

Tishah b'Av: A Day Without Closure

Rabbi Etan Moshe Berman

Faculty, Mechinah Program, Yeshiva University

There is perhaps no moment on the Jewish calendar more depressing than *motzei Tishah b'Av*. While *Yom Kippurim* and *Tishah b'Av* are comparable in many ways, there is a stark discrepancy between *motzei Yom Kippurim's* elation, resulting from an extended *teshuvah* process coupled with an awareness that on some level, one has redefined himself, and the sense on *motzei Tishah b'Av* that seemingly, nothing has changed.

On the surface, it would appear that both *Tishah b'Av* and *Yom Kippur* are days of affliction. There is no washing for pleasure, no eating or drinking, no wearing leather shoes, no anointing ourselves, marital relations are forbidden, and much of the day is spent in the synagogue. The *kinnah* depicting the ten martyrs is recited on both days. Both days also appear to be days of introspection and *teshuvah*. One would certainly imagine that especially on the day marking the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish People should join together in collective *teshuvah*.

Yet, while nearly the entire day of *Yom Kippur* is spent doing *teshuvah*, this is not the case on *Tishah b'Av*. The focal points of *Yom Kippur*, namely *vidui*, *al cheit*, and the *yud-gimmel middos* recited during *Selichos*, the centerpieces of one's expression of *teshuvah* and desire for atonement, are entirely absent from the *Tishah b'Av* service.

The approach to *Yom Kippur* as opposed to that of *Tishah b'Av* also reflects this discrepancy. The days leading up to *Yom Kippur* involve daily *selichos*. This is not the case with the approach to *Tishah b'Av*. Instead of *teshuvah*, we build up our path to the ninth of *Av* with increasing degrees of *aveilus*, of mourning. The Ashkenazik custom is to spend three weeks "preparing" for *Tishah b'Av* with a gradual reverse mourning. In respect to many of its *minhagim*, the Three Weeks reflect the situation of one observing the twelve month period following the death of a parent, followed by *shloshim* and culminating with *shivah*. Consider the customs of the Three Weeks, namely, no haircuts, live music or weddings. These are the basic restrictions of what is referred to as *yud-beis chodesh*, the twelve month period of mourning for a parent¹. With the onset of *rosh chodesh Av*, the nine days begin. Not only do we minimize joy in general (we do not eat meat or drink wine), but we also do not wear freshly laundered clothing or bathe for pleasure. These are restrictions of *shloshim*, the thirty day period after the death of an immediate relative. Along with the arrival of *Tishah b'Av*, come the restrictions of *shivah*, the seven days of

¹ Although one customarily gets a haircut after thirty days once he begins to look disheveled.

mourning for the loss an immediate relative. In fact, the *halachah* is that if someone, G-d forbid, is actually observing *shivah* for a relative during *Tishah b'Av*, he may attend *kinnos* at the synagogue, because the entire Jewish People are all mourners on that day. In this context, it is fascinating to consider that the customary phrase of comfort to one in mourning is *Hamakom yinacheim eschem besoch shaar aveilei Tzion veYerushalayim* - may God console you among the rest of the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. This phrase does not refer to all the other mourners of relatives in the Jewish people, it refers to the fact that all Jews are in mourning every day of the year for Zion and Jerusalem. Every time that one consoles a mourner he makes reference to this fact. One day a year however, on *Tishah b'Av*, this mourning takes on its full expression.

The approach to, and essence of *Tishah b'Av* is mourning, not *teshuvah*. It is for this reason that perhaps the most depressing moment on the Jewish calendar is *motzei Tishah b'Av*. On *motzei Tishah b'Av*, the lamenting has waned, but the *Beis Hamikdash* remains in ruins and one might have a sense that nothing has changed. If one was truly successful in appreciating the significance of the loss of the *Beis Hamikdash*, a feeling of sadness and almost despair might set in, as he struggles to discover what could possibly change to enable its return. The Jewish People as a whole have not done *teshuvah*, nor isolated the cause of the delayed return of the Temple. They have simply sat a *shivah* without consolation. One arises on *motzei Tishah b'av* from his *aveilus*, like a mourner who has lost a dearly beloved, lost, uncertain how life could possibly continue.

The truth is, even when it is over, it has not ended. The *halachos* of the nine days remain in effect until midday on the tenth of *Av*, because while the Temple was lit aflame towards the end of the ninth of *Av*, it continued to burn well into the tenth.² Even when the laws of *Tishah b'av* have ended, the spirit of the day has not. There is no closure to *Tishah b'av*.

On the one hand, this feeling is circumstantially appropriate and from a pragmatic perspective potentially beneficial. Feeling this way *motzei Tishah b'av* may well drive one to *teshuvah*. On the other hand, if it leads to a sense of depression, a feeling that returning to *Tzion* and rebuilding the Temple is hopeless, then it is certainly detrimental. Is there any consolation to the day that has no closure?

Perhaps the true consolation is that the tears one sheds on *Tishah b'av* have already begun, in a sense, to rebuild the Temple. The tears shed in the desert by the Children of Israel in response to the report of the *meraglim*³ ultimately caused the destruction of the Temple, and the exile from which we are still suffering.⁴ Tears express that one feels lost. Rav Moshe Shapiro *shlit"i* points out that the Hebrew word for crying in Hebrew, *bechiah*, is related to the word for perplexed, or wandering, *navoch*, as Pharaoh says about the Jewish people (Ex. 14:3) *nevuchim heim baaretz*, they are wandering in the land. The tears in response to the spies ripped the Land of Israel out of the Nation of Israel.⁵ If the Land of Israel was part of the People of Israel, then they would be drawn to it naturally. The tears, however, outwardly expressed the inner feeling

² *Taanis* 29a

³ See Numbers chapters 13 and 14.

⁴ *Taanis* 26b mishnah, *Taanis* 29a. See also *Tehillim* 106:24-27.

⁵ Maharal, *Netzach Yisrael* chapter 8.

of that generation that they could not go; they did not want to go. They could not go to the Land of Israel, for they did not view themselves as capable of maintaining it,⁶ and they did not want to go back to Egyptian slavery either. They were completely lost, neither here nor there. The resulting decree of wandering until they died (forty years) was a result of the reality they had created for themselves at that moment.

Perhaps, for this reason, the only way to replace the Land of Israel in the hearts of the Jewish People is to cry and thereby express the exact opposite of the tears in response to the report of the spies. Tears shed on *Tishah b'Av* express that **without** *Tzion* and the Temple the Jewish People are lost; they are wandering in exile. Crying to have it back demonstrates that the Land of Israel **is** part of the People of Israel. Perhaps this explains why *Tishah b'Av* is not about *teshuvah* - it is about tears. What caused the loss of *Tzion* and the Temple were tears of separation, tears that expressed they could not live with it, therefore what reconnects the people to the land, and enables the rebuilding of the Temple, is tears expressing that they can't live without it. *Tishah b'Av* is not primarily for *teshuvah*, it is for crying. The tears that result from mourning the destruction of the Temple and the loss of the Promised Land, rectify the tears that, in a broader sense, caused the loss in the first place.⁷

This type of crying is hard to come by. It can only result from a real appreciation of what *Tzion* and the Temple represent and engender in contrast to one's current state and what one's potential truly is, both as an individual as well as a part of a greater collective. This is an overwhelming agenda, but perhaps a few points could be clarified herein to enable one to appreciate to a greater extent the vast chasm between where the Jewish People are, and where they could be, from one perspective.

In addition, almost two millennia have gone by and the world still lacks a tangible result from those tears that were shed. The Jewish People need inspiration. The Children of Israel want to feel that when *Tishah b'Av* is over, their connection to Hashem and His Temple is stronger. While such a feeling may not be readily available in terms of the third Temple, it is available, to a degree, even in exile. As the Talmud (Megillah 29a) teaches, God provides a miniature Temple for the Jewish People in exile.

To understand and appreciate the nature of the miniature Temple that we still possess, we have to begin with its roots; the *Beis Hamikdash* itself. In broad strokes, there are two basic approaches to the purpose and function of the Temple. At its root, the issue is whether the Temple is purely to benefit the growth of the Jewish People in particular, and humanity as a whole, or if it can be suggested that there is a certain type of benefit to God as well. Certainly, the Temple is an opportune location to fix one's perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, and many

⁶ See Rav Eliyahu Kitov's [Book of our Heritage](#) for a beautiful development and presentation of this approach.

⁷ Perhaps this is the explanation of the statement of Rebbi Yochanan in *Taanis* 29a, "That night (that the Jewish People cried), was *Tishah b'Av* eve. The Holy One, blessed be He said to them, 'You cried a cry for no reason, I will establish for you crying for generations.'" On the surface, Rebbi Yochanan is pointing out that because on *Tishah b'Av*, they cried without reason in response to the spies, on that same day the Jews will be crying for generations over the loss of the Temple. What is the connection between the tears of that generation and *Tishah b'Av* today? According to the above explanation, it is these tears 'for generations' that ultimately fix the disaster created by the tears in response to the spies.

rishonim explain the commandment to establish a Temple with humans as the beneficiaries.⁸ The Ramban, however, takes an entirely different approach and consequently provides another avenue of understanding regarding the significance of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

The Ramban⁹ notes certain curiosities regarding the structure and situation of the *mishkan* that hint to its deeper significance, and consequently, to that of the Temple itself.¹⁰ His comments must be understood in light of the first and tenth chapters of Yechezkel, where the prophet Yechezkel is granted two visions of the chariot of God, the *Kisei Hakavod*, the Throne of Glory. In chapter one, he perceives four *chayos*, angels, bearing the throne, each possessing four heads with four different faces, that of a human, a lion, an ox and an eagle. Later, in chapter ten, Yechezkel realizes that these same *chayos* were *keruvim*, and there he perceives God standing atop these *keruvim*.

Probably the most unexpected objects present in the Temple are the *keruvim*, the angelic forms on the cover of the ark. The Ramban explains that the *keruvim* are there because the ark in particular, the *mishkan*, and ultimately the Temple, in a broader sense, are a physical manifestation of the Throne of Glory. Since God is depicted by Yechezkel as standing atop *keruvim*, so too in the *mishkan*, His presence rests atop *keruvim*¹¹. Similarly, we find that the twelve tribes of Israel are divided into four banners with the *mishkan* in the center, which the Ramban also explains as a reflection of the structure of the Throne of Glory. He quotes the Ibn Ezra that the four banners had representations of a lion (Judah), an ox (Ephraim), *dudaim*, the flower that was utilized for its ability to assist fertility (Reuben), and an eagle (Dan)¹². These parallel the four faces of the angels that bore the Throne of Glory in Yechezkel's vision. Later in Bamidbar (chap. 11), Moshe is told to gather seventy men, which would ultimately form the Sanhedrin. Again, the Ramban (Num. 11:16) notes a parallel between the seventy men and the seventy angels that surround the Throne of Glory, as mentioned in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 24). For this reason, there were also seventy elders present when God revealed Himself upon Mount Sinai. In that context, the Ramban summarizes these hints.

For it is appropriate that He should rest the Glory of the Shechinah upon them with this complete number, as it is in the upper camp - because Israel is the legion of God in the physical world - like the ark and its cover and the mishkan were fashioned to resemble the heavenly ministers, and the banners in the likeness of the chariot that Yechezkel perceived, in order to rest His

כי ראוי במספר השלם הזה שישרה עליהם כבוד השכינה כאשר היא במחנה העליון, כי ישראל צבאות השם בארץ, כמו שנעשה ארון וכפורת ומשכן בדמות המשמשין במרום ונעשו הדגלים בדמיון המרכבה אשר ראה יחזקאל

⁸ See, for example, the *Sefer Hachinuch mitzvah* 95 at length (note as well his concluding comments regarding the root of the *mitzvah*).

⁹ See his comments to *Shmos* 2:2, and 2:21, as well as *Bamidbar* 2:2 and 11:16.

¹⁰ While not espousing the perspective of the Ramban, in the beginning of *Hilchos Beis Habechirah*, the Rambam describes the historical process of metamorphosis from *mishkan* into *Beis Hamikdash*. They are not to be viewed as disparate entities. In fact, the Rambam there indicates that the construction of the Temple is a fulfillment of the same *mitzvah* as was fulfilled with the construction of the *mishkan*.

¹¹ Based on this understanding, the necessity for the presence of the *aron* in the Temple takes on a unique significance.

¹² Although many *midrashim* depict the snake on the flag of Dan, see *Psikta Zutresa* to *Bamidbar* 83a.

Shechinah upon them in the physical world just like it is in Heaven.

Ramban, Commentary to Bamidbar 11:16

להשרות שכינה עליהם בארץ
כאשר היא שכינה בשמים.
רמב"ן במדבר יא:טז

Although the Ramban does not spell this out, the seventy-member Sanhedrin (along with the *Nasi* paralleling *Moshe Rabbeinu*, making it a total of seventy one), was required to be housed, in part, within the Temple structure. All these curiosities point to the fact that the *mishkan* and ultimately the Temple itself, was designed to be a physical manifestation of the Throne of Glory and its accompanying entourage.¹³

This understanding sheds light on a difficult passage in the Talmud.

Perhaps one would think that he should fear the Temple itself? Therefore, the verse states, 'My sabbath you shall guard and My mikdash you shall fear (Lev. 19:30).' Guarding is mentioned regarding Shabbos and fear regarding the Temple. Just like in terms of guarding the Shabbos, it is not from Shabbos that one fears, but rather from He who warned us regarding it, so too in terms of fearing the Temple, it is not the Temple that one fears, but rather from He who warned us regarding it.

Yevamos 6a

יכול יתיירא אדם ממקדש? תלמוד
לומר: את שבתותי תשמורו ואת
מקדשי תיראו, נאמרה שמירה בשבת
ונאמרה מורא במקדש, מה שמירה
האמורה בשבת - לא משבת אתה
מתיירא אלא ממי שהזהיר על השבת,
אף מורא האמורה במקדש - לא
ממקדש אתה מתיירא אלא ממי
שהזהיר על המקדש.
מסכת יבמות דף ו.

The question of the Talmud appears inexplicable. Why would one think to fear the Temple itself? Based on the comments of the Ramban, however, one could suggest that because the Temple structure is a physical manifestation of the Throne of Glory, it has a certain status in and of itself, and for this reason, one should, perhaps, relate to it with awe. The Talmud therefore understands the verse to be instructing us not to express the awe from that posture. The awe due the Temple is a result of the commandment from God Himself, and not due to any independent status of the Temple.¹⁴ This conclusion notwithstanding, there was a legitimate *prima facie* approach, to fear the Temple itself, due to that which it represents.

One wonders if there is an avenue towards an understanding, to some extent, of why God commanded the Jewish People to create a physical representation of His Throne of Glory. What is the significance of this physical expression of a spiritual reality?

For the Ramban, this is part of a much larger picture. In his introductory remarks to each book of the Torah, the Ramban develops a basic outline for the entire *Chumash*. He comments that the theme of the first book of the Torah, *Bereishis*, is the creation and formation of the world. Included in that are the lives of the *avos*, because they were a type of formation for their descendants, since the lives of the *avos* determined all that would befall their children in the

¹³ Several *midrashim* refers to the Temple, or more precisely, the *aron*, as the "lower throne". See *Psikta Zutresa Shmos perek 15, Sechel Tov perek 15* and *Yalkut Shimoni Beshalach remez 253*. All are commenting on the verse *machon leshivtecha (Shmos 15:17)*.

¹⁴ Compare this understanding with the comments of the Rambam to the very beginning of *hilchos acu"m*, regarding how idolatry began.

future. The *avos* had succeeded in connecting themselves, intellectually, emotionally and behaviorally, to God to such an extent that they had become a chariot for the *Shechinah*. They had become the vehicle that drew the presence of Hashem from the spiritual realm to the physical. For this reason, the second book of the Torah, the book of redemption, does not end with the physical redemption from slavery, nor does it end with the giving of the Torah. The redemption was not complete until the Children of Israel had regained the status of the *avos*, as a chariot for the *Shechinah*. Therefore, *Shmos*, the Book of Redemption, ends with the construction of the *mishkan*. It was not until the physical Throne of Glory was constructed that the Children of Israel had regained the role that was prepared for them by their ancestors, to be the chariot, the vehicle to draw the presence of God from the spiritual plane to the physical. According to the Ramban, the rest of the Torah is basically how to maintain the connection between the *Shechinah* and the physical structure, with a few stories and lessons along the way.

It is clear from the presentation of the Ramban that the role of the Jewish People is to connect the spiritual to the physical in general, and to bring a tangible sense of the presence of God into the world. The world was created for *Yisrael*; as *chazal* state,¹⁵ the world was created for *reishis*, the Jewish People. When the Jewish people are functioning properly, fulfilling their role that, in fact, the world was created for, the Throne of Glory is manifest in their midst. We reference this in *kabbalas Shabbos* every Sabbath eve, in *Tehillim* 99 which refers to God as the *yosheiv keruvim*, He Who sits upon *keruvim*. Whereas Yechezkel perceived Hashem as standing atop *keruvim*, when He is finally recognized as King in the physical world, Hashem is described as *yosheiv keruvim*, because His presence will finally sit, so to speak, upon the *keruvim* of the *kapores* in the Holy of Holies.

The Temple, the structure within which the presence of Hashem, the *Shechinah* rested, was the pride of Israel. Israel is the nation that was chosen to be the bearers of the Throne of Glory and the *Shechinah* itself. The Children of Israel are the people whose camp in the desert reflected the structure, imagery and sanctity of the angels that surround the Throne of Glory. All this, however, occurred when the Sanctuary was on its foundation and the Temple was on its site, and the *kohen gadol* stood and ministered. Now that this has all been taken away, the Jewish People have been deemed unworthy of that distinction. The presence of the Temple indicates that the Jews are furthering their purpose, and the purpose of physical existence in general, functioning as the vehicle to draw down the *Shechinah*. Without it, however, the Children of Israel are exiled, and so is the *Shechinah*; the Throne of Glory remains a spiritual entity in Heaven, its physical manifestation lacking, lying in ruins, and God remains a King without a throne. The purpose of the Jew goes unfulfilled, and the world continues as a physical location distant from its spiritual source and core. This is the situation today.

The fact of the matter is that the Jewish People's connection to the *Shechinah* has not been entirely lost, and the physical Throne of Glory has not been completely destroyed. There are statements of *Chazal*, both in the Talmud¹⁶ and later sources¹⁷ indicating that certain actions are

¹⁵ Quoted by Rashi in his second comment to *chumash*.

¹⁶ Learning the details of a sacrifice is considered as if one has brought it on the altar. (Menachos 110a) The recital of the order of the sacrifices is considered as if one has brought them. (Taanis 27b) Prayer is in place of sacrifices.

tantamount to Temple *service*. The prophet Hoshea himself said that when there are no longer sacrifices to be brought, the words of our lips will take their place (Hosea 14:3), which the Talmud (Yoma 86b) understands to be a reference to repentance.

Aside from certain actions being considered like sacrifices, there are also statements of *Chazal* to the effect that certain locations or objects have the *status* of certain vessels, or even of the Temple itself. The one that is, perhaps, most familiar is the synagogue. Quoting the verse regarding God's relationship to the Jews in exile, "I have been for them a miniature temple, a *mikdash m'at* (Yechezkel 11:16)," the Talmud (Megillah 29a) states, in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak, that *mikdash m'at* refers to synagogues and study halls. In exile, a synagogue is the Temple in miniature.

How far does this statement go? How literally does the status of *mikdash* apply to synagogues and study halls? Is it merely symbolic, a philosophical abstraction, or is there some sort of practical, *halachik* consequence? Is there, perhaps, a spiritual reality to this concept?

The Chofetz Chaim writes¹⁸ that one of the commandments that is a Torah law, even in our time, is fear, or awe, of the Temple. While one might expect his explanation to relate to the Western Wall, or the Temple Mount, that is not the case.

It is a positive commandment to have awe of the Temple, as it says (Lev. 19:30), "My Temple you shall fear". Our synagogues and study halls are called, "Miniature temples", as it says (Yechezkel 11:16), "I have been for them a miniature temple". One should be careful to avoid jest, mockery and unnecessary speech in them; one should not make calculations in them; and one should not sleep in them. Their sanctity is very severe.

Sefer Hamitzvos Hakatzer (Mitzvah 18)

מצות עשה לירא מן המקדש, שנאמר (ויקרא יט:ל), "ומקדשי תיראו". ובתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות שלנו, נקראים "בתי מקדש מעט", שנאמר (יחזקאל יא:טז), "ואהי להם למקדש מעט". ויש ליזהר בהם משחוק והיתול ושיחה בטילה, ואין מחשבין בהם חשבונות, ואין ישנים בהם. וקדושתם חמורה מאד.

ספר המצות הקצר מצוה יח

While the miniature temple does not have exactly the same status as the *Beis Hamikdash*, the *mitzvah* to have awe of the "Temple" applies to both.¹⁹

(Berachos 26a) One who brings the poor into his home or one who gives a gift to a Torah scholar is considered to have brought *bikkurim* to the Temple. (Kesubos 105b) One who desires to perform wine libation upon the altar, should fill the throats of the sages with wine. (Yoma 71a)

¹⁷ For example: Monetary fines may be instituted by a community to encourage synagogue attendance to ensure that there is a *minyan*, in the words of the Rama (*Orach Chaim siman 55:22*), "So that the daily *Tamid* sacrifice continue." The *tamid*, being a communal offering, is expressed today by the community coming together to pray. The *sandik* at a *bris* is considered as if he has brought incense. (Maharil in the name of Rabbeinu Peretz, quoted by the Rama in *Shulchan Aruch 265:11*)

¹⁸ The Chofetz Chaim was not the first to state this. The *Yereyim* (*siman 409*) had already explained the *mitzvah* this way in the twelfth century. The fact that the Chofetz Chaim held this way is noteworthy however, and sheds light on his comments to *Shulchan Aruch siman 151*.

¹⁹ See *Shiurim Lezeicher Abba Mori* vol. I on *kavod ve'oneg* where the Rav *zt"l* explains certain distinctions between the Temple and the synagogue in this regard. Rav Schachter *shlit"a* in *Eretz Hatzvi siman 12* explains that those who

In a similar vein, the *mishnah* (*Megillah* 3:3) states that a synagogue maintains its sanctity even in ruins, based on the verse, “I will lay desolate your temples (Lev. 26:31).” Even when desolate, they are referred to as temples. Again, while the plural language is noteworthy, the basic understanding of the verse is in reference to the *Beis Hamikdash*. The *mishnah* nonetheless quotes it as proof that even after a synagogue is destroyed, it is still referred to as a *mikdash*, i.e. it retains its sanctity, and therefore behaviors inappropriate in a standing synagogue are likewise prohibited in a ruined one. While there are Rishonim that understand the citation of this verse as a mere *asmachta*, there are also those that understand this to be a Torah law.

There are many other examples of a synagogue’s status as a miniature *Beis Hamikdash* in *halachah*.²⁰ The *Zohar Hakadosh* appears to equate the commandment to build the Temple with a requirement to build a synagogue.²¹ Rav Asher Weiss *shlit”a*, points out that the Rambam, in his enumeration of the six hundred and thirteen commandments, published as a preface to his *Mishnah Torah* (number 65), lists a prohibition to destroy the Temple, as well as synagogues and houses of study.²² Rav Weiss notes that the Mordechai (*Megillah* 826) similarly learns that one who destroys a part of a synagogue violates this Torah prohibition. The *Yereyim* (*mitzvah* 104) seems to understand the prohibition of *meilah* to apply to personal use of synagogue property. The later authorities debate the application of the principle of *ein chatzer lahekdesh* to a synagogue,²³ as well as if a synagogue has sanctity on par with the sanctuary of the Temple or its courtyard.²⁴ This short list is by no means exhaustive.

While many of these examples are debated regarding their details and application, nonetheless, there is clearly a connection between the sanctity of a synagogue and the sanctity of the Temple, and this connection engenders *halachik* consequences.

It stands to reason that it is due to its relationship with the sanctity of the Temple that the physical structure of a synagogue mirrors that of the Temple and its vessels. Based on the verse, “To exalt the House of the Lord (Ezra 9),” the Talmud (*Shabbos* 11a) states that a synagogue should be constructed at the highest elevation of a city. Similarly, based on the Tosefta (*Megillah* 3:22), the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim siman* 130:5), states that the doors to a synagogue should open opposite the direction to which the congregation prays, so that the entrance is opposite the ark, as was the case in the sanctuary of the Temple.

Within the synagogue doors, the focal point is the ark containing the *Sifrei Torah*. The Rambam

understand fear of the Temple to apply *mideoraisa* to a synagogue, limit its application somewhat due to this explanation.

²⁰ Rav Asher Weiss *shlit”a* in his *Minchas Asher* (*Balak* 54) presents twelve examples of the *halachik* relationship between the synagogue and the *Beis Hamikdash*. See there for a more detailed discussion.

²¹ *Zohar Hakadosh Naso* 126a, see also *Raaya Mehemna beshalach* 59b. See however *Sdei Chemed clalim maareches 2 clal* 44. Compare the statement of Rebbi Elazar in the *Zohar Hakadosh Naso* above with the statement of Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai in *Megillah* 29a.

²² Rav Weiss points out that while the Rambam lists these three together in this location, in his *Sefer Hamitzvos* as well as in his *Mishnah Torah* proper, he fails to mention anything other than the Temple and its vessels as included in this prohibition.

²³ *Ketzos Hachoshen* (*siman* 200).

²⁴ *Beis Yoseif siman* 151.

in his *Mishnah Torah* (*hilchos sham 10:10*) writes that a Torah must be stored in an ark. Since every Torah has within it the ten commandments, a *sefer* Torah also has the *halachik* status of *luchos*, and *Moshe Rabbeinu* was commanded by God that upon reception of the *luchos*, he should store them in an ark (Deut. 10:2). This was commanded to Moshe even before the Ark of the Covenant had been constructed. Therefore, every synagogue has, as its focal point, the *luchos* contained in an ark, just as it was in the Temple. Interestingly, Rav Moshe Feinstein²⁵ felt that a *paroches* composed of two separate curtains was a violation of the ancient *minhag* to model the cover of the ark in a synagogue based on the *paroches* in the Temple.

Other vessels of the Temple find their expression in the synagogue structure as well. Certainly, on *Chanukah*, the *menorah* is lit in the southern part of the synagogue, but every day before the ark there is a *ner tamid*, that represents the *menorah*, as the verse states, “*Lehaalos ner tamid* (Ex. 27:20, Lev.24:2)”. The *amud* from which the chazan leads the prayers at the front of the synagogue could be viewed as the incense altar,²⁶ as exemplified by King David’s request that his prayers should be accepted like incense before Hashem (Tehillim 141:2). Traditionally, in the middle of the synagogue is a raised platform, used primarily for the public reading of the Torah. On the holidays the special reading from that *bimah* is the sacrificial order unique to that day. One gets the sense that this *bimah* represents the outer altar of the Temple. In fact, the Talmud (Megillah 31b) relates a dialogue between Avraham and Hashem during *bris bein habesarim*. Avraham was concerned that his descendants might sin and be destroyed like the generation of the flood, or dispersed like the generation of the Tower of Bavel. Hashem reassures him by relating the mitzvah of the sacrifices in the Temple, assuring them atonement. Avraham responds that this mechanism is sufficient when there is a Temple, but without the Temple, how can he be certain the sins of his descendants will not cause their annihilation? Hashem responds that whenever the Children of Israel will read the sacrificial procedures, it will be considered as if they actually brought a sacrifice, and via that mechanism they will be forgiven. Our public readings of the holiday sacrifices, on the *bimah* in the center of the synagogue, are therefore considered sacrifices today. Similarly, on *Succos* we encircle the same *bimah* during *hoshanos*, because in the Temple these *hakafo*s were performed around the altar. The Chasam Sofer (*Orach Chaim siman 51*) views an *aliyah* in conjunction with the blessing of *hagomel* to be tantamount to sacrificing a thanksgiving offering.

From all of the above, one understands that the synagogue has both the halachik sanctity as well as the physical structure of the Temple, albeit in miniature.

All of this indicates that we are not completely bereft of the presence of Hashem in our midst. If the synagogue is a miniature temple, along with the status, structure and sanctity of the Temple in miniature, then the synagogue is also a miniature Throne of Glory. After the destruction of the Temple, what remains of the Throne of Glory, is the synagogue. For this reason, there is a presence of the *Shechinah* in the synagogue, and this fact is pointed out in the Talmud.

It is taught Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: Come and see how beloved Israel is before the Holy One blessed be He. In every place

תניא, רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר: בוא וראה כמה חביבין ישראל לפני

²⁵ *Igros Moshe* vol. 4 *siman* 40.

²⁶ Rav Asher Weiss (*Ibid.*) quotes this idea from *Michtav Sofer* vol. II *siman* 1.

they were exiled the Shechinah was with them. When they were exiled to Egypt the Shechinah was with them, as it says (Shmuel I 2) Did I reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt? When they were exiled to Bavel, the Shechinah was with them, as it says (Isaiah 43) For your sake I was sent to Bavel. Even when they will be redeemed in the future, the Shechinah will be with them, as it says (Deut. 30) Hashem, your Lord will return your captivity. It does not say He will cause them to return, rather He will return. This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, returns with them from the exiles... Where [is the Shechinah] in Bavel? Abaye said in the synagogue of Hutzal and in the synagogue of Shaf-veyasiv in Nehardea. Don't say it was in both places, rather sometimes here and sometimes here.²⁷

Megillah 29a

הקדוש ברוך הוא. שבכל מקום שגלו - שכינה עמהן. גלו למצרים - שכינה עמהן, שנאמר: (שמואל א' ב) הנגלה נגליתי לבית אביך בהיותם במצרים וגו', גלו לבבל - שכינה עמהן, שנאמר: (ישעיהו מ"ג) למענכם שלחתי בבלה. ואף כשהן עתידין ליגאל שכינה עמהן, שנאמר: (דברים ל') ושב ה' אלהיך את שבותך, והשיב לא נאמר אלא ושב, מלמד שהקדוש ברוך הוא שב עמהן מבין הגלויות. בבבל היכא? אמר אביי: בבי כנישתא דהוצל, ובבי כנישתא דשף ויתיב בנהרדעא. ולא תימא הכא והכא, אלא: זמנין הכא, וזמנין הכא. מסכת מגילה דף כט.

The language utilized by Rabbi Shimon, come and see, is unusual for the Babylonian Talmud. The *Ben Yehoyada* (Megillah 29a) therefore comments that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was saying that one can tangibly recognize how precious the Jews are to Hashem, by coming to synagogue, because in those days the revelation of the *Shechinah* in the Diaspora was recognizable in the synagogues.

It is in this context that the Talmud quotes the verse, "I have been to them a miniature Temple", upon which Rav Yitzchok comments, "This refers to the synagogues and study halls in Bavel." Rav Yitzchok is also quoted in *Berachos* 6a commenting that the Holy One, blessed be He is found in the synagogue. On this passage of the Talmud, the *Pnei Yehoshua* writes that once a building is constructed with the intent to serve as a synagogue, and utilized on a regular basis for prayer with a quorum, the *Shechinah* can be found there always, and is never absent at all. For this reason the Talmud Yerushalmi²⁸ encourages prayer specifically in a synagogue. The verse instructs, "Search out Hashem, where He is found (Isaiah 55)." Where is He "found"? The Yerushalmi answers, "in synagogues and study halls."

There is *Shechinah* in the synagogue, because it is a miniature Temple, and therefore a miniature Throne of Glory. Along with this reality comes a degree of solace, but also an agenda. The presence of the *Shechinah* in the synagogue has *halachik* ramifications, and demands a response, in general attitude and particular behaviors. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*siman* 151) states, regarding appropriate behavior in synagogue, that any activity reflecting ignorance of one's location, like jest, mockery and general unnecessary conversation is prohibited. The *Chofetz Chaim* elaborates in detail regarding appropriate behavior and speech in his *Mishnah Berurah* (*Siman* 151 note 2). As was pointed out above, according to the *Chofetz Chaim*, one who behaves in a manner prohibited by the *Shulchan Aruch* is in violation of a positive commandment of the

²⁷ The Talmud goes on to relate incidents when the presence of the *Shechinah* arrived, in a tangible way, in a synagogue.

²⁸ Yerushalmi *Berachos* chap. 5 *halachah* 1.

Torah. All this is obvious when one considers the reality of a synagogue being a miniature throne for the *Shechinah*.

It is fascinating that in both the verse commanding the construction of the Temple and the verse in which Yechezkel tells us that God provides a miniature Temple in exile, the stated purpose is so that the *Shechinah* will rest among the people, not within the structure. In *Shmos* (25:8) it says, "Make for Me a Temple and I will dwell within *them*," and in Yechezkel (11:16), "I have been for *them* a miniature Temple." Neither verse states that the presence of Hashem will rest in *it*, but rather in *them*. It is the people who function as the chariot, as the vehicle, not the building. When the people function as such, the Throne of Glory is expressed in its full glory, among them. When the people are not functioning as such, then the physical Throne of Glory is removed from among them. However, even in that scenario, the *Shechinah* is never fully removed. When one is conscious of this fact, and its expression in the synagogue, his prayers are strengthened and his attitude and behavior therein are more sanctified.

This year, let no one leave *Tishah b'Av* solely depressed, because the Temple remains in ruins. One should also focus on the miniature temple, therein finding an element of solace, with the *Shechinah* that is with the Jews in exile. Perhaps, through the Jewish People's collective efforts to appreciate the sanctity of the synagogue and a renewed awareness and emphasis on the presence of the *Shechinah* that dwells therein, the Chosen People will merit to once again have the physical manifestation of the Throne of Glory in their midst, with the construction of the third, and final *Bais Hamikdosh*, may it be speedily built in our days.