

Insights into Kinah 11: The Eulogy for Yoshiyahu HaMelech

Of the myriad Tisha B'Av *Kinnos* recited by Ashkenazic Jewry, the dirge devoted to the tragic, untimely death of King Yoshiyahu (no. 11 in most editions of Ashkenazi *Kinnos*) is especially poignant. This *kinnah*, like many of the others, was composed by R. Elazar HaKalir, whose name is synonymous with the genre of Ashkenazi *piyut* (poetic liturgical compositions). While the identity of HaKalir and the time period in which he lived are the subject of much discussion and debate,¹ the high regard with which he and his compositions have long been held are undeniable.²

R. Elazar HaKalir's *kinnos* generally follow an *aleph-beis* acrostic or a permutation of the *aleph-beis* (reverse *aleph-beis* or *at'bash*), and are based on the language of one or more *perakim* in Tanach. Often his name, Elazar, is encoded as an acrostic at the conclusion of the composition.

The literary structure of *kinnah* no. 11 is patterned after the fourth chapter of Eicha, with each stanza beginning with the corresponding opening word of a *pasuk* in this chapter.³ Chazal (quoted by Rashi to Eicha) interpret the fourth chapter of Eicha as a eulogy for King Yoshiyahu. Yoshiyahu inherited the throne from his father, Amon, and his grandfather, Menashe, both of whom led the Jewish people down a path of spiritual depravity. Yoshiyahu ascended the throne at the age of 8 and ruled for 31 years. During



Rabbi Elchanan Adler

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

his reign, he set the Jewish people back on the path of Torah, cleansed the Beis HaMikdash and rid the Land of idolatry. Yoshiyahu was tragically killed in battle when he tried to stop Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt, from passing through Eretz Yisrael in order to reach the Euphrates to wage war. The *pasuk* in Divrei HaYamim (2, 35:25) records that Yirmiyahu composed a *kinnah* upon the tragedy of Yoshiyahu's death. Tradition teaches that this *kinnah* is the fourth chapter of Eicha.

The Gemara (*Ta'anis* 22b) relates that Yoshiyahu was punished for not consulting with Yirmiyahu about whether to wage battle against Pharaoh Necho. Midrashic sources indicate that Yoshiyahu disregarded a warning issued to him by Yirmiyahu not to block Pharaoh Necho's entry into the land (see later discussion). Yoshiyahu's reasoning was based on the biblical assurance that "a sword shall not pass through your land" (Vayikra 26:6), which Yoshiyahu interpreted as referring even to a "sword of peace" (i.e. an army that doesn't plan on waging war with Israel). The Gemara (*ibid*) explains that Yoshiyahu erred in overestimating

the righteousness of his people and thinking that they were worthy of this blessing.⁴ The Midrash (*Eicha Rabbah* 1:57), provides further detail: Yoshiyahu assumed that he had successfully eradicated idolatry from all Jewish homes after having sent messengers to inspect each home. However, unbeknown to the inspectors, there were some duplicitous people who stealthily placed half an idol on each side of the door so that when the doors would open, the idols could not be seen but once closed, the idols became visible again.

Each line of this *kinnah* is replete with myriad scriptural and midrashic allusions. A close analysis of these connections yields many precious insights. Unfortunately, space constraints do not allow us to focus on the *kinnah* in its entirety, but only on several key sentences.⁵

איכה אלי קוננו מאלי

Cry out "Eicha" for one of the mighty ones

The *shoresh* (root) of the word "*eilav*" would seem to be "*eil*," which means "mighty," just as we find in the word

ba'eilim (Shemos 16:11), which Rashi translates as *ba'chazakim*, among the mighty. Accordingly, this sentence would be rendered “Cry out ‘Eicha’ for one of the mighty ones” — namely, King Yoshiyahu. Alternatively, “one of the mighty ones” may refer to the extraordinary individual who recited Eicha for Yoshiyahu — namely, Yimriyahu. If so, the phrase should be rendered “A cry of ‘Eicha’ came from one of the mighty ones.”

An entirely different interpretation of this sentence appears in a 16th-century commentary on the *Kinnos* authored by R. Yosef ben Asher, which notes a verse in Yechezkel (41:1) that refers to doorposts as *eilim* (see *Metzudas Dovid* there). As such, the *kinnah* implores us to cry out for the sin of idolatry that was performed by suspending idols on the doorposts of the homes (as referenced in the introduction).

It is noteworthy that R. Elazar HaKalir utilizes the root *aleph lamed* twice in this line, once with the word *eli*, which means to cry, and once with *me'elav*, which, as noted, means either “mighty” or “doorposts.” [Interestingly, the “*aleph lamed*” combination appears in the next sentence as well.] Perhaps the recurrent use of the *aleph lamed* root is an allusion to the 31 years that Yoshiyahu reigned (Divrei Hayamim II 34:1), which corresponds to the numeric value (*gematria*) of the letters *aleph lamed* (1 + 30).

בן שמונה שנה החל לדרוש מאלקיו At the age of eight he began to inquire about his G-d

The simple reading of this sentence implies that Yoshiyahu began his spiritual quest when he was 8 years old, the year he became king. However, the verse in Divrei Hayamim (2, 34:3) indicates otherwise:

וּבְשִׁמוֹנֶה שָׁנִים לְמָלְכוֹ וְהוּא עוֹדֵנּוּ נֶעַר הַחֵל לְדְרוֹשׁ לְאֱלֹהֵי דָוִד אָבִיו וּבְשָׁתַיִם עָשָׂה שְׁנָה הַחֵל לְטַהֵר אֶת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם מִן הַבָּמֹת וְהָאֲשֵׁרִים וְהַפְּסִלִים וְהַמַּסְכּוֹת.

In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek out the G-d of David his father; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, and the Asherim, and the graven images, and the molten images.

This *pasuk* suggests that Yoshiyahu’s quest for G-d did not begin until the eighth year of his reign, rather than the eighth year of his life (when he first became king).

Interestingly, Radak translates the verse as “In the eighth year of his life, when he started to rule, while he was yet young, he began to seek etc.”⁷ Ostensibly, Rav Elazar HaKalir follows this translation.⁸

Yoshiyahu was not the first person to recognize G-d in his youth. Chazal have a tradition that Avraham Avinu also recognized G-d at a young age. Like Avraham, Yoshiyahu was the son of an idol worshipper. Indeed,

the midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, *Chukas* no. 19), includes Avraham and Yoshiyahu in a list of personalities and paradigms that defy the trend embodied by their respective precursors. The midrash hails this phenomenon as a remarkable manifestation of the all-encompassing unity of the Master of the Universe:

זש"ה (איוב יד) מי יתן טהור מטמא לא אחד, כגון אברהם מתרח, חזקיה מאחז, יאשיה מאמון ... העולם הבא מעולם הזה מי עשה כן מי צוה כן מי גזר כן לא יחידו של עולם.

That which the verse states “Who can produce purity out of impurity? No one!” — For example: Avraham from Terach, Chizkiyah from Achaz, Yoshiyahu from Amon ... the World to Come from this world. Who did this? Who commanded this? Who decreed this? [It was] none other than the one and only [Creator] of the World.

Yoshiyahu’s youthful stirrings to abandon the idolatrous lifestyle within which he was reared, laid the groundwork for his subsequent campaign to purge idolatry from the land. Interestingly, Yoshiyahu’s calling, along with his very name, were foreshadowed many years earlier in an episode recorded in Sefer Melachim (1, 13:1-2), in which a prophet of Hashem appeared to the wicked King Yeravam as he prepared to offer an idolatrous sacrifice upon the altar in Beis El:

וַיִּקְרָא עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בְּדַבַּר ה' וַיֹּאמֶר מִזְבֵּחַ מִזְבֵּחַ כֹּה אָמַר ה' הִנֵּה בֵן נוֹלָד לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמוֹ יִזְבַּח עָלָיִךְ אֶת כָּל־הַבָּמֹת הַמִּקְטָרִים עָלָיִךְ וְעַצְמוֹת אָדָם יִשְׂרְפוּ עָלָיִךְ:



He called out to the altar, by the word of Hashem, and said: "Altar, altar! Thus said Hashem: Behold a son will be born to the house of David — Yoshiyahu will be his name — and he will slaughter upon you the priests of the high places, who burn sacrifices upon you; human bones will be burnt upon you."

This episode suggests that on some mystical level Yoshiyahu was predisposed from birth toward what was to become his life's mission and ultimate legacy.⁹

דבק בו חטא ליצני הדור אשר אחר הדלת קמו לסדור

The sin of the generation's scoffers clung to him, those who set up [the idols] behind the doors

The word *davak*, clung, alludes to the notion of *areivus*, that each Jew is responsible for the sinful actions of other Jews. Why was Yoshiyahu punished? How was Yoshiyahu supposed to know that some people were worshipping idols in a clandestine manner? R. Soloveitchik answered that as a leader, Yoshiyahu was indeed expected to know his people (*The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways* pg. 280, see also commentary in *Mesoret HaRav Kinot*).

We might expand on this insight by examining more closely the concept of *areivus*. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 43b-44a) quotes a dispute among the Tannaim as to whether there is punishment for the hidden sins of others (*nistaros*). R. Yehuda's opinion is that punishment is, in fact, meted out for hidden sins. Rashi explains that this is primarily directed toward the leaders. According to R. Yehuda, the leaders are responsible for the hidden sins of others.

Meiri writes:

דייני ישראל וחכמיהם ומנהיגיהם צריכים הם לפשפש תמיד ולחזור ולחקור על מעשה בני עירם ואין להם התנצלות כשיעשו הראוי על הנגלה הבא לידם אלא צריכים לחקור ולרגל אחר הנסתרות כפי יכלתם וכל שמתרשלים בכך הרי הכל נענשים בנסתריהם של חוטאים שכל ישראל נעשו ערבים זה לזה.

The judges of Israel, its scholars and its leaders, must constantly probe and investigate the deeds of the people of their city. They are not free from guilt if they merely acted appropriately regarding issues that are well-known and which make their way to them; they must proactively probe and "spy out" the private deeds to their utmost ability, and those who are delinquent in doing so are punished for the private deeds of the sinners because all of Israel have become guarantors for one another. Rabbeinu Yonah (in his commentary to *Sanhedrin*) writes:

לפי שאי אפשר שלא יכירו שום פגם כשהוא עובר בסתרה.

Because it is impossible that they will not notice some fault when the sinners sin clandestinely.

By his choice of the word *davak*, R. Elazar HaKalir is providing a profound insight into the concept of *areivus*. The punishment is not merely a technical violation for not investigating the private matters of the people. It is a natural consequence that flows from failed leadership. A leader must have his pulse on the conduct of his people. Even when not initially privy to their specific deeds, he must do all within his power to probe the intensity of their commitment. Otherwise, their sins will automatically cling to him.¹⁰

לא שמע לחוזה לשוב אחרים He did not listen to the prophet to turn back

This sentence, as well as subsequent sentences in the *kinnah*, suggest that Yirmiyahu had advised Yoshiyahu not to engage in battle with Pharaoh Necho, and Yoshiyahu chose to defy these clear instructions. A number of questions present themselves. First, in what manner did the navi (Yirmiyahu) warn Yoshiyahu not to deny passage to Pharaoh Necho — in person or via an emissary? Second, at what point was the warning issued — before Yoshiyahu amassed his troops or afterwards? Third, was Yirmiyahu's warning based on an actual prophecy that he had received from Hashem? Fourth, if so, how could Yoshiyahu justify disregarding it?

A cursory reading of the *pesukim* in *Divrei Hayamim* suggests that Yirmiyahu's message was delivered by Pharaoh Necho as the word of Hashem after Yoshiyahu had already amassed his soldiers for battle. Additionally, the phrase "*lashuv achorayim*" — "to turn around" — employed by R. Elazar HaKalir, implies that the prophet's warning was issued after Yoshiyahu had set out to confront the forces of Pharaoh Necho. This too would suggest that the warning was issued via a third party. Had Yirmiyahu delivered the message to Yoshiyahu in person, logic would dictate that such a conversation take place before Yoshiyahu went out to war rather than on the battlefield.

The basis for Yoshiyahu's disregarding the prophet's warning would also seemingly hinge on the above issue. Assuming that the message was delivered merely by Pharaoh Necho, Yoshiyahu might have had good reason to doubt that Pharaoh Necho was honestly conveying a message from the prophet. If, however, the warning came directly from

Yirmiyahu, it is difficult to understand why Yoshiyahu felt justified in ignoring it. All of this would suggest that the Navi's message was delivered to Yoshiyahu at the battlefield via proxy, most likely by none other than Pharaoh Necho.

This approach is supported by the comments of Radak (Melachim 2, 23:29) who states:

ונענש יאשיהו לפי שלא שמע יאשיהו אליו כי מפי אלקים היה אומר לו כמו שאומר בדברי הימים ולא שמע אל דבר נכה כי ירמיהו התנבא בזה וכן אמרו רז"ל כי אלקים האמור ביאשיהו קדש.

Yoshiyahu was punished because he did not listen to him [Pharaoh Necho] because he was telling it to him in the name of Hashem. Our Rabbis say that when it states [from the word of] Elokim it refers to the Divine.

However, the midrash (*Eicha Rabbah* 1:57) records a face-to-face encounter between Yirmiyahu and Yoshiyahu:

ולא הסב יאשיהו פניו ולא שמע אל דברי נכו מפי אלקים זה ירמיהו שאמר ליאשיהו כך מקובלני מישעיה רבי (ישעיה י"ט) וסכסכתי מצרים במצרים ולא שמע לו אלא א"ל משה רבה דרבך לא כך אמר (ויקרא כ"ו) וחרב לא תעבור בארצכם וחרבו של אותו רשע עוברת בארצי ובתחומי.

[The verse states] "Yoshiyahu didn't turn his focus away and did not listen to the words of Necho in the name of God." This refers to Yirmiyahu who said to Yoshiyahu, "I have received from Yeshayah, my teacher: 'I will confound Egypt with Egypt' (i.e. you should let them fight their own wars without intervening)." Yoshiyahu responded, "Didn't Moshe, the teacher of your teacher, state 'a sword shall not pass through your land,' and I shall allow the sword of this evil person to pass through my land in my borders?"

The midrash records a verbal

exchange between Yirmiyahu and Yoshiyahu regarding whether to deny access to Pharaoh Necho. In support of his position, Yirmiyahu invoked a prophecy of Yeshayahu which implied that Israel stay above the fray as "Egypt battles Egypt." The next line in the *kinnah* also references this prophecy of Yeshayahu. If a direct conversation was held, then apparently Yirmiyahu visited the battlefield to convince Yoshiyahu to reverse course. Alternatively, it is conceivable that Yirmiyahu issued an initial warning in person prior to Yoshiyahu's amassing his troops, and a subsequent warning via proxy calling on Yoshiyahu to turn back from the battlefield.

As to why Yoshiyahu disobeyed the words of the prophet, perhaps Yoshiyahu felt that the warning was not based on a received prophecy but merely on logical inferences that Yirmiyahu drew from the aforementioned prophecy of Yeshayahu.¹¹ To this, Yoshiyahu provided a logical counterargument (as recorded in the midrash), and persevered in his military campaign against the forces of Pharaoh Necho.

סורו העידו עד לא שאיה They warned "turn back" before the disaster

The *kinnah* uses plural language — **they** warned. What is meant by "they"? As we have seen, the warning seemingly came from only one prophet — namely, Yirmiyahu.

We may suggest that because Yirmiyahu attributed his warning to a tradition received from Yeshayahu, it is as if both he and Yeshayahu had issued the warning. Alternatively, assuming that Yirmiyahu's message

was conveyed via Pharaoh Necho (see above), the plural "they" may refer to Yirmiyahu and Pharaoh Necho.¹²

פני קרב כקרב ולא עלתה לו רטיה ויורו המורים למלך יאשיה

As he approached the battlefront, no bandage was available, and the archers shot at King Yoshiyahu

The presentation of these events seems out of sequence. Seemingly, after Yoshiyahu was shot it was determined that no bandage was available. Why does R. Elazar HaKalir reverse the order of events?¹³

A simple solution is to read the sentence in reverse: "no bandage was available after the archers shot." On a deeper level, however, we may resolve this literary anomaly in light of the Talmudic teaching (*Megillah* 13b) that Hashem first creates the remedy and afterwards inflicts the wound. In other words, Hashem normally doesn't bring suffering upon His people unless He has already set into motion the process of the cure. R. Elazar HaKalir alludes here to the fact that this special Divine quality was absent in Yoshiyahu's case; hence, there was no prepared remedy in place before the archers shot at Yoshiyahu.

קלים הטו אחריו ארון מוצא פיהו ... צדיק הוא ה' כי מריתי פיהו The light-footed bent behind him to hear [the words] emanating from his mouth ... Hashem is the righteous one for I have disobeyed His word

This line of the *kinnah* is based on the verse (*Eicha* 1:18), "*Tzaddik hu Hashem ki fihu marisi* — Hashem is just for I have rebelled against His word." The midrash (*Eicha Rabbah*

1:53) and the Gemara (*Taanis* 22b) both note that Yirmiyahu overheard Yoshiyahu uttering these words of confession just before his death. Yet there is a notable difference between the presentation of the midrash and that of the Gemara. The midrash states the following:

והיה ירמיהו מצית אחריו לידע מהו אומר ומה היה אומר צדיק הוא ה' כי פיהו מריתי פיהו ופום סרסורו.

Yirmiyahu was listening from behind to know what he would say. What was he saying? "Hashem is just for I have rebelled against His word and the word of His messenger."

The Gemara states:

כי הוה ניחא נפשיה חזא ירמיהו שפוותיה דקא מרחשן אמר שמא ח'ו מילתא דלא מהגנא אמר אנב צעריה גחין ושמעיה דקא מצדיק עליה דינא אנפשיה אמר (איכה א, יח) צדיק הוא ה' כי פיהו מריתי.

As Yoshiyahu was dying, Yirmiyahu saw that his lips were moving. [Yirmiyahu] said, "Maybe G-d forbid, he might say something inappropriate because of his suffering." He bent over and heard [Yoshiyahu] accepting his judgment saying: "Hashem is just for I have rebelled against His word."

Why does the midrash add the words "and the word of His messenger" while the Gemara omits it? Perhaps the variance can be traced to what we have noted earlier regarding the nature of Yoshiyahu's sin. According to the midrash, Yoshiyahu disobeyed the clear instructions of Yirmiyahu who had warned him not to wage battle against Pharaoh Necho. According to the Gemara, however, Yoshiyahu never received a warning from Yirmiyahu. His sin was that he rebelled against Hashem by failing to consult with the prophet. As such, the midrash adds "and the word of his messenger" while the Gemara does

not.

ויקונן עליו כל איכה יועם And he lamented for him all of "Alas, the gold is dimmed"

R. Elazar HaKalir alludes here to the fact that when Yoshiyahu was killed, Yirmiyahu composed the fourth chapter of Eicha — *Eicha yu'am zahav* (Alas, the gold is dimmed) — in eulogical tribute. The *kinnah* implies that the entire fourth chapter of Eicha serves as a eulogy for Yoshiyahu. Yet when one examines the specific verses in the chapter, there are only a few scattered references to Yoshiyahu; most of it concerns the *churban* in general.

An answer may be gleaned by examining the verse in Divrei Hayamim (2, 35:25) which implies that Yirmiyahu's eulogizing Yoshiyahu set a precedent for future generations:

וַיְקוֹנֵן יִרְמְיָהוּ עַל יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הַשְּׂרָיִם וְהַשְּׂרוֹת בְּקִינֹתֵיהֶם עַל יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ עַד הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְּנוּם לְחֹק עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָנִים כְּתוּבִים עַל הַקִּינֹת.

Yirmiyahu lamented over Yoshiyahu; and all the men and women singers spoke of Yoshiyahu in their lamentations, until this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel; and, behold, they are written in the lamentations.

What was the ordinance that was instituted? Rashi writes:

כשמזדמן להם שום צער ובכיה שהם מקוננים ובוכים על המאורע הם מזכירים זה הצער עמו דוגמא בתשעה באב שמזכירים קינות על ההרוגים בגזירות שאירעו בימינו כן יבכיון על מות יאשיהו.

When the Jewish people experience any form of suffering or grief that causes them to lament and cry over that event, they will mention this tragedy (i.e. the death of Yoshiyahu) along with it. As an example, on Tisha B'Av, when we

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l on R. Elazar HaKalir and his Piyyutim

"Kalir was the *avi ha-paytaniim*, the "father" of all liturgical poets; he dared to do more than any other paytan. He simply had the Hebrew language at his disposal, and he fashioned and refashioned it, cast and recast its words. That is why the text is very difficult, although most of the words he introduced are still in use. There are times when he writes so obscurely that it is almost impossible to decode what he means. Those who do not know either Hebrew or *aggadot Hazal* find ha-Kalir's *piyyutim* boring. But they are not boring at all; they are like a gold mine." (pp. 142-143)

"The *Hakhmei Yisrael* chose the *kinot* of Kalir for the very important purpose of commemorating *hurban Yerushalayim* because they trusted that he would not change any halakhic practices and that his *kinot* would be exactly in accordance with their traditions. The trusted him, and he wrote his *kinot* under their supervision." (pg. 139)

"On Tish'ah be'Av day, we study Mishnah, Gemara, and Midrash, all in the form of *kinot* written by great scholars like Rabbi El'azar ha-Kalir. On Tish'ah be'Av day, Kalir is the commentator, the *meturgaman* par excellence, who interprets *Eikhah* in halakhic, midrashic and aggadic terms." (pg. 99)

from *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*

mention those who were killed during the persecutions that occurred in our times, we cry over the death of Yoshiyahu as well.

Rashi's comments indicate that a precedent was established to include mention of Yoshiyahu's death in connection with mourning over other national tragedies. As such, the fourth chapter of Eicha would serve as a perfect illustration of this very institution. While the majority of the chapter does not directly bemoan the death of Yoshiyahu, the references at the beginning and end of the chapter serve to place the tragedy of Yoshiyahu's death within the larger context of mourning the *churban*, precisely because Yoshiyahu's death serves as the quintessential paradigm of Jewish tragedy.

תם במקרה אחד כוס מגידו לשתות
The innocent one¹⁴
experienced the same event
by drinking the cup (of
suffering) at Meggido.

This line is a reference to a midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah, Acharei Mos* no. 20) that notes the bitter irony that the righteous Yoshiyahu, who was killed by archers in the battlefield (of Megiddo), suffered the same fate as the wicked King Achav who was also slain by archers on the battlefield.¹⁵ In a similar vein, the Gemara (*Megillah* 3a, *Moed Katan* 28b) equates the mass eulogy of Yoshiyahu to that of Achav. Maharsha (*Mo'ed Katan* 28b) notes that both of these eulogies are associated with battles in which

only the king was killed, giving each tragedy the appellation of an “*eivel yachid*” — the mourning over a single charismatic leader.¹⁶

On a mystical level, the common circumstances surrounding the respective deaths of Yoshiyahu and Achav reflect a kabbalistic tradition that Yoshiyahu's soul was a reincarnation of that of King Achav. Hence, Yoshiyahu's unique calling in life was to rid the land of idolatry, thereby “remedying” the sins of Achav who was responsible for spreading idolatry in the Land of Israel.¹⁷

כי ספדו לו איכה בעשרים אותיות
Because they eulogized him
with the 22 letters of Eicha

This line refers to the fact that the fourth chapter of Eicha serves as a eulogy for Yoshiyahu. This reinforces the idea mentioned earlier that although only a few verses directly refer to Yoshiyahu, the entire chapter is considered a eulogical tribute given that Yoshiyahu's death is interwoven within the description of national tragedy.

The sentence emphasizes that because Yoshiyahu was eulogized appropriately (with recourse to the 22 letters of the *aleph beis* in chapter 4 of Eicha), the *churban* was postponed for 22 years.¹⁸

זמותי כי לעד יאהילי
I thought that He would
forever shelter me

Why does the *kinna* end with this thought? This sentence highlights the flawed mindset that prevailed at that time. Yoshiyahu was convinced that the spiritual damage that had been caused by his predecessors had been successfully undone, that the Jews were righteous and that the *churban* would be averted. In addition, many Jews turned a blind eye to Yirmiyahu's prophecies of impending doom and sought solace in the false hopes offered by charlatan prophets. However, the sad reality was that notwithstanding Yoshiyahu's herculean efforts and amazing success in elevating Israel's spiritual level, the damage was irreversible and the *churban* was inevitable. Moreover, pockets of idolatry still existed throughout the land, as evidenced by the “scoffers who set up idols behind the doors” (see commentary above). Yoshiyahu's death serves as a lesson to future generations never to be complacent with the status quo. Perhaps this is also why Yoshiyahu's death has become an integral part of *Kinno*s for all generations.

Notes

1 Many Rishonim assume that R. Elazar HaKalir was a Tanna. Tosafos (*Chagigah* 13a, s.v. *V'raglei*) and the Rosh (*Berachos* chapter 5 #21) assume that he was R. Elazar the son of R. Shimon bar Yochai. [See, however, *Mor U'ketziah* (OC 112) who quotes the Arizal as attesting that HaKalir contained the “spark of the soul” (*nitzotz nishmas*) of R. Elazar b. Shimon. See also the Chida's *Machzik Bracha*, *ibid.*] According to the Rashba (*Teshuvos Harashba* 1:469), he was R. Elazar ben Arach. Others consider the



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Elchanan Adler at
<http://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Elchanan-Adler>

possibility that HaKalir was R. Elazar b. Yaakov or R. Eliezer b. Hurkinus (*Tzemach Dovid*, 4: 833). On the other hand, Rav Yosef Steinhart (*Zichron Yosef, Orach Chaim*, no. 13), speculates based on the language of some of HaKalir's *piyyutim*, that he lived in the Geonic period. This view was also held by R. Wolf Heidenheim and R. Shlomo Yehuda Rappaport (*Shir*). [See, however, a critique of this opinion in *Noda Bi'Yehuda (Orach Chaim 2, #113)*.] See also lengthy discussion in *Shu"t Teshuva Me'ahava* by R. Elazar Fleckeles (*Orach Chaim* 1:1). Most contemporary scholars place him within the Byzantine period (early 7th century).

2 HaKalir's compositions are often cited and discussed by Rashi, Tosafos and many Rishonim. For a sample listing, see *Shu"t Teshuva Me'ahava* *ibid*. For an eloquent defense of HaKalir's intricate linguistic style, and the genre of *piyut* in general, see *Nesivos Olam* (Maharal of Prague), *Nesiv Ha'Avodah*, # 12.

3 In one instance (stanza beginning with the words "Vayigdal avon"), HaKalir utilizes the opening two words of the verse.

4 The Artscroll commentary to *Kinnos* adds: "He ignored the prophet's harsh warning and instead sought advice from the prophetess Huldah whom he felt would see things in a more sympathetic light." This sentence is factually misleading. In fact, the advice that Yoshiyahu sought from the Prophetess Chuldah occurred years earlier in the wake of a discovery of an ancient Torah Scroll, which was open to an ominous verse within the *tochacha*, and bears no connection to Yoshiyahu's confronting Pharaoh Necho in the battlefield against the wishes of Yirmiyahu. The pairing of the two events is a glaring error which will hopefully be deleted in future editions.

5 The insights presented here are culled from a lengthy pre-Tisha B'Av shiur which dealt with the entire *kinnah*. For those interested, the shiur can be heard on YUTorah, please

refer to <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/780541/rabbi-elchanan-adler/analyzing-kina-11-the-tragic-death-of-yoshiyahu-hamelech/>

6 Some versions have *me'elav* — of his own [accord], highlighting the fact that Yoshiyahu's spiritual quest occurred without his having recourse to a mentor or teacher.

7 Radak may have been led to this interpretation by the syntax of the verse: "*uwishmoneh shanim l'malcho*." Had the *pasuk* meant "In the eighth year of his reign," it should have stated "*uwishnas shmoneh l'malcho*."

8 Some suggest a more homiletical interpretation: once ascending the throne Yoshiyahu was, in a sense, reborn. Hence, the eighth year of his reign is considered the eighth year of his "new" life.

9 For an elaboration of this idea, see *Pirkei de'Rebbi Eliezer* chapters 17 and 32, and the comments of R. Eliyahu Haitamari referenced in note 17.

10 Additionally, the word *davak* may allude to the concept of vicarious atonement — namely, that Yoshiyahu died on account of the sins of the generation and his death atoned for the generation's sins in a manner similar to the offering of a *korban*. This notion is implicit in a midrashic interpretation cited by *Pirkei de'Rebbi Eliezer* (chapter 17) on the *pasuk* (Yeshayahu 57:1) "*Tzadik avad . . . be'ain meivin ki mipnei ha'ra'ah ne'esaf hatzadik*," which the commentaries note refers to the death of Yoshiyahu. [See, however, Rashi (*ibid*) who interprets *mipnei ha'ra'ah ne'esaf hatzadik* in a different manner.] The equating of Yoshiyahu with the status of a communal offering is also noted by R. Soloveitchik (See *Mesoret HaRav Kinot*, P. 297). This concept deserves greater elucidation.

11 Indeed, the language of the midrash speaks of Yirmiyahu's referring to a tradition that he received from "my mentor Yeshayahu" (*Yeshayahu Rabi*), implying that the matter

was a function of rabbinic interpretation rather than of received prophecy.

12 The same question can be raised with regard to the next words of the *kinnah*: *vayima'anu sur* — And they refused to turn back. To whom does "they" refer? Perhaps it is a reference to Yoshiyahu and the soldiers who had amassed for battle.

13 Some versions of the *kinnah* substitute the word *shei'yah*, prayer, for *retiyah*, bandage. As such, the sentence reads well and states that Yoshiyahu's prayers on the battlefield were not accepted.

14 An alternative rendition might be "He was depleted through experiencing the same event etc."

15 The midrashic observation is based on a verse in Koheles (9:2), which speaks of "*mikreh echad*" (an identical fate) that befall the righteous as well as the wicked. Hence, R. Elazar's HaKalir's use of the phrase "*be'mikreh echad*."

16 The assumption that Yoshiyahu was the sole casualty of the battle is seemingly inconsistent with an earlier line of the *kinnah*, "*Kilah hamonai leches Aram Nahrayim*," which the commentaries render as "He [Yoshiyahu] destroyed my multitudes [of Jewish soldiers] by going forth [in battle] toward Aram Naharyim" (see Goldschmidt edition of *Kinnos* as well as *Kinnos HaMeforash*). Other commentaries, however, interpret this as referring to Yoshiyahu's blocking the multitudes of Egyptian soldiers from passing through Israel to reach the Euphrates (see *Peirush Kadmon* as well as *Artscroll*). According to this interpretation, Maharsha's assumption remains tenable.

17 See "*Velo Od Ela*" (by R. Eliyahu Haitamari, author of *Shevet Musar*), in the section on *Pirkei de'Rebbi Eliezer*, chapter 17.

18 For a beautiful explanation of the significance of the eulogy's being based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, see the commentary in the *Mesoret HaRav Kinnot*.

