this remarkable shift occurs at the mere utterance of God’s name at the conclusion of 3:18. The mention of God precipitates the *gever*’s transformation, his inclination to consider God’s ways and recognize his own culpability, ultimately discovering a path to return to God. The *gever*’s description in 3:55 (“I have called out your name, God, from the depths of the pit”) may transcend his present episode in the pit. Perhaps he alludes to his previous experience and to the lessons that he learns at the beginning of this chapter. There, he calls out God’s name when he is steeped in hopelessness, an act that has far-reaching consequences for propelling the *gever* forward toward reconciliation with God. Finally, this may be what the individual means when he states, “You have fought, God, the battles of my soul, You have redeemed my life” (3:58). While the exact nature of the battles of the *gever*’s soul remains obscure, the individual may allude to God’s role in his spiritual and emotional recovery in the first section of the chapter. God redeems him, not simply from physical peril, but from the danger that he will relinquish hope and abandon faith in God.

*Addressing God and Calling on God’s Name*

After calling on God’s name (3:55), the suffering individual continues speaking to God, addressing Him directly in second person nearly twenty times. He also specifies God’s name four additional times before the conclusion of the chapter (3:59, 61, 64, 66). In fact, God’s name (the Tetragrammaton) appears seven times in the final section of Chapter 3 (verses 40-66).[[7]](#footnote-8) The number seven draws our attention to the importance of God’s name in this section and also contrasts starkly with the absence of God’s name in the initial section (3:1-18), right up until its final word, “God” (3:18). Interestingly, names of God appear seven times in the middle section of the chapter (3:21-39).[[8]](#footnote-9)

By turning directly to God, the sufferer illustrates that he no longer regards God as the enemy. Unlike the first section, in which the *gever* refers to the enemy in the third person singular, in this section the enemy appears in plural form; a malevolent group (perhaps a nation of foreign conquerors) looking to harm the suffering individual. This constitutes one of the most significant transformations of the *gever* in the chapter. In contrast to the first section, where the *gever* assigns God responsibility for his woes, in this final section the external enemies are guilty and God is the *gever’s* guardian. It is perhaps for this reason that the *gever* no longer employs the motif of darkness to describe his grim situation. In the first section, the *gever* described his feeling of entrapment and darkness: God leads him in darkness without light (3:2), and, surrounded by peril, darkness closes in on him as though he were already dead (3:6). Although the sufferer still experiences encirclement and imprisonment, he omits any mention of darkness or the absence of light. With God at his side, divine light accompanies the sufferer and darkness is banished. Death, moreover, vanishes from his lexicon; instead, he focuses on his life, first endangered (3:53) and then redeemed by God (3:58).[[9]](#footnote-10)

Another theme that disappears from the individual’s account of his suffering is similarly indicative of the individual’s reacquisition of his faith in God. In his previous account, the individual helplessly describes God blocking or twisting his path, deliberately leading him astray (3:9, 11). The word path (*derekh*) again appears as the second word of the third section (3:40), “Let us search out our ways (literally: our paths, *derakheinu*) and examine them, and we will return to God.” In this section, however, humans assume responsibility for treading on the proper path. God is not held accountable for humans who have gone astray. A similar idea arises when the sufferer confidently notes that God has seen his perversions (*avatati*) (3:59) and can, consequently, be called upon to restore justice. Based on the context, most commentators identify these perversions as the injustices that his enemies have inflicted upon him.[[10]](#footnote-11) This same word (*iva*) is used previously to describe God deliberately perverting his route (3:9). However, in the contemplative middle section of the chapter (3:36), the *gever* asserts that God cannot abide corruption (*le-aveit*). These reflections inspire the *gever* to reconsider his perception of God as his enemy, immersed in perverse attempts to obstruct humans. In the final section of the chapter, the *gever*’s perceptions have completely changed; he no longer regards God as his adversary, but as his protector, one who sees and responds to the perversions of his actual enemies.

Finally, it is significant that, at the conclusion of the chapter, the *gever* stands firmly within his community. He originally expresses his feeling of alienation from his nation by asserting plaintively, “I was a laughingstock for my nation, their **plaything all of the day”** (3:14). This statement evokes the *gever*’s isolation, and his perception that his countrymen take pleasure in his misery, perhaps even afflicting him for sport. The *gever* at the end of the chapter again describes the taunts of his adversaries, who maliciously regard him as a “**plaything**” (3:63), plotting against him “**all of the day**” (3:62). However, the agent of his misery is no longer his compatriots, but rather, his unabashed opponent. By repeating words that appear in his initial statement of alienation from members of his community and transposing it onto the actual enemy, the chapter illustrates the *gever*’s remarkable transformation. As the *gever* reacquires his God and his community, his perspective and his narrative alter, and he can begin to heal.

*The Form of the Verbs in Verses 56-61: The Sufferer Perceives God’s Deliverance*

Has God already intervened on the individual’s behalf in this section or is the speaker petitioning God to do so? Much depends upon the nature of the verbs in verses 56-61, which has been the subject of scholarly debate. We could read these verbs in the past tense, describing God’s previous intercessions to extricate the sufferer from his tribulations.[[11]](#footnote-12) This gives the sufferer hope that God will deliver him from this situation as well. It seems, however, rather doubtful that Chapter 3 would devote so much space and energy to describing God’s salvation from an unrelated episode. The current situation seems sufficient to occupy the sufferer’s thoughts and it is unlikely that he would remove his attention from it for such a prolonged time.

Alternatively, some scholars suggest that these verbs are in the precative perfect tense, in which the sufferer beseeches God in the present, expressing a wish or request: “Hear my voice… Be near when I call you… Say to me. ‘Do not be afraid’… Fight my fight… Redeem my life… See my injustice.”[[12]](#footnote-13) These verses therefore take on the character of a petition or prayer; the sufferer implores God to intervene in the sufferer’s ordeal. Some of the verbs in this section are certainly imperative verbs, a petition to God to act: “Do not obstruct Your ear” (3:56); “Judge my judgements” (3:59); “Look!” (3:63).[[13]](#footnote-14) The precative perfect verbs easily link up with the imperative verbs to turn this section into a plea for help, a prayer to God. In this schema, the chapter ends without any concrete results; the best we can hope for is an individual who acquires enough hope that he feels that he can appeal to God for assistance.

Finally, we can understand the verbs as being in the present perfect tense (as I have translated above). This tense expresses actions that are complete (or nearly so), but have consequences for the present.[[14]](#footnote-15) In this reading, the verbs construct statements steeped in faith and hope that God will immediately respond to the sufferer’s dire predicament, if He has not done so already. God has heard him, and has drawn near, having assured him that he should not fear. God has also actively intervened, has fought on his behalf, has redeemed him and judged his judgments. In this reading, the sufferer expresses bold confidence in God and His deliverance, which seems as though it has happened or is currently occurring. In this schema, the speaker expresses his faith in God and thanksgiving to Him for His remarkable deeds. Though I have adopted this approach, I am not at all certain that this is the exclusive way to understand the verbs in this passage. It seems likely that the verb tense is deliberately ambiguous, mixing and mingling different aspects of the sufferer’s perception of God’s role in his suffering.

Why, though, are the verbs in this section so ambiguous? In all of these readings, God’s role is to protect the sufferer. Lack of clarity as to whether God has already delivered this individual from previous peril, whether He is now in the process of delivering him from the present one, or whether the sufferer requisitions His assistance in the present may be the very point. This deliberate blurring of the speaker’s intentions indicates the speaker’s stalwart confidence in God’s deliverance. Has God already saved? Is He is the process of doing so? Has He yet to do so? Does the individual express his memories from the past or his hope for the future? It does not seem to matter very much. Hope-filled memories of God’s past deliverance become the basis for human optimism that He will save in the future. This has bearing on the way in which humans regard their present, their ability to maintain stalwart faith and confidence in God even when the external circumstances seem hopeless. It is the *gever*’s religious transformation that matters here, not the actual circumstances of God’s intervention; the verbs indicate that this individual has reacquired faith in God and the belief in God’s mercy and deliverance.

*God’s Interaction with the Sufferer*

What, precisely, does the individual want from God in this final passage of the chapter? The individual utters a series of statements about God’s involvement, progressing from one topic to the next. First, the individual describes God listening to his prayer (3:56). This represents a revision of his previous statements, in which he accuses God of shutting out his prayers and deliberately obstructing them (3:8, 44). He moves on to describe God drawing near to him, and offering explicit verbal assurance: “Do not fear!” (3:57). These are the only words that God actually utters in the book (though they are cited by the human speaker in God’s name), drawing our attention to the vast improvement in the individual’s perception of God’s accessibility. It is especially significant that the individual portrays God as fighting for his soul (3:58); previously, the *gever*’s soul lacks peace or goodness (3:17), his despondency a result of God’s torments.

Following the individual’s recognition of God’s willingness to listen and respond, the individual expresses the confident assertion that God actually has intervened in his disputes (“***ravta***… ***rivei nafshi”***), redeeming his life. This bold assertion confirms the *gever*’s ruminations in 3:35-36, in which he states his confidence in God’s refusal to abide perversions of justice (“*le-aveit* *adam* *be-****rivo”***). Moreover, the *gever* notes that God actually **sees** him (3:59-60). Once again, this rectifies a previous predicament in the chapter, one that echoes throughout the book — namely, that God has turned His face away from His suffering nation. Just a few verses prior, the individual boldly demands that God look from the heavens, avowing that he will weep unceasingly until God acquiesces to this petition (3:49-50). In this final passage of the chapter, the *gever* twice asserts his confident belief that God has looked at him (3:59, 60), that He has identified the injustices that prevail. In 3:63, the sufferer explicitly entreats God to look at the enemies, employing the imperative verb, “*Habita*!”[[15]](#footnote-16) Once God looks out from heaven, he is bound to see not simply the suffering of the wronged, but also the malevolence perpetrated by the wicked enemies. God hears their taunts and their evil plots and sees their malicious deeds. This leads to the climactic finale of the chapter, the final petition requesting that God wreak vengeance on these enemies.

The *gever* seeks to kindle God’s ire against the malevolent enemies, who taunt, plot, and devote themselves wholly to tormenting the suffering speaker.[[16]](#footnote-17) The *gever* outlines a detailed plan for God’s vengeance. God should give them anguish of the heart, His curse should be upon them; He should pursue them with anger and destroy them. However, this is no more than they deserve; the *gever* is careful to open his call for vengeance with the request that God should give them appropriate retribution (*gemul*), in accordance with their own deeds.

The call for vengeance that closes each chapter of *Eikha* is not mere vindictiveness.[[17]](#footnote-18) This plea looks toward the restoration of divine justice. The bid to restore the world to its proper moral order begins with the punishment of those who have caused harm to others.

The *gever*’s request that God “pursue [the enemies] in anger” (3:66), employs similar words that he previously uses to describe God’s punishment of His nation, “You clothed Yourself in anger and You pursued them” (3:43). In this call for vengeance, the sufferer endeavors to deflect God’s punishments from His nation, calling on God to shift His attention and His punishments to the deserving enemies, those who perpetuate injustice in God’s world.

*Conclusion*

The ending of the chapter is far from triumphant. The suffering *gever* resurfaces, and his external circumstances remain miserable, his immediate prospects grim. The individual continues to suffer; he still feels entrapped and maligned, taunted and tormented. Nevertheless, his perception of the situation has undergone a remarkable shift. The *gever* no longer regards God as his adversary, nor does he feel alienated from his compatriots. Instead, he advocates on his people’s behalf and enlists God as his protector. In this way, the individual makes significant gains in reacquiring his faith, his meaningful relationships, and his will to live.

In the final analysis, the last section of the chapter (40-66) illustrates the astonishing development of the suffering individual over the course of the chapter. Possibly the most significant transformation occurs as the *gever* abandons his self-centered victimhood and begins to perceive those around him. This process allows him to reacquire a relationship with both God and his community, alleviating his loneliness and facilitating his recovery.

Chapter 3 opens with the word “*Ani*,” “I,” introducing a self-absorbed *gever*, whose narcissistic obsession with his hardships alienates him from his surroundings. The chapter closes with the name of God, illustrating the manner in which the *gever* has learned to look beyond the narrow scope of his own grief and find God. Though God never directly intervenes in the chapter (or in the book),[[18]](#footnote-19) in this final section of the chapter, the sufferer hears God’s words, senses His immanence and anticipates God’s redemption and the restoration of the moral order. By the end of the process of introspection, the *gever* has indeed found God, somewhere deep within the recesses of his own inner being.[[19]](#footnote-20)

1. For a similar image, see *Tehillim* 69:2-3, 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. R. Yosef Kara, *Eikha*, 3:54-55; Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Rashi and Ibn Ezra, *Eikha*, 3:53. See also *Daniel* 6:18. Note that the stone appears in a singular form in this verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. For a similar image, see *Yirmeyahu* 16:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. For a similar description of misfortune, see e.g. *Tehillim* 7:16; 88:4-7. Being thrown into a pit evokes inevitable allusions to Yosef (*Bereishit* 37:24; 41:14) and Yirmeyahu (*Yirmeyahu* 38:6), although I do not believe that we should make too much of these particular similarities. In my opinion, the pit is used to elicit a feeling of hopeless entrapment, rather than an allusion to specific stories or characters. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Rashi, *Eikha*, 3:53. See also *Yirmeyahu* 38:6-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The remaining two appearances are in 3:40, 50. I thank Margot Botwinick for pointing out this sevenfold appearance of God’s name in the final section of Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. The Tetragrammaton appears four times and the name *A-donai* appears an additional three times in the middle section of this chapter. In the final section, the Tetragrammaton appears seven full times, while the name *A-donai* appears one additional time. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The *gever*’s description of his deathlike ordeal (3:6) overpowers the initial section of the book with its severity and intensity. The *gever* feels nearly dead: dulled, insensible and lifeless. He seems to return to life only after he finishes ruminating about God, when he states vigorously, “Of what shall the **living** man complain, each man over his own sins!” This represents a return to the living for the *gever*, who is revived and reanimated at this point in the chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Targum, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, R. Yosef Kara on *Eikha* 3:59. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. R. Yosef Kara (3:56-57) reads some of the verbs in this way, maintaining that some of the past-tense verbs refer to God’s intervention in the liberation of the enslaved Israelites from Egypt. See also Rashi on 3:57-58; Westermann, *Lamentations*, p. 164; House, *Lamentations*, pp. 402, 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See Rasag on *Eikha* 3:58. Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. 52; Berlin, *Lamentations*, pp. 81, 97; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 126. The precative perfect is close to an imperative, but has a less demanding quality. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. If we read the other verbs as past tense verbs, then we must note the manner in which this section deliberately intermingles tenses, past tense appearing alongside future verbs. This suggests a blurring of past and future; based on his past experiences, the *gever* has as much faith in God’s actions that have yet to occur (which are phrased as imperative verbs) as those divine actions that God has already executed. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Perhaps this is Ibn Ezra’s intention in his commentary on 3:56-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. The imperative word-pair “*Re’eh* *ve-habita”* (“Look and see!”) appears in nearly every chapter of the book (1:11; 2:20, 5:1). Both words appear in the final section of Chapter 3 (3:59, 60, 63) although not juxtaposed so closely as in the other chapters. In this central chapter, the individual seems to have acquired confidence that God will look upon him, as we noted above. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. While here (verse 61) the context suggests that the taunts are directed against the *gever*, the word *cherpatam* often connotes blasphemy or mockery of God (see e.g. *I Shemuel* 17:26, 45; *Tehillim* 74:10, 18, 22). The *gever* may use this word to suggest that the enemies’ taunts are also an offense to God, in a bid to spur God to act against them. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. R. Yosef Kara (3:65) observes that this idea closes each chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. This constitutes a remarkable omission within the context of biblical books. God’s absence from the book suggests that in this era of sin, punishment and exile, humans must cultivate the ability to find a relationship with God even if a divine response is not forthcoming or easily discerned. This is one of the primary challenges of Judaism following the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent waning of prophecy. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. I complete the writing of my commentary on *Eikha* 3 — a striking chapter of human faith and determination — as I sit in my home in Alon Shevut on 11 Tevet, 5777, the day that my neighbor, Second Lieutenant Erez Orbach, was laid to rest. Erez was killed by a terrorist in Jerusalem on the fast day of 10 Tevet. Despite a medical condition that exempted him from army service, Erez insisted on serving, and volunteered for the Israeli army, eventually enrolling in an officers course. He was an example of idealism, fortitude and dedication; a committed soldier; and a spiritual young man who had a great deal more to contribute to his family, community and nation. I dedicate this chapter to his blessed memory. *Yehi zikhro barukh.* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)