YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)
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EIKHA: THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

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In memory of Rabbi Moshe ben Avraham Shraga Furst z"l
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Dedicated by his family.
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Shiur #33: Chapter Two: In Summation

Chapters 1 and 2

Thematic, linguistic, and technical/structural similarities suggest a strong connection between chapters 1 and 2 of *Eikha*. Shared themes include: Jerusalem's vanished glory (1:6; 2:15); the tears in Jerusalem's eyes (1:16; 2:11); a terrible dearth of food in the city (1:19; 2:12); violation of her Temple (1:10; 2:7); the cessation of the function of the *mo'ed* (an appointed place or time; 1:4; 2:6); the destructive fire (1:13; 2:3); Jerusalem as a physical body with a heart (1:20, 22; 2:19); the desolate or sunken gates of the city (1:4; 2:9); the mocking enemies (1:7, 2:16) and their schadenfreude (1:21; 2:16, 17); the exile amongst the nations (1:3; 2:9); and the appearance of priests (1:4, 19; 2:2, 6, 20), officers (1:6; 2:9), elders (1:19; 2:21), maidens (1:4; 2:10), passersby (1:12; 2:15), and *olalim*, young children (1:6; 2:11).

Linguistic parallels also link these chapters. Unusual phrases, such as *mei'ai chamarmaru*, portraying the city's churning innards (1:20; 2:11); God's deliberate destruction using the verb *olal* (1:12, 22; 2:20); the appellation *betulat bat Judah/Zion* (1:15; 2:13); the days of old, *yemei kedem* (1:7; 2:17); the call to God to look and see, *re'ei ve-habita* (1:11; 2:20); the lexical combination of the word call (*kara*) alongside the word *mo'ed* (1:15;2:22); and the phrase "maidens and young men," *betulotai u-vachurai* (1:18; 2:21).

Other technical and structural similarities include the lament-like word *eikha*, which launches both elegiac chapters, the consecutive alphabetic structure that gives it order, and the shift from the third person speaker to Jerusalem herself at the chapter's center. These, along with Jerusalem's role as the pivotal emotive force of the poem and the focus on the physical city and her personified grief, bind the two chapters together in structural, substantive, and linguistic ways.

However, while at first the structural division of the chapters appears broadly similar, a closer examination indicates otherwise. Jerusalem recounts her share of the story in first person in the second part of chapter 1; nevertheless, Jerusalem speaks only briefly after her initial appearance in the second part of chapter 2. Following her succinct portrayal of the dying children (verses 11-12), Jerusalem refuses to continue to speak in chapter 2, defying the reader's expectation and ignoring the attempts of the narrator to elicit her speech.[1] Jerusalem resumes her speech in verses 20-22 only after the narrator pointedly uses the same image of the dying children to persuade her to communicate (verse 19). When Jerusalem's speech recommences, it does not emerge gently; she does not turn to God in turmoil and shame-filled admission of culpability, as she did at the conclusion of chapter 1. Instead, accusations against God burst forth from her in an explosion of anger; confusion and fury intermingle to produce a volatile and vehement tirade.

Each chapter likewise maintains a distinct tone and atmosphere. The first chapter focuses on the eerie void that hovers over Jerusalem following the destruction, while the second chapter details the active destructive forces that assail and crush Jerusalem. The dismantling of Jerusalem is a methodical affair; the enemy devastates her buildings, palaces, fortresses, walls, and Temple. Synonyms abound, as numerous verbs of destruction lend depth and intensity to the account. The chapter gives special attention to the destruction of the political, religious, and military leadership; kings, officers and priests are profaned, spurned, and exiled, leaving Jerusalem's populace confused and leaderless, lacking guidance or instruction.

At their theological core, these chapters are more different than they are similar. Chapter 1 moves toward admission of sin and reconciliation with God, while chapter 2 does nothing of the sort. Chapter 1 concludes with Jerusalem's shame and guilt, alongside her declaration of God's righteousness, while chapter 2 concludes with Jerusalem's outrage and defiance, alongside her declaration of God's culpability.

Chapter 2: Anger, Destruction, and Incomprehension

God's anger burns fiercely and actively throughout chapter 2. The "day of God's anger" surrounds the chapter, appearing in its first, penultimate, and final verse (2:1, 21, 22). God's wrath burns fiercely throughout the chapter, consuming everything in its path. The chapter employs various synonyms and expressions –

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[1] It seems that chapter 2 was intentionally constructed parallel to chapter 1, in which the first 11 verses are devoted to the objective narrator's account, while the second half of the chapter allows Jerusalem to offer her first person account. Indeed, the first ten verses of chapter 2 offer an objective, third person account. As expected, 2:11 opens in first person, with Jerusalem describing her pain. However, Jerusalem falls silent after just two verses, a glaring cessation of speech that is exacerbated by the expectations created by the structure of chapter 1.

anger (*chori af*, v. 3), wrath (*cheima*, v. 4), and fury (*za'am apo*, v. 6) – to construct a sweeping portrait of pervasive divine ire. While God's anger appears once in chapter 1, alongside His punitive actions (verse 12), in chapter 1 Jerusalem primarily endeavors to elicit God's compassion (verses 9, 11, 20), turning to God in her grief.

Chapter 2 presents God engaged in an unremitting assault on His city, pummeling it from every angle. Opening with an act of furious divine violence, God hurls the glory of Israel from the heavens to the earth. This launches the theme of plummeting downward that appears repeatedly in the chapter, represented by the sevenfold appearance of the word *aretz* (ground). The entire city seems to come crashing to the ground as Jerusalem's structures totter and collapse on the ground (v. 2) and her gates sink deeply into the earth (v. 9). Mirroring the fall of the city's structures, the human inhabitants likewise drop and fall heavily upon the ground. Elders sit on the bare earth, dazed by mourning (v. 10), maidens' heads sag to the ground (v.10), Jerusalem's innards spill out onto the earth (v. 11), and elders and youth lie prostate (v. 21), dead on the blood-soaked earth of Jerusalem. This theme reveals not simply the physical collapse of the city, but her spiritual downfall as well. From the heights of heaven, where she shared the domain of the divine, God has flung His holy city down to the earth, where she lies shattered in a heap of unhallowed ruins.

God's antagonistic portrayal predominates throughout the chapter. Sometimes, the chapter resists calling God an enemy, preferring instead to portray Him offering Jerusalem's enemy unbarred access to His city (verses 3, 7). However, the chapter does not always deal gently with the reader's sensibilities; verses 4 and 5 refer to God as an adversary or enemy three times in rapid succession. The final reference to the anonymous enemy (v. 22) may in fact be a reference to God, who remains the veritable enemy of the chapter, even if He employs human agents to execute His destructive designs. To compound this frightening portrait of God, the chapter repeatedly describes God's pitiless stance (*lo chamal*, vv. 1, 17, 21), and His withdrawal from affairs involving the city, withholding guidance (v. 9), vision (v. 9), and speech. God is wrathful and merciless in this chapter; following His destruction of the city, He retreats without offering comfort or advice.

God's terrible anger mirrors and provokes the human anger that intensifies at the conclusion of the chapter. Jerusalem's initial speech (2:11-12) expresses pain and horror. When Jerusalem resumes her speech at the end of the chapter, we witness the depth and intensity of her anger (2:20-21). She challenges God, flings her words defiantly toward Him, shifting sharply from her role as numb victim to that of an enraged assailant. She questions God's actions, accusing Him of acting from anger, without compassion. Jerusalem's angry speech empowers her, allowing her to revive following her emotional paralysis. Jerusalem's rage produces defiance; the savagery of the divine assault on the city and the death of the innocent children leave no room for human comprehension, no possibility of quietly accepting the divine decree.

Jerusalem does not reconcile herself to God’s role in creating this intolerable reality. Chapter 2 recounts a heartbreaking experience of human incomprehension and dismay. Jerusalem recounts the theological outrages that she witnesses, the state of *tzaddik ve-ra lo*, the righteous who suffer without cause. The leaders have failed their people, who suffer from the leadership blunders, especially the iniquity of the prophets (2:14).[2] The chapter reserves its most lurid and terrible details to describe the unfathomable and unbearable death of innocent children that lies at its core. Scandalized by these events, Jerusalem does not blame the cruel and voracious enemies; she lodges her most strident complaint against God, who bears ultimate responsibility. Lacking closure or a solution for the theological quandary, the chapter ends without resolving the dilemma or repairing the relationship between God and humans. The final words resonate with indignation and confusion, as though one could turn the concluding statement into an unfathomable question, laced with alarm and disbelief: “Is it possible that those whom I nurtured and raised have been completely destroyed by my enemy?!”

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[2] The only mention of sin in the chapter is in the context of the failure of the prophets to reveal the sins to the people. This chapter does not assign responsibility for the catastrophe to the general populace. If anyone is to blame, it is the failed leadership.

Appendix One: The Chiastic Structure

Similar to chapter 1, this chapter appears to maintain a chiastic pattern:
1- *be-yom apo, ve-lo*
2- *lo chamal, la-aretz*
3- *ke-eish…* ***akhela*** *saviv*
4- ***shafakh*** *ke-eish chamato*
5- *a-donai, be-vat*
6- Tetragrammaton
7- *oyeiv, ki-yom*
8- *Bat Zion*
9 – *nevi'eha*, *chazon*
10- *Bat Zion, betulot Yerushalayim*
11- *nishpakh*, *be-ateif*, *be-rechovot*
12-*be-hitatfam*, *be-rechovot*, *be-hishtapeikh*
13-*Bat Yerushalayim, Betulat Bat Zion*
14- *nevi'ayikh, chazu*
15- *Bat Yerushalayim*
16- *oyvayikh, ha-yom*
17- Tetragrammaton
18- *a-donai, bat*
19- ***shifkhi*** *ka-mayim libeikh*
20 – *im* ***tokhalna*** *nashim piryam*
21- *lo chamalta, la-aretz*
22- *be-yom af hashem, ve-lo*

As I noted in the previous chapter's appendix, some of these linked pairs have stronger linguistic associations, while others, on their own merit, are less persuasive.[3] Nevertheless, the overall structure exposes a robust chiastic design, which does not appear to be random.[4]

What is the meaning of this structure? The cyclical design of the chapter indicates that the chapter does not progress in a linear fashion. It opens and closes with the day of God's anger and His pitiless, intentional assault on

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[3] For example, the appearance of the Tetragrammaton in verses 6 and 17 is not a very unique word, nor is it unique in the chapter, appearing in five additional verses (verses 7, 8, 9, 20, 22) for a total of seven appearances. The word *bat* (appearing in two separate pairs of verses: 8 and 15 and 10 and 13) also appears seven times in the chapter.

[4] As noted in the appendix to chapter 1, Berman (*Criteria*, pp. 61-63) persuasively argues that the concentrated presence of lexical correspondence in the chapter is statistically rare and therefore compelling.

Jerusalem. God’s fire consumes the city alongside the mothers who consume their young. The chiastic structure surrounds the chapter with God’s judgements. Divine rage encircles the chapter and there is no respite or escape from that fury; it swirls around tempestuously, imprisoning Jerusalem in its furious power.

In spite of the cyclical, unending situation, one parallel seems designed to hint to a solution. *Eikha* 2:4 describes God pouring out His anger like fire, which devastates and obliterates the city. Its parallel verse in 2:19 features the narrator pleading with Jerusalem to cry out to God, to pour out her heart like water before God. Water extinguishes fire, and in this metaphoric structural analogy, the chapter posits that prayer and petition can function as the solution for divine wrath.

The concentric structure draws the reader’s attention toward its pivotal center.[5] As in the previous chapter, an inner chiasm lies at its midpoint, focusing our attention upon its most important idea. This chapter revolves around the innocent children, who languish on the city streets.[6] The theological centerpiece of the chapter unveils Jerusalem’s perplexity, pain, and incomprehension during this calamity, whose impact and consequences defy human understanding.

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[5] In this structure, as the chapter moves toward its center, the word pairs seem to become increasingly persuasive, creating verse pairs that contain intertwined language and perhaps also parallel themes. See the words pairs of verses 9 and 14 (which focus on the failure of the prophets’ visions) and 10 and 13 (which focus on Jerusalem and her different appellations).

[6] In our examination of 2:11-12, we noted the linguistic chiasm at the center of this chapter: *nishpakh…be-atef …be-rechovot + be-hitatefam… be-rechovot …be-hishtapekh*.

Appendix Two: The Reversed Order of the *Ayin* and the *Peh*

As we have previously noted, the first four chapters of the book of *Eikha* are composed in an alphabetic acrostic, in which each verse opens with a subsequent letter of the alphabet. While chapter 1 maintains the familiar order of the alphabet, chapters 2, 3, and 4 reverse the customary order, which generally places the *ayin* before the *peh*. Thus, in our chapter, verse 16 opens with the letter *peh*, while verse 17 opens with the letter *ayin*.

Eikha Rabba offers a homiletic explanation for this noticeable reversal, playing on the meaning of the word *peh* (mouth) and *ayin* (eye):

> Why did the *peh* precede the *ayin*? Because they said with their mouths what their eyes had not seen. (*Eikha Rabba* 2:20)[7]

The midrash appears to suggest that people spoke rashly, without understanding or basis.[8] This idea coheres with the rabbinic endeavor to elaborate on the roots of Israel's sins and subsequent punishment.

The *midrash* seems to draw its greatest support for this idea from chapter 3. The initial *peh* verse (3:46)[9] opens with a reference to the mouths of the enemies,[10] followed by three successive references to eyes in verses 48, 49, 51 (one reference actually appears in the third *peh* verse, anticipating the manner in which the first and third *ayin* verses open with the word *eini*, my eyes). In chapter 3, the mouth quite literally precedes the eyes, in a manner that suggests the triumph of the cruel mouths, which produce fear and horror (3:47). Unlike the midrashic homily, in this case the mouth belongs to the vicious enemy (not to Israel), while the eyes are the sufferer's tool for eliciting God's compassion.

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[7] *Sanhedrin* 104b attributes this misdemeanor to the errant spies, whose behavior prevented the Israelites from entering the land for 40 years (*Bamidbar* 13-14), in accordance with the tradition that the spies' punishment was decreed on the same day that the Temple was destroyed. In general, rabbinic *midrash* tends to connect Israel's punishments back to earlier sins (e.g. the sin of the golden calf, the sins of the spies).

[8] The word "eye" appears 10 times in *Eikha*. Only once, however, are eyes (possibly) used for sight in the book (4:17); generally their main job seems to be to produce tears (see e.g. 1:16; 2:18; 3:47-48). Appearing five times in the book, the mouth twice describes God's word (1:18; 3:38) and twice describes the enemies opening their wicked mouths (2:16; 3:46). On the one occasion where the mouth is that of a member of Israel, the sufferer (*gever*) of chapter 3 ruminates that humans should not speak, but rather put their mouth in the dust (3:29). The *midrash*'s comment on the inadvisability of rash speech appears to be well-founded in the book.

[9] Chapter 3 contains a triple acrostic, which means that there are three *peh* verses followed by three *ayin* verses.

[10] The first word in the initial *peh* verse is *patzu* (they opened), while the third word is *pihem* (their mouths).

Archeological finds have helped shed some light on this irregular alphabetical arrangement.[11] Early Semitic abecedaries (writings that record the alphabet in order, probably used for learning purposes) found in pre-exilic Israel, consistently place the *peh* before the *ayin*.[12] To date, no abecedary has been found in pre-exilic Israel that has the *ayin* preceding the *peh*. It seems possible, therefore, that early Hebrew (Proto-Canaanite) originally developed with the *peh-ayin* arrangement and only later adopted the *ayin-peh* arrangement found in other Western Semitic languages.[13]

In spite of the compelling nature of the historical explanation, the fact that biblical alphabetical compositions generally adhere to the *ayin-peh* order (including in the first chapter of *Eikha*)[14] allows for a literary explanation. The majority of biblical alphabetic compositions (*Mishlei* 31; *Tehillim* 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111; 112; 119, 145) use the *ayin-peh* order, in contrast to the three middle chapters of *Eikha*.[15] Therefore, the switch in these chapters seems deliberate. Indeed, O'Connor suggests that this reversal of letters is a conscious literary device designed to allude to the reversal of God's affections.[16]

In this chapter, the *ayin* verse describes God's role in the destruction, while the *peh* verse describes the gloating enemies. Perhaps the reversal draws our attention literarily to the manner in which God has withdrawn in order to allow the enemy to enter (as stated explicitly in 2:3). Alternatively, the reversal may draw our attention to the attempt of Israel's adversaries to assume credit for the devastation. In a deft literary flourish, the *peh* verse jumps in before its turn, illustrating the enemy's bid to usurp God's role. Thus, this striking structural element can reflect and enhance the themes of the chapter and the book in several notable ways.

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[11] See e.g. A. Demsky, "A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and its Implications for the History of the Alphabet," *Tel Aviv 4* (1977), pp. 14-27.

[12] Abecedaries that have this reversed order include one from approximately 1200 BCE (found at Izbet Sarta), three abecedaries on one jar from Kuntillet Arjud dated to approximately 800 BCE, and probably also the abecedary found at Tel Zayit from the 10th BCE. An unprovenanced ostracon with three abecedaries from the 6th BCE also places the *peh* before the *ayin*. Interestingly, the earliest manuscripts (4th and 5th CE) of the Septuagint translation of the alphabetic poem of *Mishlei* 31 (*eshet chayil*) have the *peh* preceding the *ayin*. See E. Tov, "Recensional Differences Between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint of Proverbs," in H. W. Attridge, et al., *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins Presented to John Strugnell* (1990), p. 53.

[13] It is likely that the order in Hebrew changed due to the influence of Western Semitic languages such as Ugaritic and Aramaic, which used the *ayin- peh* order. M. First suggests that this occurred during the Babylonian exile, where the Aramaic alphabet predominated (see "The *Peh/Ayin* Order in the Acrostics of the Book of *Eikha*," Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg (2009): http://publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/12190).

[14] Intriguingly, the Qumran scroll of *Eikha* (4QLam) reverses the order of the *peh* and the *ayin* in chapter 1, rendering its order consistent with the remaining alphabetical arrangements of the book.

[15] Some scholars believe that other alphabetic compositions may originally have had a *peh-ayin* order, which was not preserved due to its anomalous appearance. See e.g. Mitchell First, "Using the *Pe-Ayin* Order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms," *JSOT* (2014), pp. 471-485.

[16] *Lamentations*, pp. 40-41.The broader phenomenon hints to the centrality of the theme of reversal in the book, as developed extensively in Gottwald, *Lamentations*, pp. 53-62.