

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

EIKHA: THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

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Shiur #13: *Eikha*: Chapter 1 (continued)

Eikha 1:6

וַיֵּצֵא מִבֶּת-צִיּוֹן
כָּל-הַדָּגֶרֶה

הֵיוּ שָׂרֵיהָ כְּאַיִלִים
לֹא-מָצְאוּ מְרֻעָה

וַיֵּלְכוּ בְּלֵא-כֹחַ
לִפְנֵי רוֹדְף

**Departed from the daughter of Zion¹
Is all of her glory**

**Her officers were like stags
they did not find pasture**

**And they walked without strength
Before the pursuer**

Exile: Part II

For the second time (see also verse 3), *Eikha* turns its attention to the sights outside of Jerusalem, to the far-flung places where her inhabitants have gone. Bemoaning the depletion of the city's glory, the verse does not specify what exactly constituted the city's former glory. The word *hadar* evokes an association with God's majesty (e.g. *Tehillim* 96:6; 145:5), perhaps indicating that God has left the city, taking His splendor with Him. However, the continuation of the verse

¹ A phrase that refers to the city as a daughter ("daughter of Zion\Jerusalem\Judah") occurs thirteen times in *Eikha*. A similar phrase, "daughter of my nation," appears five times in *Eikha*. Berlin offers a short excursus on the possible origins of this expression (*Lamentations*, pp. 10-12).

suggests that the departed glory refers to the exile of the officers.² Possibly, however, the departed glory continues the subject of the conclusion of the previous verse – namely, the young children gone into captivity.³ Taken together, these images blend and merge, as the reader witnesses the depletion of Jerusalem’s grandeur, dignity, and esteemed populace. As our eyes strain to follow these children into exile, we also glimpse the exhausted officers who fail to find a respite as they flee their pursuers. Turning back to the city, the reader observes a hollow void in place of her previous majesty, which faded and vanished in the wake of her inhabitants’ expulsion.

Three motifs recall the previous snapshot of exile in verse 3: the dogged motion of a weary people in flux, the relentless pursuer, and the manner in which the exiles “do not find” respite or pasture. These repeated themes, appearing twice (verses 3 and 6) at the outset of the book, crystallize a particular notion of exile. Exile is movement from place to place, chronic, unremitting persecution and pursuit, and an abiding inability to find permanent residence or repose.

These disturbing images portray exile as a hostile, challenging experience. Nevertheless, a *midrash* regards the inability to find repose as containing a hidden blessing:

“And he sent the dove... and the dove did not find repose...”
(*Bereishit* 8:8-9) – R. Judah bar Nachman said in the name of R. Shimon, who said: Had she found respite, she would not have returned. Similarly, (*Eikha* 1:3), “She sat amongst the nations, and did not find repose.” Had she found repose, they [sic] would not have returned. (*Bereishit Rabba* 33:6)⁴

The fact that the Jewish nation does not find repose may be the reason that they do not assimilate and completely disappear in exile. As we will see in *Eikha* 4:15, the host countries repeatedly reject the Jewish refugees and do not allow them to integrate, thereby compounding their misery. The *midrash* suggests that this misfortune may nevertheless be the reason that Israel maintains its distinctive national identity and the longing to return to their land.

Metaphor: Officers as Stags

Metaphors offer rich opportunities for interpretation. The word *ayyal* (as in our verse) means a stag,⁵ but a similar consonantal word can mean a ram (*ayil*).⁶ In

² Ibn Ezra, *Eikha* 1:6, suggests that this refers to the exiled monarchy; indeed the word *hadara* often relates to the glory associated with royalty.

³ See e.g. *Eikha Rabba* 1:33.

⁴ See also *Eikha Rabba* 1:29. Rabbinic commentators sometimes put a positive spin on the hardships of exile, asserting that these difficulties prevent Israel from getting too comfortable and assimilating into their surroundings. For another example, see *Eikha Rabba* 1:28.

⁵ The word that means stag has a diacritical mark (the *dagesh hazak*) in the *yud*, as does the word in our verse. See Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, A

other contexts, the same consonantal combination connotes strength of leadership⁷ and swift movement.⁸ The verse portrays this previously powerful leadership as drained of energy, no longer in a leadership position, and unable even to find pasture or the basic means for survival. If they cannot find pasture for themselves, they certainly cannot help their people, whose sufferings are compounded by their leaders' impotence.

Rashi connects this inability to find food to the next part of the verse: starvation precludes physical strength, which accounts for the stags' inability to flee from their pursuers. One privation leads to the next, creating a downward spiral of hardships.

The absence of pasture highlights the absence of God. The *Tanakh* often depicts God as a shepherd, who nurtures and pastures His nation (e.g. *Tehillim* 23; *Jeremiah* 23; *Ezekiel* 34). Procuring pasture should be God's job; if the stags cannot find pasture, it is because God chooses not to help them. The leaders' failure in finding pasture also recalls their own deficiencies as shepherds of their people. No longer able to care for their own needs, much less the needs of others, the metaphor underscores the leader's impotence.

Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p. 19 (hereafter BDB).

⁶ This word does not have the *dagesh* in the *yud*, as does the word in our verse, though this reading is adopted by some of the translations of *Eikha* 1:6 (e.g. Septuagint and Vulgate). These animals were used for both food (e.g. *Bereishit* 31:38) and sacrifice (e.g. *Shemot* 29:31-32; 46:4-7). In this reading, the rams' inability to find pasture, along with their exhausted flight from the pursuers, implies Jerusalem's loss of food and sacrifices.

⁷ See BDB, p. 19, which seems to extrapolate this from the Ethiopic. Some biblical passages refer to leadership with the word *ailay* (e.g. *Shemot* 15:15; *Ezekiel* 17:13). BDB, p. 18, suggests that this may derive from the manner in which the ram acts as the leader of the flock.

⁸ See e.g. *Bereishit* 49:21; *II Samuel* 22:34; *Isaiah* 35:6.

Eikha 1:7

זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם
יְמֵי עֲנָהּ וּמְרוּדֶיהָ
כָּל מִחְמֵדֶיהָ
אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִיַּמֵי קֶדֶם

בְּנֹפֶל עַמָּהּ בְּיַד-צָר
וְאֵין עֹזֵר לָהּ
רְאוּהָ צָרִים
שֹׂחֲקוּ עַל מִשְׁבַּתָּהּ

**Jerusalem remembered
[During] the days of her affliction and wandering
All of her precious delights
That were in the days of old**

**When her nation fell in the hand of the adversary
And there was none to help her
Her adversaries saw her
They laughed at her desolateness**

This verse caps *Eikha's* initial section (1:1-7) by dwelling briefly on Jerusalem's recollections of her precious delights from better days.⁹ We could divide this verse either into four standard-length sentences (instead of the usual three) or into two very long sentences (as I have done above). In either case, the structure of the verse renders it notably different from the surrounding ones.¹⁰ Deviating from the accepted structure draws attention to this verse. Just as the opening verse (*Eikha* 1:1) highlights its distinctive placement by employing distinctive structure (see our discussion there), so too does this verse, which serves as a summary and conclusion to the section that describes Jerusalem's suffering.

⁹ This interpretation, which I adopted in my translation of the verse, coheres with the explanation of both Ibn Ezra and R. Yosef Kara. Rashi, however, explains that Jerusalem in exile remembered the catastrophe that brought on misery and suffering, as well as the precious delights of former times. In Rashi's view, Jerusalem's recollections are both bad and good. In Ibn Ezra's reading, her present experience is miserable, but her recollections are positive.

¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, such a striking divergence leads some scholars to recommend an emendation, removing one of the lines to conform to the standard three-line verse (see e.g. Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. 8-9, 68; Westermann, *Lamentations*, p. 112). I have many objections to the "emendation" approach of biblical scholars. This approach is too facile, allowing any biblical scholar simply to excise what seems difficult, without properly contending with the possibility that it is deliberate. The subjective nature of this enterprise is also troubling. How should we emend the problematic verse? In the case cited above, for example, which sentence should we remove? Is there any sentence that does not appear to be an organic part of the verse? It is difficult to make a compelling case, based on objective criteria, for any reconstruction of the verse. It is worth noting that the verse as it stands is found in all ancient translations (e.g. Greek and Syriac).

While the second part of the verse, which is the finale of the section, employs themes already familiar to us (Jerusalem's fallen nation, her adversaries, the absence of a helper for Jerusalem, her desolate state), the first part of the verse introduces a new idea into the book – namely, memory. Recollections from the past can help Jerusalem contend with an insufferable present.

Before we discuss the role of memory in *Eikha*, I would like to comment on the verse's meter, which has bearing on its meaning. In dividing this verse into two lengthy sentences (as seems plausible, based on the content), an intriguing metrical irregularity emerges in the first sentence. (The second sentence, with its focus on Jerusalem's anguish, has typically uneven kina meter (6 + 4), despite its uncommon length.) The meter of the first sentence is weighted in its second half:

 1 1 1 1 1 = 5 stressed syllables
Zachera Yerushalayim yemei oniya umerudeha

 1 1 1 1 1 1 = 6 stressed syllables
kol machamudeha asher hayu memei kedem

Although in kina meter the first half of the sentence customarily retains more metrical beats than the second, in this sentence its second half is metrically longer than the first. This seems to draw out the second half of the sentence, signaling that the speaker cannot bear for this sentence to end. It appears that Jerusalem is thinking of the past, longingly conjuring up her former precious delights. Like someone experiencing a wonderful dream, Jerusalem prefers not to awaken to the reality of the painful present.

Recollections: *Zakhar*

Appearing seven times in the book of *Eikha*, the word *zakhar* functions as a *leitwort*.¹¹ Memory plays a key role in Israel's national experience. In this verse, memory acts as a solace, a palliative that alleviates Israel's pain. To cope with the present tragedy, Israel dwells in past delights and in her memories. Recalling formerly precious times, Jerusalem retains a semblance of her former majesty.¹²

Often in the Bible, the word *zakhar* obligates Israel.¹³ By recalling historical acts of God's salvation, Israel restates its commitment to God. Indeed, Israel's remembrances are often onerous and demanding. As we will see, *Eikha* 3:18-19

¹¹ M. Buber, *Darko shel Mikra* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1964), p. 284 [Hebrew] defined the *leitwort* (or leading word) as follows: "A word or linguistic root, which recurs within a text, a series of texts, or a set of texts in an extremely meaningful manner, so that when one investigates these repetitions, the meaning of the texts is explained or becomes clear to the reader, or at least it is revealed to a much higher degree." Umberto Cassuto notes the significance of a sevenfold appearance of a root in identifying a *leitwort* of a narrative. See, for example, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 75, 91 ff.

¹² In *Tehillim* 42:5, 7, however, memories of past time seem to increase the misery of the present.

¹³ For example, *Shemot* 13:3; 20:8; *Devarim* 5:15; 24:9 25:17-19.

repeats the word *zakhar* three times in two pivotal consecutive verses. In these verses, the *gever* of chapter 3 feels humbled by his memories.¹⁴ This begins his transformation from a self-absorbed victim to a contemplative *homo religiosus*, illustrating how dramatic changes can occur in the wake of powerful recollections.

Memory plays another important role in the covenantal relationship between God and nation. Not only must the nation remember God, but God commits Himself to remembering His nation (e.g. *Vayikra* 26:42). High expectations underlie the bitterness of the declaration in *Eikha* 2:1: “And He did not remember His footstool [the Temple] on the day of His anger.” The apparent violation of God’s pledge to remember Israel initially causes disappointment and remonstrance. As time passes, however, God’s promise becomes a vital avenue for hope. The word *zakhor*, directed toward God, opens the final chapter of the book, as Israel collectively turns to God with a plea, or, perhaps, a reasonable demand (*Eikha* 5:1): “**Remember** God, what has happened to us, look and see our humiliation!”

Precious Delights (*Kol Machamudeha*)

Jerusalem’s painful recollections lie at the core of this verse. What are the precious delights that Jerusalem recalls with such longing? Perhaps Jerusalem is not thinking of anything specific, but rather of her pleasurable life, the delights that accompanied her glorious past.

Usage of this word elsewhere in *Tanakh* points to several possibilities that sharpen our understanding of Jerusalem’s treasured memories. Some passages use this word to refer to the Temple (*Isaiah* 64:10; *Ezekiel* 24:21)¹⁵ or its precious vessels (*Joel* 4:5; *II Chronicles* 36:10, 19).¹⁶ Others suggest that these precious delights are the inhabitants of the city:¹⁷ either one’s children (*Ezekiel* 24:25), spouses (*Ezekiel* 24:16), or simply the general population. The precise nature of the recollection does not alter the meaning of this verse in any significant fashion. However, we will return to this discussion when we encounter later usages of this word, where these distinctions will profoundly affect the meaning.

Yemei Kedem

When were these “days of old” that Jerusalem recalls? Biblical passages do not employ this phrase in a consistent manner to refer to a specific period or event. The “days of old” can recall primordial time (e.g. *II Kings* 19:25;¹⁸ *Isaiah* 51:9¹⁹),

¹⁴ Though the verse does not explain why the *gever* feels chastened by his memories, it appears that he recalls his own responsibilities toward God, which he has not fulfilled properly. We will explore this at greater length in our examination of chapter 3.

¹⁵ See R. Yosef Kara on *Eikha* 1:11.

¹⁶ *Eikha* 1:10 supports this usage.

¹⁷ *Eikha* 2:4 supports this usage.

¹⁸ See e.g. Rashi, ad loc.

or denote the days of the Patriarchs (*Micah* 7:20).²⁰ It can also refer to the monumental events of Israel's history, such as the splitting of the sea, the period in the desert,²¹ or the conquest of the land (*Tehillim* 44:2-4). Sometimes the phrase suggests an unspecified earlier time (e.g. *Jeremiah* 46:26).²²

The context of our verse suggests that Jerusalem is avidly remembering an ideal earlier period, one that she covets (see also *Eikha* 5:21).²³ Devoid of a specific reference, this verse allows readers to exercise their own judgment in identifying the period. Perhaps Jerusalem recalls the glorious period of the monarchy, when the Temple brought glory and splendor to the city.²⁴ Solomon's reign, in particular, may be that alluring "yemei kedem." Solomon forged a vast kingdom, one that was prosperous, secure, and spiritually revitalized by the construction of the Temple. One can certainly imagine why Jerusalem would dwell on the era of Solomon, endeavoring to preserve memories of her former magnificence as she now experiences devastation and torment.²⁵

Mishbateha: A Wordplay

The root *shavat*, meaning to cease or desist, is at the core of the word *mishbateha*.²⁶ In its *hiph'il* verbal form, it can mean to exterminate or destroy (e.g. *II Kings* 23:5, 11; *Hosea* 1:4; *Jeremiah* 36:29). In *Eikha* 1:7, the nominal form suggests the city's ruin, or perhaps more precisely, the cessations of the city, its desolation.²⁷ It is not clear why this noun appears in the plural form.²⁸ Perhaps it emphasizes the cessation of all forms of activity in the city, which suddenly comes to a standstill.

¹⁹ Some rabbinic commentators assume that this verse refers to the Exodus and the splitting of the sea (see e.g. Yalkut Shimoni, *Beshalach* 233; Radak ad loc.). Note, however, that Rashi often uses this phrase to mean primordial times (e.g. Rashi on *Shemot* 17:5; *Isaiah* 37:26).

²⁰ See Targum and Radak on *Jeremiah* 2:2.

²¹ See e.g. Radak on *Jeremiah* 2:2.

²² See Radak on *Micah* 5:1.

²³ In *Eikha* 2:17, this phrase does not refer to an ideal time, but rather to God's original instructions and retributions. The ideal nature of this period may be suggested by the fact that the word "kedem" recalls the narrative of the creation of humans, prior to their sin (*Bereishit* 2:8).

²⁴ See e.g. Rashi, *Tehillim* 77:7, where he explicitly uses this phrase to describe the experience in the Temple.

²⁵ *Vayikra Rabba* 7:4 suggests that the similar phrase in *Malachi* 3:4 (*ke-shanim kadmaniyot*) is a reference to the days of Solomon. See H. Angel, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Jerusalem, Maggid, 2016), p. 139, fn. 21.

²⁶ A Qumran text reads *mishbareha*, her brokenness. That variance does not add anything in terms of meaning and lacks the marvelous wordplay with the word Shabbat that we will shortly discuss.

²⁷ BDB, p. 992.

²⁸ This plural form gave rise to *midrashim* that sought to explain the multiple cessations that occurred as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem. See e.g. *Eikha Rabba* 1:34.

Significantly, the word *mishbateha* recalls the Shabbat.²⁹ This wordplay evokes the terrible transformation wrought by destruction. Although on Shabbat work ceased, on this day Jerusalem teemed with activity, especially in the Temple (e.g. *Isaiah* 66:23; *Ezekiel* 46:1-3). Linguistically invoking the once-bustling Shabbat brings Jerusalem's desolation sharply into focus.

Shabbat is also the day that proclaims the unique sign that God bequeathed upon His nation (e.g. *Shemot* 31:13), a day that evinces Israel's dignity and pride. Now, however, catastrophe evokes mockery. In lieu of a gaze of admiration for her sanctified status, outsiders cast upon Jerusalem a glance of disdain for the violently enforced cessation of activity, for her *mishbateha*.

Summation of Misery (*Eikha* 1:1-7)

The section that began by scrutinizing Jerusalem's pain concludes with a concise summary of the city's anguish. We note once more Jerusalem's grief-stricken loneliness, a leitmotif of this section. However, the final verse introduces a new torment for Jerusalem: the mockery of her enemies.

The enemies' jeers rudely intrude upon the muted sounds of Jerusalem's wretchedness: her cries in the nights, the sobs and groans of priests and maidens. No longer alone, someone finally observes Jerusalem. However, it is not an empathetic observer or a beloved companion, but rather a hate-filled foe, one who delights in her downfall. Loneliness is surely preferably to scorn.³⁰ Disparaged Jerusalem continues to suffer the enemy's mockery throughout the book.³¹

In this summary verse (7), we encounter again two of the protagonists in the story of Jerusalem's downfall: her nation and her enemies. The third protagonist, God, remains notably absent from this summary, despite His punitive (and just) role in verse 5. Despite that verse, Jerusalem continues to focus on the gloating enemy's role and assumes little responsibility for her state. The noticeable absence of God in these summary remarks indicates that Jerusalem has not fully accepted the nature of God's role in these events, nor has she come to terms with her own transgressions. This will change in the following verses (8-9), as the narrator directly denounces Jerusalem's sinfulness and her role in these events. Only then will Jerusalem turn directly to God, eliciting His ongoing involvement in her tragedy.

²⁹ *Hosea* 2:13 creates a wordplay between the verb *ve-hishbati*, meaning to destroy, and the word Shabbat. Rashi implicitly notes this wordplay by citing this verse in his commentary on *Eikha* 1:7.

³⁰ The contempt of the enemy is a particularly devastating experience (see e.g. *Tehillim* 44:14-17; 79:4; 80:7; *Jeremiah* 48:26, 39; *Zephania* 2:8,10).

³¹ *Eikha* 1:21; 2:16; 3:46, 61-62. See also 3:14, where the mockery of one's own people is likewise intolerable.