



“Oh, City of Blood!”

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In memory of Yuval Shoham, z”l

“Oh, city of blood!” cries the prophet Ezekiel (24:6), speaking on behalf of God as he announces the beginning of the siege on Jerusalem on 10th Tevet.¹ These painful words, reflecting the immense amount of blood that has been shed, resonate powerfully in our days, raising profound questions about mourning and consolation.

Later in the chapter, God addresses the prophet personally and tragically. He informs him that “the delight of his eyes,” his beloved wife, is destined to die. This is an immeasurable blow, yet the pain is compounded when Ezekiel is instructed not to mourn her. “You shall neither wail nor weep, nor let tears run down your eyes” (Ezekiel 24:16). In response to Ezekiel’s strange behavior after his wife’s death, the people ask: “Will you not tell us what this is to us, that you act this way?” (24:19). God explains that Ezekiel, in his pain, is destined to serve as an example to the people of Israel (24:24). Answering the people’s question, Ezekiel says: “Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your strength, the delight of your eyes.” And, like Ezekiel, the people will also be deprived of traditional mourning practices: “You will do as I have done... You shall not mourn or weep but shall

¹ With deep gratitude to R. Avital Hochstein for her *havruta* in understanding both the text and the emotions.



waste away because of your sins and groan to one another" (Ezekiel 24:22–23). The suffering will be so profound that the people of Israel will be left not only without rituals of mourning but also without strength and without words. All that will remain for them in the face of destruction will be the sound of groaning.

Rashi interprets the words "and you shall do as I have done" as follows: "You shall not practice mourning, for there will be no comforters for you, since there will not be a single person among you who will not be in mourning, and mourning only exists where there are comforters." The destruction will be so absolute, the pain so overwhelming, that there will be no one left to console the bereaved, for the entire community will be in mourning. When the entire community is mourning, there is no place, no meaning, no reason, no address for the customs of mourning.

Rashi highlights the critical importance of community in the mourning process and teaches us an essential aspect of the mourning experience: mourning is not only the individual's private pain, but a process in which the community supports and strengthens the mourners. When everyone is grieving, there are no comforters, and when there are no comforters, all that remains is to utter a moan. Without comforters, mourning turns into a state of absolute despair, leaving no room for solace or the ability to process the loss.

In the past year, many of us have felt a similar sense of loss. The pain in our communities often seems boundless, and mourning touches every home and every heart. There are days when all we can do is moan.

However, the chapter ends with a shift—a survivor of the destruction arrives to tell what happened in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel finds himself no longer paralyzed by grief. "On that day your mouth will be opened to the fugitive, and you will speak and no longer be silent. So you



shall be an example for them..." (Ezekiel 24:26–27). Ezekiel continues to serve as an example—but now, he models a different kind of behavior. He demonstrates the ability to move beyond the paralysis of overwhelming grief and begin to speak.

In contrast to the prophet's isolation, we find solace in our communities. While there are days of overwhelming grief, there are also other days, when there are not only mourners but also comforters. These are the days when we open our ears and our mouths, when we listen to the mourners and allow them to speak. From the difficulty, we learn to listen, to hear the mourning, and not just to experience it. We are present, we support and embrace the mourners—becoming partners in their pain and also, we hope, a comfort for them.

This past Sunday morning, the Goldberg-Polin family, who lost their son Hersh, ז"ל, stood before the Shoham family, who lost their son Yuval, ז"ל. They reached out a hand of comfort and read the words of the prophet Isaiah:

ישעיה סו:יג

כַּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אִמּוֹ תְנַחֲמֶנּוּ כֵן אֲנִכִּי אֲנַחֲמְכֶם וּבִירוּשָׁלַם תְּנַחֲמוּ:

Isaiah 66:13

As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you shall find comfort in Jerusalem.

The words "in Jerusalem you shall be comforted" have a double meaning: from Jerusalem, the city of blood, and through it, comes consolation. Through Jerusalem we will be comforted because the destruction that reached its most terrible low did not end the city's story. Jerusalem was rebuilt—its communities, its families, its steadfast spirit. And within Jerusalem we will be comforted—by the communities that continue and choose to build life from the ruins.

