

Courage, Resilience, and Perspective

These two sessions will explore Jewish responses to a national crisis and we will extrapolate together how we can use these insights in our lives. Comments and questions are welcome at michaelbalinsky@gmail.com

Midrash Yalkut Shimoni

When Israel went out of Egypt, Moses said: 'and God delivered Israel that day' (Exodus 14:30); and when Israel went out of Jerusalem Jeremiah said: 'God has put me into the hands of those I cannot withstand.' (Lamentations 1:14)

When Israel went out of Egypt, Moses said 'Judah became His -holy one, Israel, His dominion' (Psalms 114:2); and when Israel went out of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said "'Away! Unclean!" people shouted at them, "Away! Away!"' (Lamentations 4:15)

When Israel went out of Egypt, Moses said 'the sea saw them and fled, the Jordan turned backward' (Psalms 114:2); and when Israel went out of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said 'by the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept' (Psalms 137:1)

When Israel went out of Egypt, Moses said 'the mountains skipped like rams' (Psalms 114:4); And when Israel went out of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said 'I look at the mountains, they are quaking' (Jeremiah 4:24)

When Israel went out of Egypt, Moses said 'God your God has been with you these past forty years: you have lacked nothing' (Deuteronomy 2:7); and when Israel went out of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said 'the young children ask bread, and no one gives it to them.' (Lamentations 4:4)

When Israel went out of Egypt, Moses said 'and in the wilderness, where you saw how God your God carried you, as a man carries his son' (Deuteronomy 1:31); and when they went out of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said 'He has cast down from heaven to earth the majesty of Israel.' (Lamentations 2:1)

When they went out of Egypt, Moses said 'while you, who held fast to God your God, are all alive today' (Deuteronomy 4:4); and when they went out of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said 'the tongue of the suckling cleaves to its palate for thirst' (Lamentations 4:4)

When they went out of Egypt, Moses said 'and the cloud of God was on them by day' (Numbers 10:34); and when they went out of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said '[You have screened Yourself off] with a cloud, that no prayer may pass through.' (Lamentations 3:44)

When they went out of Egypt, they broke out in song, as it is written: 'then Moses and the children of Israel sang the song' (Exodus 15:1); and when Israel went out of Jerusalem they broke out in tears, as it is written: 'bitterly she weeps in the night, her cheek wet with tears.' (Lamentations 1:2)

A flame shall burn within me,
when I raise on my heart,
my leaving Egypt
And I will awaken lamentations,
so that I shall remember,
my leaving Jerusalem

Then Moses sang,
a song that will not be forgotten,
when I left Egypt
And Jeremiah lamented,
and cried a bitter weeping,
when I left Jerusalem

My house was established,
and the cloud [of glory] dwelled,
when I left Egypt
And God's wrath dwelled
upon me like a cloud,
when I left Jerusalem

The waves of the sea were in an uproar,
and like a wall they arose,
when I left Egypt;
the "seething waters" flowed,
and upon my head they waited,
when I left Jerusalem

Grain from the sky,
and the rock flowed water,
when I left Egypt
Wormwood and bitter [weeping],
and the bitter waters,
when I left Jerusalem

Every morning and evening,
surrounding Mount Horeb (Sinai),
when I left Egypt
Mourning invited itself,
upon the rivers of Babylon,
when I left Jerusalem

And the Presence of God
was like a consuming fire,
when I left Egypt
A drawn sword,
rejected to the slaughter,
when I left Jerusalem

Sacrifice and meal offering,
and anointing oil,
when I left Egypt
God's treasure was taken,
like sheep to the slaughter,
when I left Jerusalem

Festivals and Sabbaths,
wonders and signs,
when I left Egypt
Fasting and mourning,
and pursuing emptiness,
when I left Jerusalem.

Goodly tents,
for the four tribal standards,
when I left Egypt
Tents of Ishmaelites,
and camps of the uncircumcised,
when I left Jerusalem

Jubilee and Sabbatical,
and the land rested,
when I left Egypt
Sold permanently,
and written for divorce,
when I left Jerusalem

The cover and the Ark,
and stones of memorial,
when I left Egypt
Slingstones
and tools of destruction,
when I left Jerusalem

Levites and Aaronites,
and seventy elders,
when I left Egypt
Taskmasters and oppressors,
sellers and buyers,
when I left Jerusalem

Moses shepherded me,
and Aaron guided me,
when I left Egypt
And Nebuchadnezzar the evil,
and the wicked Titus,
when I left Jerusalem

Prepared for war,
and God was there,
when I left Egypt
Withdrawn from us,
and behold, He is not found,
when I left Jerusalem

The secrets of (behind) the curtain,
and the order of the set [showbread],
when I left Egypt
Fury was poured out,
it fell upon me,
when I left Jerusalem

Offerings and Sacrifices,
and pleasing scents,
when I left Egypt
Speared by the sword,
the precious sons of Zion,
when I left Egypt.

The fine turbans,
set for glory,
when I left Egypt
Whistles and blasts,
for curses and atrocities,
when I left Jerusalem

The golden headpiece,
and kingship and pride,
when I left Egypt
[God's] help was gone,
and set aside, [Israel] was cast away,
when I left Jerusalem

Holiness and prophecy,
and the awesome divine presence,
when I left Egypt
Dirtied and polluted,
in misery and defilement,
when I left Jerusalem

Joy and salvation,
and blasting of horns,
when I left Egypt.
The cry of the remnant (of the harvest),
with the plea of the defiled,
when I left Jerusalem

Table [for showbread] and [seven-branched]
lamp,
smoke [from the altar] and incense,
when I left Egypt.
False god(s) and abomination,
(and) idol and monument,
when I left Jerusalem

Teaching and instruction,
and precious vessels,
when I left Egypt
The voice of joy and gladness,
and mourning and sorrow shall end,
when I return to Jerusalem.

Talmud Makkot 24 a-b

And it once was that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking along the road in the Roman Empire, and they heard the sound of the multitudes of Rome from Puteoli at a distance of one hundred and twenty mil. The city was so large that they were able to hear its tumult from a great distance. And the other Sages began weeping and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: For what reason are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva said to them: And you, for what reason are you weeping? They said to him: These gentiles, who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly in this colossal city, and for us, the House of the footstool of our God, the Temple, is burnt by fire, and shall we not weep? Rabbi Akiva said to them: That is why I am laughing. If for those who violate His will, the wicked, it is so and they are rewarded for the few good deeds they performed, for those who perform His will, all the more so will they be rewarded.

On another occasion they were ascending to Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple. When they arrived at Mount Scopus and saw the site of the Temple, they rent their garments in mourning, in keeping with halakhic practice. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox that emerged from the site of the Holy of Holies. They began weeping, and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: For what reason are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva said to them: For what reason are you weeping? They said to him: This is the place concerning which it is written: “And the non-priest who approaches shall die” (Numbers 1:51), and now foxes walk in it; and shall we not weep?

Rabbi Akiva said to them: That is why I am laughing, as it is written, when God revealed the future to the prophet Isaiah: “And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to attest: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah” (Isaiah 8:2). Now what is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? He clarifies the difficulty: Uriah prophesied during the First Temple period, and Zechariah prophesied during the Second Temple period, as he was among those who returned to Zion from Babylonia. Rather, the verse established that fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah is dependent on fulfillment of the prophecy of Uriah.

In the prophecy of Uriah it is written: “Therefore, for your sake Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become rubble, and the Temple Mount as the high places of a forest” (Micah 3:12), where foxes are found. There is a rabbinic tradition that this was prophesied by Uriah. In the prophecy of Zechariah it is written: “There shall yet be elderly men and elderly women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 8:4). Until the prophecy of Uriah with regard to the destruction of the city was fulfilled I was afraid that the prophecy of Zechariah would not be fulfilled, as the two prophecies are linked. Now that the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, it is evident that the prophecy of Zechariah remains valid. The Gemara adds: The Sages said to him, employing this formulation: Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us.

Pesikta de Rab Kahane

8. *How then comfort ye me in vain? As for the words that you claim you bring back from God, all that I see remaining of them is ma'al*³⁴ (Job 21:34). [R. Abba bar Kahana and the Rabbis differ concerning the meaning of the last word in this verse]. According to R. Abba bar Kahana, Job meant by it that the words his friends claimed to have brought back from God showed faithlessness;³⁵ according to the Rabbis, however, Job meant by *ma'al* that the words his friends claimed to have brought back from God showed self-contradiction. [Now how is Job's charge of contradiction relevant to the verse *Comfort ye, comfort ye*? It is relevant because the Holy One said to the Prophets: "Go, comfort Jerusalem"; [and as it turned out their words of comfort were contradictory]. Thus Hosea came to comfort her, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Hosea replied: [The Holy One said through me], "Henceforth *I will be as the dew unto Israel*" (Hos. 14:6). Jerusalem retorted: Yesterday you reported God as saying *Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit* (Hos. 9:16). And now you claim that He will be as *the dew unto Israel*. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Joel came to comfort Jerusalem, saying "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Joel replied: [The Holy One said through me], *It shall come to pass in that day that the*

mountains shall drop down sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, etc. (Joel 4:18). Jerusalem answered: Yesterday you said to me, *Awake, ye drunkards, and weep, wail, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth* (Joel 1:5); and now you say, *The mountains shall drop down sweet wine*. Which words shall I believe, yesterday's or today's?

Amos came to comfort Jerusalem, saying "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Amos replied: [The Holy One said through me], *On that day will I raise up the Tabernacle of David that is fallen* (Amos 9:11). Jerusalem answered: Yesterday you said to me, *The virgin of Israel is fallen, she shall no more rise* (Amos 5:2). And now you say, *I will raise up the Tabernacle of David*. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Micah came to comfort Jerusalem, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Micah replied: [Speaking through me, the Holy One declared of Himself], *Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth the iniquity, and passeth by transgression?* (Micah 7:18). Jerusalem answered: Yesterday you said to me, *For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel* (Micah 1:5). And now you say, *God pardoneth . . . iniquity*. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Nahum came to comfort Jerusalem, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Nahum replied: [The Holy One said through me], *The wicked one shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off* (Nahum 2:1). Jerusalem answered: Yesterday you said to me, *Out of thee came he forth, that deviseth evil against the Lord, that counseleth wickedness* (Nahum 1:11); but now you say to me, *The wicked one shall no more pass through thee*. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Habakkuk came to comfort Jerusalem, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Habakkuk replied: [Speaking through me, the Holy One declared of Himself], *Thou art come forth for the deliverance of Thy people, for the deliverance of Thine anointed* (Hab. 3:13). Jerusalem replied to Habakkuk: Yesterday you said to me, *How long, O Lord, shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry unto Thee of violence, etc.* (Hab. 1:2). And now you say to me, *Thou art come forth*. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Zephaniah came to comfort Jerusalem, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Zephaniah replied: [The Holy One announced through me], *It shall come to pass at that time that I will free³⁶ Jerusalem for the sake of the lamps* (Zeph.

1:12). Jerusalem said: Yesterday you spoke to me of *A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness* (Zeph. 1:15). And now you speak of Jerusalem being freed. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Haggai came to comfort Jerusalem, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Haggai replied: [The Holy One said through me], *Shall the seed ever again remain in the barn [unsown]? Shall the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree ever again bear no fruit? Indeed not! From this day I will bless thee* (Haggai 2:19). Jerusalem answered: Yesterday you said to me, *You sow much and bring in little* (Haggai 1:6). And now you say to me, *Shall the seed ever again remain in the barn [unsown]?* Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Zechariah came to comfort Jerusalem, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Zechariah replied: [The Holy One announced through me]: *I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease* (Zech. 1:15). Jerusalem said: Yesterday you declared: *The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers* (Zech. 1:2), and now you say, He is displeased with the nations. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Malachi came to comfort Jerusalem, saying: "The Holy One sent me to comfort thee." Jerusalem asked: What comfort do you bring me? Malachi replied: [The Holy One said through me], *All the nations shall call you happy; for ye shall be a delightsome land* (Mal. 3:12). Jerusalem answered: Yesterday you said, *I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts* (Mal. 1:10). And now you say, *Ye shall be a delightsome land*. Which words am I to believe, yesterday's or today's?

Thereupon the Prophets came before the Holy One, saying to Him: Master of universes, Jerusalem refuses to be comforted by us. The Holy One replied: Then you and I together shall go to her and comfort her: *Comfort ye, comfort ye with Me*³⁷ (Isa. 40:1)—comfort Jerusalem, comfort her together with Me. Comfort her, ye who are in the regions above, comfort her, ye who are in the regions below. Ye who are alive comfort her, ye who are dead comfort her. Comfort her in this world, comfort her in the world-to-come. Comfort her for the Ten Tribes, comfort her for the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin. It is all these I mean by *ye* when I say, *Comfort ye, comfort ye with Me* (*ibid.*)—comfort Jerusalem, comfort her together with Me.