

THREE MIDRASHIM FROM MIDRASH EICHA RABBA

“This I will reply to my heart; therefore I have hope” (Lamentations 3:21).

“This (*zot*) I will reply to my heart; therefore I have hope” – Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: To what is this matter analogous? To a king who married a noblewoman and wrote for her a very substantial marriage contract, saying to her: ‘I will prepare for you such and such number of wedding canopies, and I am giving you such and such number of gowns of purple wool.’ The king left her and went to a country overseas, and he was delayed there. Her neighbors came to her and were teasing her and saying to her: ‘The king left you, went to a country overseas, and he is not going to return to you.’ She was crying and sighing. When she would enter her house, she would take her marriage contract and read it. She would see in her marriage contract: I will prepare such and such number of wedding canopies, and I am giving you such and such number of gowns of purple wool, and she would be immediately comforted.

Ultimately, the king came. He said to her: ‘My daughter, I am astonished, how did you wait for me all those years?’ She said to him: ‘My lord, the king, were it not for the substantial marriage contract that you wrote and gave to me, my neighbors would have caused my demise.’

So too, idolaters provoke Israel and say to them: ‘Your God has concealed His face from You and caused His Divine Presence to depart from you. He will never return to you.’ They cry and sigh. When they enter the synagogues and study halls, read the Torah, and find that it is written: “I will turn to you, and make you fruitful.... I will place My Sanctuary in your midst.... I will walk in your midst” (Leviticus 26:9, 11–12), they are comforted.

Tomorrow, when the end of the redemption comes, the Holy One blessed be He will say to Israel: ‘My children, I am astonished over you, how did you wait for Me all those years?’ They will say before Him: ‘Master of the universe, were it not for Your Torah that You gave us, the nations would have caused our demise.’ That is why it is stated: “This (*zot*) I will reply to my heart,” and *zot* is nothing other than Torah, as it is stated: “And this [*vezot*] is the Torah” (Deuteronomy 4:44).

Likewise, David said: “Had Your Torah not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction” (Psalms 119:92). “Therefore I have hope” in Him, and we proclaim the unity of His name twice daily and say: “Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

“The precious sons of Zion, who were valued in gold, how are they considered earthenware jugs, the handiwork of the hands of the potter?” (Lamentations 4:2).

There was an incident involving a certain man in Jerusalem, who made a feast. He said to a member of his household: ‘Go and bring me my friend, Kamtza.’ He went and brought his enemy, bar Kamtza. He entered and sat among the guests. [The host] entered and found him

among those invited to the feast. He said to him: 'You are my enemy, and you are sitting in my house? Get up and leave my house.' He said to him: 'Do not shame me, and I will give you the cost of my meal.' He said to him: 'You will not recline [at the feast].' He said to him: 'Do not shame me and I will sit, but I will not eat and I will not drink.' He said to him: 'You will not recline [at the feast].' He said to him: 'Do not shame me and I will give the cost of this entire feast.' He said to him: 'Get up [and leave].'

Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkulas was there and it was within his ability to protest, but he did not protest. Immediately, [bar Kamtza] left. He said to himself: 'These who are reclining at the feast are sitting in serenity; I will slander them.' What did he do? He went to the ruler and said to him: 'Those offerings that you send to the Jews for them to sacrifice, they eat them and sacrifice others in their stead.' [The ruler] reprimanded him. He went to him again and said to him: 'All those offerings that you send to the Jews for them to sacrifice, they eat them and sacrifice others in their stead. If you do not believe me, send with me one official and offerings, and you will immediately know that I am not a liar.'

While they were traveling on the way, the official fell asleep. [Bar Kamtza] arose during the night and rendered them all blemished animals in a discreet manner. When the priest saw them, he sacrificed others in their stead. The emissary of the king said: 'Why did you not sacrifice these offerings?' He said to him: '[I will sacrifice them] tomorrow.' The third day arrived and he did not sacrifice them. He sent and said to the ruler: 'The matter that the Jew said, he spoke the truth.' Immediately, [the ruler] ascended to the Temple and destroyed it. That is what the people say: 'Because of the differences between Kamtza and bar Kamtza the Temple was destroyed.'

Rabbi Yosei said: 'The humility of Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkulas burned the Sanctuary.' Alternatively, in what way was their preciousness manifest? Not one of them would bear a child missing a limb or blemished.

“The Lord vented His fury; He poured out His enflamed wrath. He ignited a fire in Zion, and it consumed her foundations” (Lamentations 4:11).

“He ignited a fire in Zion.” It is written: “A song of Asaf: God, peoples have invaded Your inheritance...” (Psalms 79:1). The verse should have said “weeping of Asaf”, “wailing of Asaf”, “lamentation of Asaf”. Why does it say: “A song of Asaf”?

This is analogous to a king who prepared a wedding house for his son and he plastered it, carved wall sculptures in it, and made drawings in it. His son went astray. Immediately, the king ascended to the wedding house, ripped the curtains, broke the poles. [The son's] mentor took a reed flute and began playing. They said to him: 'The king overturned his son's wedding house, and you are sitting and playing?' He said: 'I am playing because he overturned his son's wedding canopy and he did not vent his rage on his son.'

So too, they said to Asaf: ‘The Holy One blessed be He destroyed the Sanctuary and the Temple, and you are sitting and playing?’ He said: ‘I am playing because the Holy One blessed be He vented His wrath on the wood and stones and did not vent His wrath on Israel.’ That is what is written: “He ignited a fire in Zion, and it consumed her foundations.”