"Who Will Be Your Witness?" Lament and Storytelling in Lamentations, Lamentations Rabbah, and Contemporary Pastoral Care

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One Page Summary of Thesis
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In this thesis, I present textual analyses of Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah that show how these texts embody the drive to describe suffering, to lament, to tell stories, to protest, to sit in silence, and to serve as witnesses in the wake of suffering. In Chapter One, which deals with the biblical Lamentations, I follow the work of scholars who argue that Lamentations should be read and understood, first and foremost, as a "howl of pain," to borrow Rachel Adler's phrase. In its unrelenting descriptions of suffering, the poems' voices overlap with each other, blurring the lines between testifier and witness. In the midst of God's stubborn silence, we, the readers/ listeners, step into the role of witness and enter into the experience of suffering.

In Chapter Two, I explore the rabbinic Lamentations. In this collection of *midrashim*, the Rabbis offer laments and stories that describe the suffering of an entirely different time period. Like the poets of Lamentations, they insist that suffering must be described and heard. In their stories, even God must respond to suffering, becoming a testifier who uses rabbinic literature's rich repository as a model for new stories. In addition to this, the Rabbis look beyond suffering. They remind us of the flow of history over lifetimes and generations, and they describe times in which rebuilding was possible and comfort was available. Crucially, they acknowledge that even those who provide comfort to others need to be comforted themselves.

Chapter Three draws together material from interviews I conducted with eight rabbis who have done disaster chaplaincy. I suggest that lament, storytelling, silence, and protest are all important pieces of the pastoral journey. In these journeys, the chaplain serves as a spiritual witness. But, as we know from Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah, the lines between testifier and witness are easily blurred. Thus, pastoral caregivers also become lamenters in need of witnesses, and this becomes an essential element of self-care. In journeys that revolve around witnessing and testifying, the poems and stories of Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah remind us of the multiple emotional cadences of Judaism's sacred canon. Lament and protest are just as much a part of our textual inheritance as praise and celebration, and the biblical and rabbinic Lamentations are sacred texts that affirm the sanctity of our words and reactions in the immediate aftermath of catastrophe and during the long, hard process of re-building. They provide us with a blueprint for testifying and for witnessing, for telling the truth about pain and suffering and for being willing to listen to those truths.

In the Conclusion, I offer some thoughts about theologies of pastoral care that draw on my interviews with rabbis and the texts under consideration.

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arrived as this thesis was in its very final stages. With great love, I dedicate this thesis to the three of them.

Introduction

In 587 BCE, Babylonian forces sacked Jerusalem. The events that followed -- the destruction of the First Temple, the loss of the Davidic throne, and the exile to Babylonia -- became the paradigmatic catastrophe of Jewish history. In five graphic chapters, the biblical book of Lamentations records these events, describing war, plunder, starvation, homelessness, and the complete rupture of daily life. Lamentations is a communal lament and cry of pain that echoes through the centuries and across geography. In the first centuries of the Common Era, the Rabbis of Palestine added their own layers of interpretation, storytelling, and exegesis to the biblical book. These Rabbis, who lived in the vacuum left by the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and under the iron fist of subsequent Roman persecutions, saw their own stories reflected in the biblical Lamentations. Their collection of midrashim on the biblical book is known as Lamentations Rabbah; it is an excursus on suffering and re-building and, like the biblical Lamentations, it too resonates across time and place.

My interest in these biblical and rabbinic writings grows out of my work as a pastoral care provider in hospital settings. In summer 2007, I completed a second unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, a hands-on training program for hospital chaplains. I worked at Bellevue Hospital, a city hospital for the uninsured and disenfranchised. Patients there struggle with rupture in many forms: acute and chronic sickness, psychiatric illness, addiction, homelessness, and life at the margins of society. My supervisor, the Rev. Paul Steinke, encouraged my peers and me to validate and affirm patients' stories and the emotional responses that accompanied them. Rather then running away from patients' laments, we should create more room for this profoundly human form of expression. Just as we would "match" someone's excitement and enthusiasm

with an excited and enthusiastic response, so too we should acknowledge people's despair, anger, and pain. Rev. Steinke taught us that, rather than minimizing these emotions, we should "join with" patients in their suffering. This way, we could let patients know that we were truly listening to them.

Rev. Steinke encouraged us to read psalms of lament with patients. At first, I was skeptical; I didn't think these ancient poems would speak to a contemporary audience. But, when I started readings psalms to patients, I was amazed by patients' responses. Sometimes hearing a psalm of lament helped patients to let go of tears; other times it opened up a new strand in our conversation. It was clear that, for patients who were truly in the pit, these poems profoundly echoed their experiences. They identified strongly with the psalmist who described his suffering and abandonment and demanded to know when God would return to him. This ability to find oneself in an ancient text is what Tod Linafelt might call the "afterlife" of a psalm.

In his book *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book*, Tod Linafelt studies the biblical Lamentations and how subsequent authors and commentators sought to make it speak to their own time and place. He offers the following definition of texts, including Lamentations Rabbah, that interpret the biblical Lamentations:

> [T]hey represent an afterlife for the biblical book, not only drawing their own life from it but allowing it to live on in later generations.[1]

While Linafelt uses the category of "afterlife" in a *literary* context, this study explores whether there is a *pastoral* "afterlife" for Lamentations and the *midrashim* that interpret it.

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1. Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 18.

Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah speak to contemporary readers as both time-bound and timeless accounts of disaster and suffering. They are time-bound because they are shaped by catastrophes that befell the writers' communities in the immediate or recent past; they are timeless because they give voice to suffering that speaks to us regardless of time or place.

The current project grew out of my interest in whether Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah might provide a usable "afterlife" for pastoral care providers who work with survivors of collective tragedies, just as psalms of lament have an "afterlife" for patients in a hospital room. After disaster, many people turn to spiritual care providers. As Roberts and Ashley explain, "significant numbers of people having difficulties in the wake of disaster turn either first or only to spiritual care providers." Indeed, an often-cited American Red Cross poll taken in October 2001 showed that almost 60 percent of those polled were likely or very likely to seek help from a spiritual counselor as opposed to only 40 percent who were likely or very likely to turn to a mental health professional.[2] This study investigates what survivors want from pastoral care providers and how this changes over the course of the disaster's impact and the survivors' ensuing attempts to put their lives back together.

In their introduction to *Disaster Spiritual Care: Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy*, Stephen Roberts and Willard Ashley offer this definition of a disaster.

> A disaster at its most basic level is an event that severely disrupts the everyday lives of individuals and communities. It almost always involves the loss of life and/or extreme, widespread property damage. The American Red Cross defines a disaster as "an event of such destructive magnitude and force as to dislocate, injure or kill people, separate family

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[2] Stephen B. Roberts and Willard W.C. Ashley, eds., *Disaster Spiritual Care: Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy*, (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2008), xi.

> members, and damage or destroy homes." Further, disasters often overwhelm the initial coping capacities and resources of an individual, a family, or a community. Disaster disruptions can be spiritual, emotional, economic, physical, and ecological.[3]

Rabbi Stephen Roberts has developed the helpful concept of the "life cycle" of a disaster, which incorporates the following sequence of events. The "impact" phase refers to the time when the disaster actually occurs. This can last anywhere from seconds to days. The period immediately following the disaster is the "heroic" or "rescue" stage, which fosters a "honeymoon" period of "community cohesion." This is then followed by disillusionment as people come to terms with the true challenges of putting their lives back together. Finally, as survivors work through their grief, they lay the groundwork for the "reconstruction" stage.

Roberts points out that no two disasters are the same and that the "life cycle" of each one is different.[4] This is an important point that deserves to be underscored. For example, in the wake of the September 11 disaster, the rescue effort lasted for months. A number of the rabbis whom I interviewed for this project described how this placed an extraordinary amount of stress on the rescue workers, who had likely never imagined that their jobs would unfold in such unspeakable ways. Rabbi Myrna Matsa, who works in Mississippi and Louisiana providing pastoral support to Jewish clergy and lay-leaders involved in re-building after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, provides another example. She notes that Hurricane Katrina was "an equal opportunity destroyer but it is not equal opportunity in recovery." The recovery process has been much easier for those with insurance and financial resources and this has a profound effect on the pastoral (and psychological, social, and economic) needs of different groups of people.[5]

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3. *Disaster Spiritual Care*, xv.
4. Stephen B. Roberts, "The Life Cycle of a Disaster." *Disaster Spiritual Care*, 3-16.
5. Interview with Rabbi Myrna Matsa, conducted by phone in New York City, July 14, 2008.

Between June and Novmber 2008, I interviewed eight rabbis who have provided, or who continue to provide, disaster spiritual care. They have ministered to survivors, first responders, rescue workers, and other clergy following the September 11 attacks, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech, two plane disasters (TWA flight 800 in 1996 and American Airlienes flight 587 in 2001), and the 2003 Staten Island ferry crash. The rabbis with whom I talked represent a wide spectrum of American Jewish life. Rabbis Seth Bernstein, Stephen Roberts, Shira Stern, and Nancy Wiener are Reform; Simkha Weintraub and Myrna Matsa are Conservative; Craig Miller is Orthodox; and Joseph Potasnik was ordained by Yeshiva University and is now a member of the Conservative Movement's Rabbinical Assembly.

I asked these rabbis about the nature of their pastoral conversations and about the roles that lament, storytelling, silence, protest, and God-talk played in these conversations. I also asked them about their self-care strategies and their theologies of pastoral care. These questions were informed by my readings of Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah. I wanted to know if Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah's drive to describe suffering, protest injustice, and witness rupture were reflected in contemporary pastoral conversations. In short, I wanted to know if life reflects text, and if text reflects life.

Texts: Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah

Lamentations is an excruciating description of the suffering that followed the destruction of the First Temple. Zion, personified as a woman, describes her experiences of pain, abandonment, mourning, and loss. We also see the degradation of the city and her people through the eyes of a *gever* (גבר), literally "man" and often translated as "Everyman," who is a

survivor and witness. Elsewhere, the poet's voice alternates with that of another, anonymous survivor, and with the collective voice of the people. The profundity and gravity of the catastrophe lies not only in the people's visceral experiences of suffering, but also in the fact that the covenant between God and the Israelites has been breached. God, rather than the Babylonians, is held responsible for the destruction, and God's burning anger is described in terrifying detail. Four of the five poems use an alphabetic acrostic structure, a literary device that underscores the completeness of the suffering.

The Talmud, Septuagint, and Vulgate all ascribe Lamentations to Jeremiah, who prophesied during the time of the Destruction. Modern scholars, however, maintain that each poem was written by a different anonymous author in the immediate aftermath of the Destruction. The poems were then compiled into one book by 520 BCE after the exiles returned to Jerusalem.[6] The text that we now have is composed of five chapters, each of which is a discrete poem. The scholarly consensus is that the poems were composed in Palestine, rather then in exile, since they do not address the fate of the exiles in Babylon.[7]

David Grossman identifies a number of possible literary forerunners of Lamentations: the individual and communal laments in the Book of Psalms, funeral dirges, and ancient Mesopotamian laments over destroyed cities.[8] Funeral dirges were typically composed in the *kinah* meter -- a "limping" or uneven meter that has a solemn feel to it. This meter recurs throughout Lamentations.[9] Claus Westermann argues, however, that even though dirge elements

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6. David Grossman, "Lamentations." Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford University Press: 2004), 1589.

7. Delbert R. Hillers, *The Anchor Bible, Lamentations: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City: NY, Doubleday, 1972), xxiii.

8. Grossman, 1588.

9. For a discussion of the *kinah* meter in Lamentations, see Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A*

are present throughout the book, it should be understood primarily as a communal lament.[10] This is defined by Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr. as follows: "a composition ... used by and/or on behalf of a community to express both complaint, and sorrow and grief over some perceived calamity, physical or cultural... and to appeal to God for deliverance." Ferris also notes that communal laments constitute "a direct corporate dialogical expression of grief to God."[11]

Westermann makes the case that there are "astonishing" parallels between Lamentations and the Sumerian "Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur," a Mesopotamiam city destroyed around the beginning of the second millenium. For the purposes of this study, it is helpful to note the following four features that are common to Sumero-Akkadian laments over destroyed cities. First, the disaster is brought about by the anger of the gods and, in turn, the speaker expresses anger at the gods. Second, the physical infrastructure of the city is destroyed, as are social structures and religious institutions. Third, although communal laments sometimes involve some confession of sin, it is unusual. More often, the speaker asserts his/ her innocence. Finally, the purpose of the appeal to the gods is two-fold: that the gods will cease their attacks and return to the people, and that the gods will turn their anger on the people's earthly enemies.[12] All of these elements appear in Lamentations; the second and third elements are particularly germane to the discussion in the following chapters.[13]

Lamentations Rabbah, a collection of *midrashim* on the biblical Lamentations, is known by

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Commentary, (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2-3.

10. Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, trans. Charles Muenchow, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 9-10.

11. Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr., *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 111.

12. Ferris, 59-60.

13. Westermann, 11-18.

a variety of different names, including *Midrash Threni*, *Eichah Rabbah*, *Aggadat Eichah (Rabbati)*, *Megillat Eichah*, *Midrash Kinot*, and *Midrash Eichah*. For the purposes of this study, it will be referred to as Lamentations Rabbah. The work is divided into two discrete sections. The first section is a series of 36 *petichtaot* (proems), almost all of which use Lamentations 1:1 (How lonely she sits) as their lectionary verse. The second part of *Lamentations Rabbah* is composed of five *parshiot* (one for each chapter of Lamentations), which provide a verse-by-verse commentary on each of the five poems. The manuscript is preserved in two textual recensions, a critical version of which has yet to be written. This study relies on Salomon Buber's edition of the text.

Lamentations Rabbah, which was composed in Palestine, is considered to be one of the earliest aggadic collections and is dated concurrently with Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah to sometime between the fifth and seventh centuries. The collection cites Tannaim and early Amoraim, none of whom lived later than the 4th century. However, some of the proems are considered to be later additions.[14] What is significant for the purposes of this study is that Lamentations Rabbah was neither written nor compiled by those who actually survived the tragedies of the Tannaitic period. This stands in stark contrast to the biblical Lamentations, which is generally considered to have been written by survivors and witnesses of the catastrophe of 587 BCE.

In his book *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature*, David Kraemer traces the development of rabbinic ideas about individual and collective suffering. Beginning with the

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[14]. H. L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 284-7, and Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash." *Prooftexts*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1982, 19.

Mishnah, the earliest layer of rabbinic literature, he writes, "The Mishnah... has virtually nothing to say about the problems of suffering, evil, and injustice."[15] Following the work of Jacob Neusner, Kraemer argues that the Mishnah's goal was to describe a utopian world removed from the concerns of everyday life. He explains, "Suffering was evidence of the world of the everyday, precisely the world the utopian vision of the Mishnah wished to ignore."[16] Thus, the Mishnah, which was redacted around 220 CE, does not deal with suffering, either personal or communal. It does not refer to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the end of the Golden Age of Alexandrian Jewry after the failed uprising of 115-117 CE, or the crushing defeat of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE. Coming as it did approximately 70 years after the destruction of the Temple, the defeat of 135 CE extinguished all hope that the biblical prophecy of restoration 70 years after destruction would be fulfilled.[17] Despite this, the Mishnah barely mentions that the Temple is in ruins.[18]

Kraemer describes how the Tosefta (which he dates to the mid-late 3rd century) and the halakhic *midrashim* (which he dates to the late 3rd century) were written and compiled against the backdrop of "a period of anarchy in the Roman Empire." During this period, everyday life for the Jews of Palestine "deteriorated in ways which were unavoidable and undeniable."[19] Although lamenting over losses, or justifying these losses, is hardly the central project of either the Tosefta or the halakhic *midrashim*,

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15. David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.
16. *ibid.*, 55.
17. *ibid.*, 52. See, for example, Jer 25:11-12.
18. *ibid.*, 60.
19. *ibid.*, 67. He is referring to the period 235-285 CE.

> they both address one part of the imperfection of their own day where the Mishnah, several generations before, did not. Each in its own way -- the Tosefta in confronting the destruction of the Temple and the midrashim in their treatments of personal suffering -- grants that the ideal imagined in the Mishnah has yet to be realized.[20]

By the beginning of the fifth century, when the Jerusalem Talmud and the earliest aggadic *midrash* collections were redacted, the Jews of Palestine found themselves living in even harsher circumstances. Kraemer, again drawing on Neusner's work, summarizes these events as the Christianization of the Roman world, a failed effort to rebuild the Temple under Emperor Julius, and the abolition of the office of the Jewish Patriarch sometime before 429 CE. Perhaps because of these extremely difficult conditions, the rabbinic writings of this period pay considerable attention to the topics of sin and suffering. With the notable exception of Lamentations Rabbah, they display what Kraemer calls a "profound conservatism" with regard to sin and suffering, regarding the latter as the inevitable and necessary consequence of the former.[21] These "conservative" theological strains are certainly present in Lamentations Rabbah. However, Kraemer argues that it departs significantly from the other midrash collections of its time period in two key ways. First, it gives voice to "the Jobian complaint" -- meaning that God's justice is called into question. Second, it frames the destruction in a political context (i.e. life under the Roman emperors who destroyed the Temple and crushed the Bar Kokhba revolt), thus giving a concrete historical framework within which to make sense of the catastrophes.[22]

These historical details fulfill important literary and theological purposes. For the Rabbis, the disaster of 587 BCE is the paradigmatic catastrophe of Jewish history. In Shaye Cohen's words, Lamentations became "the eternal lament for all Jewish catastrophes, past, present, and

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[20] *ibid.*, 99.
[21] *ibid.*, 141.
[22] *ibid.*, 142.

future."[23] Lamentations Rabbah, the primary rabbinic vehicle for the interpretation of Lamentations, is filled with stories that provide historical details about the Jews' lives under Vespasian (who ruled from 69-79), Trajan (98-117), and Hadrian (117-138). These details become the framework that explains the fulfillment of the prophecies in the biblical Lamentations, which the Rabbis believed was a prophetic work written by Jeremiah. One way to understand the relationship between the two works is this: the biblical Lamentations is a prophetic warning of the punishments that God would inflict on Jews in the future if they transgressed, and Lamentations Rabbah is an account of the fulfillment of those prophecies in the first two centuries of the Common Era.[24]

However, both works are also much more than this. As described in Chapter One, the biblical Lamentations is multivocal in its treatment of suffering. Lamentations Rabbah increases this multivocality. Given that *midrash* is often defined as the project of "filling the gaps" in the biblical text, this is not surprising. However, Linafelt expands upon this definition of "filling the gaps" in ways that are very helpful for the present study of Lamentations Rabbah:

> [T]his understanding [i.e. of "filling the gaps"] hardly accounts for the seeming joy that midrash takes in providing *numerous* ways of filling any one gap... I prefer to imagine midrash as attending to the gaps in Scripture, but instead of filling them, widening them. [italics in original][25]

Lamentations Rabbah, like any other *midrash* collection, offers a plurality of interpretations and understandings about God, suffering, human failings, and the places in which hope is found. It is neither desirable nor necessary -- nor was it ever part of the midrashic project -- to reconcile

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[23] S.J.D. Cohen, 19-20.
[24] *ibid.*, 20.
[25] Linafelt, 104.

these multiple understandings with each other.

Chapter Overview

This thesis is divided into three chapters that deal, respectively, with Lamenations, Lamentations Rabbah, and contemporary disaster chaplaincy issues. In Chapter One, which deals with the biblical Lamentations, I draw out five themes. First, I look first at what Lamentation is *not*. The five poems that make up the Book of Lamentations are not primarily concerned with acknowledging sin or with reconciling with God. Indeed, many of the poems' references to sin are cloaked in ambiguities. This raises questions about whether the poet's various personae believe that God's punitive anger is excessive. Given this, what *is* Lamentations? The remaining four sections provide answers to this question.

In the second section, I argue that Lamentations is a communal lament and "howl of pain" (to borrow Rachel Adler's phrase) that is primarily driven by the need to give voice to the extent of the devastation and suffering. In Lamentations, the poet and reader/ listener are mired in descriptions of extraordinary suffering from which there is no apparent relief. The poems are testaments about pain, grief, and abandonment. Third, the poems describe a God who is both oppressively present and terrifyingly absent. Fourth, the poet uses wordplay that, implicitly or explicitly, indicts God for God's excessively harsh treatment of the people. Finally, in the face of a silent God, Zion and the people nevertheless call out to God and to humanity, asking for witnesses to their suffering. Ultimately, we the readers/ listeners, are drawn into the accounts of the survivors and witnesses. We, too, become witnesses, affirming the necessity of bearing witness to lament. Thus, Lamentations encourages those who are suffering to give voice to their pain, to call out to God even when God is unresponsive, and to rebuke the terrifying source of

suffering.

In Chapter Two, which deals with the rabbinic Lamentations, I identify four key themes that emerge from Lamentations Rabbah's multiplicity of interpretations. The first two are a continuation of themes in the biblical text; the second two are radical departures from it. First, as in the biblical Lamentations, the Rabbis are ambivalent about the people's sinfulness and raise questions about God's punitive excesses. Indeed, the Rabbis make explicit the idea that rebuke and lament are overlapping categories. The object of the rebukes/ laments is similarly slippery. Sometimes the spotlight is on the people, sometimes it is on God. Second, like the biblical text, the rabbinic exegesis of Lamentations is largely driven by the need to put into words the scale of the Israelites'/ Jews' suffering. Given their remove from the events they are describing, the Rabbis use the literary form of storytelling, rather than lament. Nevertheless, they are determined to explore and describe suffering on a scale even greater and more elaborate than that in the biblical text.

Third, the Rabbis turn God into a mourner, finally breaking the silence God maintains in the biblical text. This literary device appears in both of the themes already discussed, but it deserves to be treated in its own right, especially in relation to the well-known Petichta 24. Finally, the Rabbis are able to do something that the biblical poet could not: because of their distance from the disastrous events, they can see the whole picture of a people's life -- suffering, joy, and everything in between. Thus, they tell stories that comfort and stories that promise redemption.

In Chapter Three, I explore three sets of important parallels between the texts under discussion and the lived experiences of those who provide spiritual care in the wake of disasters. First, I look at how, after disaster, people give voice to lament, stories, and protest, all of which have literary parallels in Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah. I also look at silence and its

literary parallels. Second, I look at Zion's repeated calls for a witness and explore the role of clergy people as witnesses to others' suffering. Third, I explore how the experience of witnessing suffering brings its own pain. This, in turn, gives rise to pastors' need to lament, tell stories, and be comforted. Finally, I look at the ways in which the biblical and rabbinic Lamentations are texts that mirror our lives, reminding us that there is always a place for words of lament and protest. In the Conclusion, I offer some thoughts about theologies of pastoral care that draw on my interviews with rabbis and the texts under consideration.

Chapter One:
The Biblical Lamentations

Rachel Adler describes laments as "the cultural form closest to the preverbal howl of pain." She writes:

> Lament can be incoherent and chaotic, picking its way through a broken rubble of unbearably vivid happenings and intolerable sensations. Its content is dangerously dark and disordered...[26]

Laments describe the experience of loss, mourning, and suffering. The lament's "howl of pain" is more than a literary device; it is a lived, sociological phenomenon. The book of Lamentations has been passed down to us as poetry and scripture but it is likely that its original purpose was stark and graphic: it was a vehicle through which those who witnessed and survived the destruction of 587 BCE gave voice to the previously unimaginable scale of their loss. Thus, the "howl of pain" is driven by the need to express suffering, without necessarily analyzing or deriving meaning from it. Most of this chapter explores the ways in which Lamentations is a "howl of pain." However, much of the scholarship on Lamentations, especially that written prior to the last decade, takes a different approach, focusing instead on the themes of sin and repentance. So, before exploring how Lamentations functions as a communal lament, I will address these approaches.

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[26]. Rachel Adler, Dr. Samuel Atlas Memorial Lecture, "For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament." *HUC-JIR Chronicle* 2006, Issue 68, 16. http://huc.edu/chronicle/68/articles/TheologyLament.pdf

I.
Poems about Sin and Reconciliation?
A Look at What Lamentations is *Not*

Lamentations is *not* primarily about sin and guilt. Rather, a close reading of passages dealing with guilt and punishment reveals that: (1) references to Jerusalem's sinfulness are firmly rooted in the lament genre that is primarily concerned with describing, not explaining, suffering, (2) both Jerusalem and poet express ambivalence about whether the sin warranted such severe punishment, and (3) the poems are cries of pain rather than neatly packaged expressions of reconciliation. Before doing this close reading, however, it is helpful to review how and why Lamentations is often read through the lenses of sin and reconciliation.

Until the last decade, exegetes tended to interpret Lamentations as poems about a sinful but ultimately repentant people, and a punitive but ultimately compassionate God. Claus Westermann, for example, focuses on the paradigms of guilt, suffering, and repentance in his analysis of Lamentations. For him, Lamentations' core is Chapter 3, a "didactic poem" that expresses "a deuteronomic spirit of repentance and public confession."[27] For Westermann, even Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5, which he regards as communal laments, involve admissions of sin. He explains:

> As all five chapters emphasize, the people of God have incurred guilt over against God. Thus the references to the wrathful acts of God are set in conjunction with language about guilt and punishment. The heavy blows that have fallen on the people of God are recognized by them as a form of divine punishment. This amounts to a concurrent admission of the people's guilt.[28]

For Westermann, Lamentations is an extension of the Torah's theology of reward and

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[27]. Westermann, 230.

[28]. *ibid.*, 224.

punishment. Adele Berlin identifies two paradigms -- the paradigm of purity and the political paradigm -- that can be used to explain the sins that led God to bring about the Destruction. With regard to the first paradigm, the Bible threatens that moral impurity (sexual sins, idolatry, and bloodshed) will defile the land. Consequently, "[t]he defiled land spews out its inhabitants, so if Israel defiles its land, the land itself will reject them." That is, the people will be exiled. Thus, argues Berlin, Lamentations uses the image of the sexually impure woman -- the personified Jerusalem -- to reinforce the idea of the moral defilement of the land.[29]

Berlin's second paradigm is a political one. This paradigm revolves around the violation of the Deuteronomic covenant, which is patterned on suzerainty treaties between a king and his vassals. Berlin explains,

> The treaty model helps us to understand why it is God, not the Babylonians, who are blamed for the destruction. It was with God that Israel made the covenant, and it is God, therefore, who is the offended suzerain. The Babylonians do not come into the picture at all.[30]

Common to both paradigms is the belief that exile is the ultimate punishment for the most serious transgressions. Indeed, this warning is repeated multiple times in the Torah.[31] The

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29. Berlin, 19-20.

30. *ibid.*, 21.

31. See, for example, Deuteronomy 4:25-28, which reads:

> [25] When you have begotten children and children's children and are long established in the land, should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, causing the Eternal your God displeasure and vexation, [26] I call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess; you shall not long endure it it, but shall be utterly wiped out. [27] The Eternal will scatter you among the peoples, and only a scant few of you shall be left among the nations to which the Eternal will drive you. [28] There you will serve gods of wood and stone, made by human hands, that cannot see or hear or eat or smell.

This translation is based on David E. S. Stein's in *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 293.

biblical prophets and the poets of Lamentations, argues Berlin, also fused these two paradigms together.[32] For Westermann, then, Lamentations becomes a work dealing primarily with exile as a just punishment for serious transgression, and its poems should be read in the context of sin and guilt.

Tod Linafelt describes this approach as the "devaluing of lament." In *Surviving Lamentations*, Linafelt proposes that the focus on sin and reconciliation is a reading strategy to "survive" Lamentations -- "that is, for the reader to somehow deal with the pain and devastation represented by the book."[33] According to Linafelt, this strategy relieves God of ultimate responsibility for the people's extraordinary suffering. Furthermore, it downplays what Linafelt regards as the real purposes of lament: the need to give voice to the experience of suffering, and the need to address protests to God. Finally, Linafelt argues that commentators tend to connect admissions of guilt with reconciliation with God. Again, this downplays the bitter exhaustion and loss of hope that runs through the Book.[34] Taking Linafelt's approach as my starting point, I will look in depth at some of the verses that deal with sin and guilt.

Others Speak about Jerusalem's Sinfulness; Jerusalem Speaks about her own Sinfulness

At several junctures, the poems' speakers identify Jerusalem's sinfulness as the cause of her suffering. Lamentations 1:5b, for example, reads: "Because God made her suffer/ for her many sins." In several places, Zion is personified as a prostitute and her sexual infidelity becomes a metaphor for idolatry. This understanding of sin reflects Berlin's comments about the fusing of

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32. Berlin, 22.
33. Linafelt, 2.
34. *ibid.*, 10.

the purity and political paradigms of transgression. Lamentations 1:8-9 provides a helpful example.

[8a] Jerusalem has sinned terribly,
therefore she must wander aimlessly.
[8b] All who honored her despise her,
because they have seen her nakedness
[8c] She herself groans and falls back.

[9a] Her impurity is on her skirts,
she did not think of the future.
[9b] She has come down astonishingly
with no one to comfort her.
[9c] Look, God, upon my misery,
because the enemy is made great.

Lamentations 1:9 is significant because it is the first verse in which we hear Jerusalem's own voice. In 9a, the poet-witness blames Jerusalem for her suffering. However, in 9b he describes Jerusalem's utter lack of comfort, employing the phrase that is repeated, with small changes, throughout the chapter: אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ. Finally, in the third part of the verse, Zion speaks for the first time, imploring God to see her suffering. It seems, then, that both Zion and the poet are ambivalent about Jerusalem's culpability, or at least about whether her transgressions warranted such suffering.

In verse 18a, in the midst of Zion's long soliloquy, she turns for the first time to the subject of her own sinfulness. She cries out:

[18a] God is in the right
because I rebelled (מָרִיתִי) against his mouth.
[18b] Listen well, all you peoples
and see my pain.
[18c] My young women and men
have gone into captivity.

Similar to the progression in verses 8-9, Jerusalem's admission that God is in the right is immediately followed by her plea for others to look upon her suffering. As Linafelt says, Zion "can hardly be characterized as modeling a submissive spirit toward suffering."[35] Furthermore, the word מָרִיתִי, which first appears to be a confession of sinfulness, soon becomes suffused with ambiguity.

The verb מָרִיתִי occurs again, two verses later, in the following passage:

[20] See that I am distressed, God,
my belly churns,
My heart is turned over inside me
because I am truly bitter (כִּי מָרוֹ מָרִיתִי).
Outside, the sword bereaved;
in the house, there is death.

As Berlin notes, the phrase כִּי מָרוֹ מָרִיתִי is usually translated as "for I have indeed rebelled." However, this does not fit with the meaning or tone of the rest of the verse, which is an expression of profound distress. Berlin, then, understands the second use of the word as being from the root מ-ר-י, meaning "to be bitter," rather than from the root מ-ר-ר, meaning "to rebel."[36] Given this, I have translated the phrase as "because I am truly bitter." While this leaves us with two disparate translations of the same word, it seems to be the best way to resolve the problems posed by the use of the same word in very different contexts.

From an exegetical perspective, the different understandings of the word מָרִיתִי point to the text's ambivalent approach towards Zion's sin. In different contexts, Zion uses the same word to describe, first, God's justness and her own transgression and, second, her visceral experience of

35. Linafelt, 13.
36. Berlin, 47.

bitter suffering. Later in this chapter, I will explore Zion's words of suffering and protest in more depth. For now, I turn my attention to the "Everyman" character, who is the speaker in Chapter 3, and to his attitude towards sin and punishment.

The גבר *Speaks about Jerusalem's Sinfulness and God's Righteousness*

Biblical interpreters have long wondered who the גבר is meant to be. For those who follow the traditional view that Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations, it seems obvious that he must be the גבר.[37] M. Saebo argues, however, that the גבר is the last king of Jerusalem, Zedekiah.[38] While Saebo makes a strong case in support of this, the literary function of the גבר seems to be that he is "Everyman." He is a representative survivor of the disaster who gives voice to the experience of individual and communal devastation.[39] Like Zion, the גבר is ambivalent about whether there is a necessary relationship between sin and punishment. Verses 37 through 45 read:

> [37] Who said it and it came to be
> if God did not command it?
> [38] Do not good and bad come
> from the mouth of the Most High?
> [39] How can a living person complain (מַה־יִּתְאוֹנֵן אָדָם חָי),
> a man about his punishments (גֶּבֶר עַל־חֲטָאָו)?
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> [40] Let us search and examine our ways

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37. See, for example, M. Saebo, "Who is 'The Man' in Lamentations 3? A Fresh Approach to the Interpretation of the Book of Lamentations." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 152, ed. A. Graeme Auld (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 298.
38. Saebo, 302-304.
39. See Saebo, 299 and Hillers, 64.

and return to God;
[41] Lift up our hearts and our hands
to God in heaven.
[42] We have transgressed and rebelled;
you have not forgiven.

[43] Enveloped in anger, you pursued us;
you killed and did not have mercy.
[44] You screened yourself in that cloud of yours
so that no prayer could get through.
[45] You made us rejected filth
among the nations.

The meaning of verse 39 is open to several possible interpretations. Berlin translates עַל־חַטָּאָו as "about his punishments,"[40] whereas Hillers has "over his sins"[41] and JPS has "each one of his own sins."[42] Iain Provan solves the problem by rendering the phrase as "about the punishment of his sins" and argues that there are other examples in the Tanakh (Isa 53:12 and Ezek 23:49) in which חטא meaning "punishment for sins."[43]

I have followed Berlin and rendered the phrase as "about his punishments." The rest of the verse (מַה־יִּתְאוֹנֵן אָדָם חָי) supports this translation. The root א-נ-ן appears only one other time in the Tanakh, in Numbers 11:1. Here the phrase is: וַיְהִי הָעָם כְּמִתְאֲנְנִים רַע בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוָה. Brown-

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40. Berlin, 80.

41. Hillers, 51.

42. JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation - Second Edition (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 1758.

43. Iain Provan, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 99. Paul M. Joyce notes a similar semantic ambiguity in the words חטא and עון in Lam 4:6a and 5:7. He notes that "[i]nterpretation... depends in part upon one's theological assessment of the message of the book as a whole... Perhaps one can never reach a definitive and final interpretation." He argues that this ambiguity allows us "to hear multiple echoes in a richly-laden poetic text." Paul M. Joyce, "Sitting Loose to History: Reading the Book of Lamentations without Primary Reference to its Original Historical Setting." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 254-5.

Driver-Briggs translates the *hitpael* of א-נ-ן as "to complain" or "to murmur."[44] My rendering of the phrase is: The people were complaining bitterly into God's ears. The people are unhappy and are directing their complaints right into God's ears. Similarly, in Lamentations, it makes sense that the witnesses' complaints would focus on suffering, not wrongdoing. Indeed, in both Numbers and Lamentations, the people are participating in what Anson Laytner describes as the Jewish tradition of arguing with God. He writes:

> [I]n many generations, God has not acted toward His people as a God should act. And His people have known it. The Jewish literary heritage is replete with laments and dirges, complaints and arguments, all protesting God's mistreatment of His people.[45]

In verses 40-42, the גבר calls on the people to atone and return to God. But, in verses 43-45 the גבר delivers his complaint and accusation into God's ears. The גבר can exhort Zion's people all he wants, but God remains distant, inaccessible, and cruel. Lamentations, then, is not primarily a collection of poems about transgression and return. Rather, the poems are laments, the primary purpose of which is to give voice to suffering. They do not articulate a clear theological position about sin and guilt. Rather, they embody the act of describing one's own suffering and of witnessing other people's suffering.

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44. R. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 59.

45. Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1990), xv.

II.
"A Howl of Pain:"
The Book of Lamentations as a Communal Lament

As noted above, Adler describes lament as a "howl of pain" that is "chaotic" and "disordered." It is an expression of suffering, not an analysis or explanation of it. In Lamentations' poems, this is achieved through two key descriptive strategies: pictures of a world turned upside down, and accounts of the people's physical responses to their suffering.

The World is Turned Upside Down

Lamentations is filled with references to the multiple ways in which destruction and slaughter have rendered ordinary life unrecognizable. Lamentations 1:4 reads:

> Zion's roads are filled with mourning,
> no pilgrims come for festivals.
> All of her gates are desolate,
> her priests groan,
> Her virgins grieve,
> she is bitter.

Lamentations 2:9 reads:

> Sunk into the ground are her gates,
> defeated and broken are her bars..

Lamentations 4:5 reads:

> Those who used to feast on dainties
> are desolate in the streets;
> Those raised in crimson,
> embrace refuse heaps.

These three verses encapsulate many themes that are repeated throughout the five poems. The physical structure of the city is in ruins. The people now live their lives in the streets and public squares of Jerusalem. The catastrophe has affected people of every age and from every

social stratum. In four excrutiating verses, Lamentations 5:11-14 captures the totality of the suffering:

[11] Women in Zion they raped,
virgins in the streets of Judah.
[12] Princes were hanged by their hands,
elders they did not honor.
[13] Youths carried millstones,
young men stumbled under loads of wood.
[14] Elders are gone from the gate,
youths no longer make music.

The normal cycle of time has been disrupted. Not only are pilgrims no longer coming to bring offerings to the Temple, but the poet uses the word מועד, which is usually understood to mean "festival" or "set time," to describe God's proclamation of imminent destruction of God's own people.

God proclaimed a set time (מועד) against me
to destroy my young men. (1:15b)

You invoke, as if it were a festival (מועד),
my attackers who surround. (2:22a)

As Linafelt notes, in this account of relentless slaughter, the poet describes "a gruesome perversion of the [sacrificial] cult."[46]

This utter disruption of ordinary life is reflected in the poet's word choices, in which the line between metaphor and reality becomes painfully blurred. In 1:20, the poet uses the phrase: בַּבַּיִת כַּמָּוֶת. In 2:5, the phrase הָיָה אֲדֹנָי כְּאוֹיֵב appears. In both phrases, the poet places a *kaf* before a noun. We could read these phrases as similes: *in the house, it is like death* and *God has become like an enemy*. However, Berlin argues that this is incorrect. The *kaf* is asseverative and should

46. Linafelt, 58.

be translated as an emphatic, not comparative, particle.[47] The situation is so hopelessly bad that similes describing the worst possible scenarios (death in the house, God as an enemy) are rendered useless by the fact that they are no longer mere similes. Instead, they become tragic descriptions of reality.

A similarly harsh journey from metaphor to reality appears in 4:7-8. These verses read:

[7] Her nobles were whiter than snow,
clearer than milk:
Their limbs were ruddier than coral,
their physique like sapphire.

[8] Their faces became darker than black --
they were not recognizable in the streets;
Their skin shriveled on their bones,
it was as dry as wood.

Verse 7 describes the pre-destruction period in which Jerusalem's people were as perfect as fresh snow and creamy milk, as glorious as exquisite jewels. Once, they were white, coral, sapphire. Now, they are black. At first, this appears to be a continuation of the metaphor that revolves around color. But, by 8b, it is clear that this is no metaphor. The people's faces are black with starvation, their skin shrivels on their dry bones from which the marrow of life has been sucked.

The People's Bodies are Wracked with the Pain of Mourning

All five chapters include a plethora of references to body parts. Some of these body parts belong to the angry, consuming God, but many of them belong those who are suffering, weeping, and starving. The poet conjures up body-related images that viscerally convey the misery of the

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47. Berlin, 47 and 66.

people's experiences. In 1:20, Jerusalem tells God that her belly churns and her heart is turned over inside her. Similarly, in 2:11, the poet/ witness says:

My eyes are worn out with tears,
my belly churns,
My liver bile is poured out on the ground
on account of the breaking of my Dear People.

In 3:49, the poet laments, "My eyes pour and do not cease" and in 4:17 the people report, "We still wear out our eyes looking/ for our help, in vain." For the survivors of the catastrophe, the experience is viscerally gut-wrenching. As the readers, we, too, are drawn into these graphic descriptions. Our insides writhe, our hearts turn over, our eyes wear out. The poet draws us into the "howl of pain" and the words of the communal lament and we experience a momentary glimpse of the magnitude of the people's suffering.

III.
God's Terrifying Absence and God's Terrifying Presence

Where is God in Lamentations? In Lamentations, God is nowhere and everywhere. God is nowhere because God does not answer. But, at the same time, God is everywhere. God's punitive actions and burning anger are described in graphic detail, particularly in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, God's oppressive omnipresence and omnipotence are described. God is a lurking bear and a lion in hiding; God is the most dangerous of animals (3:10). God walls in, shuts out, and encircles (3:4-9). In some places, the poet uses encirclement language associated elsewhere in the Tanakh with being surrounded by enemies. For example, in verse 3:5, the poet writes:

He built for me and encircled (וַיִּקַּף) me
with poverty and hardship.

The verb נ-ק-ף is used in Psalms 17:9 and 22:17 to describe the experience of being surrounded by enemies. It also appears in Job 19:6 and in Psalm 88:18 with God as the subject.

Job charges that God has encircled him with traps or siege works, and the psalmist describes how God hides God's face but yet sends terrors to swirl around him. Lamentations' imagery, then, recalls other descriptions of God as an encircling, suffocating enemy.

However, elsewhere in Chapter 3, the poet employs language found in other parts of the Tanakh to describe God's comforting presence. In verses 43 and 44, the poet twice uses the verb ך-כ-ס, meaning to "overshadow," "screen," or "cover."[48] In a majority of the cases when this verb is used in the Tanakh to describe God's actions, it describes how God's enveloping, overshadowing presence brings comfort and security. In Exodus 33:22, Moses stands in the cleft of a rock as God's presence passes by and God shields (וְשַׂכֹּתִי) Moses with God's hand.[49] In Psalm 140:8, the psalmist describes how God protects (יִסַּךְ) his head when he goes into battle. In Psalm 91:4, the psalmist tells us that God covers (סָכוּתָה) us with God's limbs/ wings.

In stark contrast, Lamentations 3:43-44 reads:

[43] Enveloped (סָכִּתָה) in anger, you pursued us;
you killed and did not have mercy.
[44] You screened (סַכּוֹתָה) yourself in that cloud of yours
so that no prayer could get through.

Here, God's presence is suffocating and terrifying, and it is as tangible and real as any of the uses of the verb that describe comfort and protection. The experience of abandonment and injustice is heightened because the root ך-כ-ס reminds us of earlier and happier times in the story of God's relationship with Israel.

Similarly, the word עָנָן, cloud, which appears in 3:44, holds within it dichotomous

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48. Brown, *et al.*, 696.

49. See Brown, *et al.*, 967. The root ך-כ-שׂ has the same semantic range (and is vocalized in the same way) as ך-כ-ס.

possibilities: it can be used to denote comfort or terror, proximity or distance. Exodus and Numbers contain numerous references to God's guiding presence in the form of a cloud.[50] Indeed, I have borrowed Berlin's phrase, "that cloud of yours,"[51] because of its outraged and sarcastic tone. Although Berlin does not explain her use of this phrase, I read it as an angry reference to the cloud that once faithfully led the Israelites through the wilderness.

The Torah's image of God as a cloud is carried into the prophetic writings. In Ezekiel 10:4, for example, God's cloud/ Presence fills the Temple. The image of God as a comforting, reliable cloud is also used in Psalms.[52] However, the Prophets also understand God's thick cloud as a deeply ominous sign that heralds the arrival of God's day of judgment.[53] While this is not the intent of Lamentations, God's cloud certainly signifies alarm and rupture. In fact, it is a cloud through which no prayer can pass (מֵעֲבוֹר תְּפִלָּה). It is the cloud that renders God silent and unresponsive. The poet's imagery then, describes a God who is simultaneously *present* in the worst way imaginable and *absent* in the worst way imaginable. In the next section, I explore the effect of God's presence and absence on the people's lives and bodies.

IV.
Rebuking the Architect of the People's Suffering

Thus far, I have explored how laments give voice to suffering. Following Laytner, I have also noted that laments fall into a larger genre of complaints addressed to God. This section provides three examples of how the poet uses wordplay -- in this case, the equivalent and

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50. See Ex. 13:21 and Num. 12:5 for just two of many examples.
51. Berlin, 80.
52. See, for example, Pss. 97:2 and 105:37.
53. See, for example, Joel 2:2.

contrasting meanings of the same root -- to draw attention to the direct and horrifying relationship between God's anger and the people's suffering. These examples demonstrate how, explicitly or implicitly, the poet/ his personae indict God.

Equivalence and Contrast 1: א-כ-ל and ב-ל-ע
God Consumes; the People Starve

Chapter 2 is largely devoted to a relentless description of God's consuming anger. The poet finds numerous different words to describe God's wrath, including אַפּוֹ (twice in 2:1), עֶבְרָתוֹ (in 2:2), חֲרִי־אַף (in 2:3) and זַעַם־אַפּוֹ (in 2:6). Throughout, God's anger destroys all that is precious and familiar. The root ב-ל-ע, meaning "to consume" or "to devour," appears five times in the chapter. In 2:1 God devours Jacob's pastures without mercy; in 2:5 God consumes Israel and her citadels; in 2:8 God's hand devours Jerusalem's physical structure; and in 2:16 Israel's enemies cheer that they consumed her. It is an orgy of destruction. It is against this backdrop that the uses of the root א-כ-ל can best be understood.

The root א-כ-ל, meaning "to eat" or "to consume," appears twice in the chapter. In the first instance, the verb is used in connection to God. In 2:3, God's flaming fire consumes all around. In the second instance (2:20), Jerusalem uses the verb when she accuses God:

> Look, God, and see
> to whom you have done this,
> That women should eat their fruit (אִם־תֹּאכַלְנָה נָשִׁים פִּרְיָם),
> the children whom they dandle,
> That priests and prophets should be killed
> in God's sanctuary.

God's anger has caused such devastation and destruction that women are reduced to cannabalism. The juxtaposition of the two uses of א-כ-ל implies that God is being likened to a

cannibal, relentlessly destroying beloved children. To underscore this connection, we can look at verse 2:19b, which immediately precedes Jerusalem's address to God. Here, the poet implores Jerusalem to speak on behalf of her starving children:

Lift up your hands to God,
for the sake of your children's lives,
The ones who faint from hunger
on every street corner.

A similar series of associations also occurs in Chapter 4. Early in the chapter, we learn that children are starving.

[3] Even jackals offer their breast,
nurse their young.
My Dear People seem cruel
like ostriches in the wilderness.

[4] The infant's tongue cleaves
to his palate from thirst;
Children ask for bread,
no one gives it to them.

[5] Those who used to feast (הָאֹכְלִים) on dainties
are desolate in the streets;
Those raised in crimson,
embrace refuse heaps.

In verse 5, the root א-כ-ל refers to how and what the people used to eat, when they were able to feed themselves and their children in the days before God's wrath consumed the city. In verse 9, the poet returns to the theme of starvation and, again, claims that women are reduced to eating their own children.

[9] Better off are those stabbed by the sword,
than those stabbed by famine;
Those whose life ebbed from a wound,
rather than from the field's lack of produce.

[10] With their own hands compassionate women

cooked their children;
This was their sustenance
during the breaking of my Dear People.

[11] God vented all his anger,
poured out his blazing fury;
Set a fire in Zion
and consumed (וַתֹּאכַל) its foundations.

Here, the verb א-כ-ל appears in verse 11, this time in relation to God, who now consumes Zion's very foundations. God, whose devouring fury is almost cannabilistic, is gruesomely sated while the people starve. Through contrasting uses of the verb א-כ-ל, the poet draws a clear line of connection between the people's miserable suffering and God's rage. The one grows in direct proportion to the other.

Equivalence and Contrast 2: ע-ל-ל
God Deals Harshly; the Children Suffer Greatly

In Chapter 2, the various uses of the root ע-ל-ל, which can be used as a noun meaning "children" or as a verb meaning "to act severely (toward),"[54] draw this connection even more sharply. Verse 11 describes how children and babies (עוֹלֵל וְיוֹנֵק) faint in the squares of the city. In verses 19 and 20, the root appears three more times:

[19] Arise! Cry loudly at night,
at the beginning of the watch;
Pour out your heart like water,
in front of God's presence;
Lift up your hands to God,
for the sake of your children's (עוֹלָלַיִךְ) lives,

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[54] Brown, *et al.*, 759. Linafelt, 57, argues that the verb is better understood as "carr[ying] the much stronger force of 'to afflict' or 'to abuse'." He cites examples in which means "to rape" (Jud. 19:25) and to "run through [with a sword]" (I Sam. 31:4).

The ones who faint from hunger
on every street corner.

[20] Look, God, and see
to whom you have done (עוֹלָלְתְּ) this,
That women should eat their fruit,
the children (עֹלְלֵי) whom they dandle,
That priests and prophets should be killed
in God's sanctuary.

As noted above, in verse 19, the poet implores Jerusalem to speak to God and in verse 20 she does. God's actions, she says, are too much. God is causing children to suffer terribly. God must be rebuked. God must stop and God must look at that devastation that God has caused. The paranomasia on the root ע-ל-ל underscores the horrifying impact on the children (עלל) of God's actions (עלל). Thus, the poet's lament and Zion's lament are rebukes of God's excesses.

Equivalence and Contrast 3: ש-פ-ך
God's Wrath Pours Out; the People's Lives Seep Away

In Chapter 2, the contrasting uses of the root ש-פ-ך, meaning "to pour out," provides a final example of the extent of both God's destruction and the people's suffering. In verse 4, God's wrath pours out, the bilious cause of Jerusalem's extraordinary suffering. In verse 11, the root appears again. This time, the poet/ witness is the source of the bilious excretion. The poet, who until now has described other people's suffering, gives voice to his own pain:

My eyes are worn out with tears,
my belly churns,
My liver bile is poured out (נִשְׁפַּךְ) on the ground,
on account of the breaking of my Dear People.

Then, in verse 12, we have the most devastating use of the verb. It is now applied to children, whose lives slip away (בְּהִשְׁתַּפֵּךְ נַפְשָׁם) as they root in vain for milk at their mothers'

breasts. In verse 19, the poet uses the verb a fourth time. His testimony climaxes with an exhortation to Jerusalem:

Pour out your heart like water (שִׁפְכִי כַמַּיִם לִבֵּךְ),
in front of God's presence;

Overwhelmed by God's wrath, his own pain, and the children's slow starvation, the poet calls out to Jerusalem to protest these outrageous excesses. Through the recurring use of ש-פ-ך, God's anger, the poet-witness' grief, and the dying children are linked into a terrible triad. In Lamentations, God is the cause of the people's extraordinary suffering. A rebuke of God and a call for compassionate witnessing are embedded into the poetry's wordplay. In response, Jerusalem and the people refuse to suffer in silence. It is to their cries that I now turn my attention.

V.
Giving Testimony and Bearing Witness

The book of Lamentations is organized around the twin acts of testifying and witnessing. Chapter 1 divides evenly into two halves. In the first half, the poet serves as a witness to Zion's desolation, with occasional interruptions from Zion herself. In the second half, Zion testifies, with one interruption from the poet/witness. In Chapter 2, a survivor speaks, describes the devastation of the city, asks Zion, "How can I be your witness?" and then exhorts Zion to cry out to God. The chapter ends with Zion's accusation of God. Chapter 3 is a first person piece of testimony placed in the mouth of the גבר. Chapter 4 concludes with the communal voice of the people. The people are also the voice of the final chapter, in which they testify, lament, and call out to God.

Throughout the Book of Lamentations, the speakers address God. In Chapter 1, the

command רְאֵה יְהוָה (Look, God) and its variations become a refrain (1:9, 1:11, 1:20) that is then repeated in 2:20 (רְאֵה יְהוָה וְהַבִּיטָה (Look, God, and see). In all of these instances, it is Jerusalem herself who calls on God to be her witness. The beginning of Chapter 5 echoes this theme. This time, the plea is placed in the mouths of the people:

> Remember, God, what has become of us,
> look and see (הַבִּיטָה וּרְאֵה) our degradation.

The problem, of course, is that the people's cries stand in stark contrast to God's silence. God's unrelenting silence sets Lamentations apart from the Bible's psalms of lament. Gary Anderson's study of the Psalms describes the ritual mourning that accompanied the experience of lamentation. He argues that a lamenter can be "characterized as like a dead person, living a life that is cut off from the presence of God." Through the process of lamenting, the person metaphorically descends to Sheol -- which we should understand as "the abode of the dead" *and* "a place one could experience through lamentation."[55] But, in the psalms of lament, the process does not end here. The psalmist pleads for the return of the absent God and then praises God after his deliverance from the state of lamentation/ Sheol. Anderson explains:

> The ritual movement from mourning to joy... mirrored a spatial movement from Sheol to Temple, from the absence of God to the presence of God... The invocation to joyful praise is extremely common in laments and must have served to give *public* witness to the divine act of deliverance the lamenter experienced. [italics in original][56]

Anderson concludes that the "joyous sensation of God's presence cannot be appreciated apart from the sharp sting of his absence."[57] In Lamentations, of course, God's presence is never restored. Furthermore, God's dwelling place on earth has been reduced to ruins. Berlin, building

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55. Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 87, including note 81.
56. *ibid.*, 91.
57. *ibid.*, 97.

on Anderson's work, notes that without the Temple there can be no joy. In the ritualized joy and mourning of the ancient Middle East, "[j]oy is associated with sacrifice and being in God's presence, while mourning is associated with being cut off from God."[58] In Lamentations, then, there is no ascent from Sheol. The poet and his personae grieve and wail and call out, but God does not respond.

Regardless, this record of suffering serves an important purpose for both the lamenters and the listeners/ readers. With regard to the lamenters, the fact the Lamentations is preserved in the Bible's canon must mean that there is some value and power in speaking to God, even when we are not sure if our voices are heard. Indeed, Mintz argues that laments can be defined as "a record of man's struggle to speak in the face of God's silence."[59] Here in Lamentations, the lamenters are in the midst of a crisis from which there is no apparent way home to safety and comfort. The Temple is destroyed, the people are being dragged into exile, and all outward and inward signs of holiness have vanished from their lives. In the face of this, Zion, the גבר, an anonymous survivor, and the collective entity of the people all raise their voices in sorrowful protest. They call on God to look and see what God has done, and they rebuke God for a punishment that is surely out of proportion to any crime Zion might have committed.

For Walter Brueggeman, laments model a refusal to be submissive; they are a cry against injustice. Additionally, laments mirror life and covenant. Life is filled with both joy and sorrow, so our liturgical and scriptural poems must be too. In Brueggeman's words:

> Where lament is absent, covenant comes into being only as a celebration of joy and well-being... Since such a celebrative, consenting silence does not square with reality, covenant

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58. Berlin, 52.

59. Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1984), 41.

minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretense, which sanctions social control.[60]

Bruggeman points to the close relationship between the lamenters' cries to God and their cries to humanity. In 1:12 and 1:18, right after she calls to God, Zion also calls to passersby to witness her suffering. In both cases, the verbs "look" and "see" (הַבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ in verse 12 and וּרְאוּ in verse 18) recur. In Lamentations, then, calls to God and calls to humans are interconnected cries of protest. Zion's exhortations to the passersby reminds us that there is an important role for those who witness catastrophe. Indeed, the גבר begins his lament by telling us that he is the man who has seen (רָאָה) suffering.

In Chapter 2, a survivor/ witness addresses Jerusalem and asks how he can ease her pain. He wants to know:

13 How can I be your witness? To what can I liken you?
Dear Jerusalem;
To what can I compare you so I can console you?
Dear Maiden Zion;
Because your ruin is as big as the sea,
Who will heal you?

There are no ready answers to any of these desperate questions, but the poet's persona understands the importance of the act of witnessing the suffering of others. The poet also understands that, inadequate as they might be, words and metaphors have the capacity to offer some comfort. This search for metaphors is what Mintz calls "the ministry of language."[61] For Mintz, then, the poet/ wordsmith plays the role of comforter. The poet's personae bear witness to the carnage and, in doing so, join in the chorus of lament, rebuke, and protest.

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60. Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 1986, vol. 36, 59-60.
61. Mintz, 29.

In the hermeneutical triangle between God, text, and reader, we, too, are witnesses -- if only during our brief encounter with the words we hear or read. Throughout Chapter 1, Zion laments that there is no one to comfort her. Berlin, building on Anderson's work, notes that "[t]he ritualized mourning of the Middle East requires a comforter." In Chapter 1, no such figure emerges. Indeed, throughout the five chapters, God and the poet are at an impasse. No amount of crying out on the poet's part elicits a response from God. But, since providing comfort means to mourn alongside the mourner, we, the listeners/ readers fill this empty role.[62] Thus, the "howl of pain" provides a role for the poet and his personae, for those in the text who give testimony and stand witness, and for us, the readers/ listeners. In this way, the readers/ listeners are drawn into the visceral experience of lament. As we absorb the words of the lament, we have our own experience of suffering that provides a partial resolution to the problem of the impasse between the poet and God.

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62. Berlin, 48.

Chapter Two:
The Rabbinic Lamentations

I.
איכה as Rebuke and as Lament:
The Rabbis' Ambivalence about Israel's Guilt

Chapter One began with an exploration of what the book of Lamentations is *not*. Following recent scholarly work, I argued that Lamentations is not primarily a confession of sin or an effort to reconcile with a just God. In fact, it contains little material that could be categorized as a reflection of the deuteronomic theology. Rather, Jerusalem is ambivalent about her sinfulness and the poems' speakers rebuke God for God's excesses. In comparison, Lamentations Rabbah contains much more material that reflects a theology of reward and punishment. Indeed, a significant swath of the material in the 36 *petichtaot* deals with Israel's sinfulness and punishment and the inevitable and just relationship between the two. Out of many possible examples, I will cite just one.

Petichta 11, which is attributed to Rabbi Yitzhak, is a carefully crafted exegesis that explores Israel's lack of merit and subsequent punishment. Alternate sections begin with the phrase: אלו זכיתם הייתם קורים בתורה/ If you had had the merit, you would have read in the Torah... This opening phrase is always followed by a verse from the Torah that describes appropriate behavior. The verse is then followed by the phrase: ...ועכשיו שלא זכיתם, הרי אתם קוראים/ But since you lack merit, you read... This is then followed by each verse of the first chapter of the biblical Lamentations, starting with verse 22 and concluding with verse 1, אֵיכָה יָשְׁבָה בָדָד, the base verse.[63] In unrelenting succession, Rabbi Yitzhak juxtaposes biblical passages describing what

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63. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, ed. Salomon Buber (Vilna: Romm, 5659/1898-9), 10-11.

Israel should have done with passages from Lamentations describing Israel's retributive suffering. Without question, the *midrash* is undergirded by a theological framework in which suffering is equated with punishment.

This *petichta* is just one of many examples of how the Rabbis use Israel's sinfulness as a key trope in their efforts to understand the destructions of both 587 BCE and 70 CE. Indeed, Galit Hasan-Roken points out that most of the proems conclude with the refrain, "Because they sinned, they were exiled; because they were exiled, Jeremiah began to lament over them, *Eicha.*" This phrase, she says, "categorically formulate[s] the theodicy principle."[64] But, in addition to this, Lamentations Rabbah reflects much of the same ambivalence about sin and punishment that is found throughout the biblical text. This is true even within the *petichtaot*, which are more concerned with the relationship between sin and suffering than the five *parshiot*. Petichta 4 provides one such example. The *midrash* spins on the multivalent meanings of איכה and explores its usage in Lamentations and in Genesis 3 (when God calls out to Adam and Eve after they eat from the forbidden tree). It reads as follows:

> Rabbi Abahu opened: They are like a person who has transgressed the covenant (Hosea 7:6). *They are like a person* -- this is Adam HaRishon. The Holy Blessed One said, "I brought Adam HaRishon into the Garden of Eden and commanded him and he transgressed my commandments so I judged him worthy of expulsion and judged him worthy of banishment, and I lamented over him, "אֵיכָה." *Placed him in the Garden of Eden*, as it is said: And Adonai Elohim took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden... (Gen 2:15) *And commanded him*, as it is said: Adonai Elohim commanded Adam, saying... (Gen 2:16). And he transgressed my commandments, as it is said: Did you eat from the tree about which I commanded you..? (Gen 3:11). *Judged him worthy of expulsion*, as it is said: And God expelled Adam (Gen 3:24). *And judged him worthy of banishment*, as it is said: And God banished him from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:23). *And I lamented over him*, "אֵיכָה," as it is said: And God said to him, "How?!" (Gen 3:20). אַיֵּכָּה is written. Similarly, God brought

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[64] Galit Hasan-Rokem, trans. Batya Stein, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 13.

God's children into the Land of Israel, as it is said: I brought you into this garden-like[65] land (Jer 2:7). *And commanded them*, as it is said: Command the Children of Israel (Lev 24:2). *And they transgressed my commandments*, as it is said: All of Israel has transgressed your Torah (Dan 9:11). *And judged them worthy of expulsion*, as it is said: I will expel them from my house (Hosea 9:15). *And judged them worthy of banishment*, as it is said: Banish them from My Presence and they will go forth (Jer 15:1). *And I lamented over them*, אֵיכָה יָשְׁבָה בָדָד/ How?! She dwells alone (Lam 1:1).[66]

Often translated as *Alas!*, איכה is best understood as an interrogative *How?* or *Where?* or *Why?* Its use in laments is a cry of despair and disbelief: *How?!*[67] In this *midrash*, the people of Jerusalem are likened to Adam HaRishon in the Garden of Eden, who clearly violated God's instructions by eating from the forbidden tree. Rabbi Abahu gives God a voice, allowing God to explain how God lovingly placed Adam HaRishon/ Bnai Yisrael in a fertile, garden-like place, gave them commandments, and then watched them transgress the commandments. After both sets of transgressions, God lamented. Thus, God's cry to Adam in the Garden of Eden becomes less of a rebuke and more of a cry of pain. Similarly, the poet's cry at the beginning of the Book of Lamentations becomes God's cry. In Rabbi Abahu's reading, God is vocal, not silent, from the very first word of Lamentations. Indeed, God lets out a cry that is part rebuke and part lament. Angry about the people's transgressions but also pained by their profound suffering, God is unsure of the appropriate response.

Later in Lamentations Rabbah, we learn that there is a rabbinic *makhloket* (debate) about the proper way to understand the word איכה. Towards the beginning of the first *parashah*, the *midrash* records a disagreement between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah.

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65. This translation of כרמל as *garden-like* is based on Brown, *et al.*, 502.

66. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 5.

67. In modern parlance, we might hear this cry as: *Why did this happen?* or *Where were you?* Chapter Three includes a discussion of *Eichah*-like words and phrases in the laments to which people give voice in the wake of contemporary disasters. See pages 82-5.

> Rabbi Nehemiah says, איכה means only lament, as it is said: And Adonai Elohim called to the Adam and said to him אַיֶּכָּה/ How?! (Gen 3:9). Rabbi Yehudah says, איכה means only rebuke, as it is said: How (אֵיכָה) will you say we are wise and that God's Torah is ours?! (Jer 8:8).[68]

Taken in its entirety, the text of Lamentations Rabbah encapsulates both of these interpretations: that Israel must be rebuked and that Israel must be lamented over. God and the Rabbis, it seems, hover between rebuke and lament. Like the biblical poets, the Rabbis cannot bring themselves to unequivocally rebuke Israel. And, like the biblical poets, the Rabbis are obsessed with the extent and horror of the people's suffering. It is to this drive to describe suffering that I now turn my attention.

II.
Storytelling and Narrative:
The Drive to Describe Suffering

For Linafelt, descriptions of the suffering of children are part of a "rhetoric of persuasion" that leads first the poet/ Zion (in the biblical Lamentations) and then the Rabbis/ God (in Lamentations Rabbah) to take up a lament. For Linafelt, laments are characterized by a "drive for life;" they are a means of surviving tragedy and living on in its wake.[69] The compulsion to describe suffering, even in its most terrible detail, is a moral call that insists we face loss and lament over it. Like the biblical text that it uses as its starting point, Lamentations Rabbah is mired in the project of describing terrible loss and pain. This determination to dwell on descriptions of suffering is an important line of continuity between the biblical and rabbinic Lamentations. However, in their explorations of suffering, the rabbis use the medium of

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[68] *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 41.

[69] Linafelt, 30, 42, 50, and 104.

narrative story-telling, rather than lament. In this section, we will look at three stories that exemplify the rabbinic approach to telling stories about suffering. The first two stories, which are about cannibalism, use various literary devices to amplify harrowing details. The third story is about martyrdom, a topic that is a dramatic departure from the biblical text and that reflects the Rabbis' efforts to make meaning out of suffering. In all three of the stories, the Rabbis succeed in doing something that the biblical poet could not: in their journeys into the heart of suffering, they give a voice to a weeping, heart-broken God.

In Chapter One, I explored the use of metaphor and description in Lamentations 4:7-8. The biblical verses are:

> [7] Her nobles were whiter than snow,
> clearer than milk:
> Their limbs were ruddier than coral,
> their physique like sapphire.
>
> [8] Their faces became darker than black --
> they were not recognizable in the streets;
> Their skin shriveled on their bones,
> it was as dry as wood.

Lamentations Rabbah, in its exegesis of these verses, adds a new layer to what is already a harrowing account of suffering. The text records a story, originally told by Rabbi Elazar bar Tzaddok, who wanted to explain the meaning of the phrase "they were not recognizable in the streets." He says:

> I went and I found a woman whose hair had fallen out and about whom no person knew if she was male or female, and she was begging only for a dried date, in order to fulfill what was said: they were not recognizable in the streets (Lam 4:8).

Rabbi Elazar teaches us that, as horribly inexplicable as the biblical description is, it was not an exaggeration. Jerusalem's people were so transformed by their experiences of violence and poverty that they were rendered unrecognizable. All the distinguishing features of their

individuality, gender, and humanity were erased by suffering. As gruesome as his description is, it is important to note that its literary form is one of narrative, not lament. Rachel Adler notes that laments are inherently disordered -- that they are "non-narratives."[70] This disorder reflects the emotional state of survivors and witnesses -- of those who give voice to laments while they are still in the throes of tragedy.

If the biblical Lamentations is a disjointed "howl of pain," the rabbinic re-tellings are characterized by story-telling and narrative. These narratives reflect the emotional worlds of people who seek to impose an orderly narrative on chaos, rather than of people who are giving voice to chaos. To return to Rabbi Elazar, we should assume he is describing the suffering surrounding the wars of 135-132 BCE.[71] We cannot know how this story changed in the process of transmission and redaction, or even if the attribution is correct. We do know, however, that Lamentations Rabbah was compiled many centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple. Rabbi Elazar's account, then, loses the urgency and chaos of the biblical Lamentations -- although it may once have possessed this. Indeed, one of the *midrashim* in the Lamentations Rabbah collection gives voice to the Rabbis' understanding that their relative proximity to, or distance from, the catastrophe affected how they told stories about it. This *midrash* comes in the midst of a series of different exegeses of Lamentations 2:2, which reads: God devoured (בִּלַּע אֲדֹנָי) without mercy/ all of Jacob's dwellings. The midrashic tradition, which is unattributed, reads as follows:

> Rabbi used to interpret בִּלַּע אֲדֹנָי in 24 ways and Rabbi Yohanan used to interpret it in 60 ways. Is not Rabbi Yohanan greater than Rabbi? No, rather Rabbi, because he was closer to

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70. Adler, 20.

71. According to Strack and Stemberger, 71, R. Elazar belonged to the second Tannaitic generation.

the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, would remember and interpret (דורש) and cry and be comforted and interrupt [himself]. Rabbi Yohanan, because he was not close to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, would interpret without interruption.[72]

This *midrash* captures perfectly how we describe trauma and loss when we are in the midst of experiencing it. The root ד-ר-ש means "to examine, question, expound, interpret, teach, or lecture."[73] All of these verbs describe what the Rabbis were trying to do when creating *midrash* -- a word that shares the same root. By way of providing historical context, Mintz makes the case that the disaster referred to here is the Bar Kokhba wars of 135-132 BCE. Rabbi, the compiler of the Mishnah, was one generation removed from these events but still close enough that, when talking about the events, he constantly interrupted himself to cry and be comforted. Rabbi Yohanan, meanwhile, was Rabbi's student and belonged to the first Amoraic generation.[74] The *midrash* emphasizes, however, that Rabbi Yohanan was not a better interpreter of the Destruction; he merely had more distance from it.

The redacted versions of Lamentations Rabbah may not reflect the disorder of laments but they do not avoid or downplay gruesome details. Indeed, they often amplify these details. Two harrowing *midrashim* about cannibalism illustrate this. The first *parashah* of Lamentations Rabbah includes a long passage that explores the phrase עַל־אֵלֶּה אֲנִי בוֹכִיָּה/ for these I weep (Lam 1:16). Two of the *midrashim* that use Lamentations 1:16 as their base verse describe cannibalism. In the first story, a son eats his father while hiding in caves with other Jews, presumably in the wake of the Bar Kokhba revolt. In the second story, a mother lavishes

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72. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 100.

73. Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1903), 325.

74. Mintz, 51.

attention on her son and then eats him when Vespasian's army lays siege to Jerusalem.

The first *midrash* tells the following story:

> *For these I weep* (Lam 1:16). Hadrian, may his bones be smashed, set up three garrisons, one in Emmaus, and one in Bethlehem, and one in Lekatia. Hadrian said, "All those who flee from one will be captured at another"... Hadrian gathered all of them in one valley and said to the commander of the army, "By the time I finish eating this slice of bread and this chicken thigh, [the Jews] will be slaughtered until not one of them is found standing on his feet." Those [Jews] who were hiding (מטמרין) in caves would go out at night and follow the smell of corpses and bring them and eat them. They said to one of them, "Go out and bring us a body and we will eat it." He went out and he found his father, murdered and hidden (וטמריה) [i.e. buried] and he put a sign upon [the spot]. He went back and said to them that he did not find anything. Another one of them went out and followed the scent of the body and found it and brought it. They sat and ate and the teeth of the child were blunted. [The child] said to him, "From where did you bring this body?" He said, "From such and such a corner."[75] [The child] said, "What sign was on it?" He said, "Such and such a sign." [The child] said, "Woe to the boy [i.e. to me] who eats his father's flesh, to fulfill that which was said: *Therefore, fathers will eat their sons in your midst and sons will eat their fathers* (Ezek 5:10). And the Spirit of the Holy One cried out, "For these I weep."[76]

Galit Hasan-Rokem categorizes this story as a "historical legend," noting that the following "precise details" are provided: "the name of the cruel ruler Hadrian...; names of places well known in the Palestine of the time; an exact description of the methods of oppression and physical extermination, as well as tactics of flight and survival."[77] These layers of detail draw us more deeply into the story, helping us to understand the truly terrible conditions in which the Jews were living. We learn that Vespasian set up three garrisons in Palestine while the Jews hid in caves. Thus, Vespasian constructed, built outwards, and took up more space while the Jews retreated and removed themselves from any type of normal, public life.

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[75]. Rabbi Bernard Mehlman proposes *corner* as the best translation of זיו. He suggests there is a mistake in the manuscript and argues that the word should actually appear as זויות, which Jastrow, 386 translates as "joint," "angle," or "corner."

[76]. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 82. I referred to Hasan-Rokem's translation, 138-9 when writing this translation.

[77]. Hasan-Rokem, 138-9.

Wordplay is another tactic that intensifies the story's descriptive layers. The double use of the Aramaic root ט-מ-ר underscores the extent of the Jews' dehumanization. The verb is used first to tell us that the Jews are hiding in caves. Later, it is used to describe how the son finds his father's body hidden -- or, literally, buried -- in the land around the caves. The paronomasia makes a clear point: living in caves surrounded by rotting corpses is not so far removed from death itself.

Hasan-Rokem notes that "[t]he story itself is prefaced by a statement of fact, namely, those in hiding used to eat human corpses."[78] Far from refuting the biblical Lamentations' claim that the Jews resorted to cannibalism in the various disasters that befell Jerusalem, the Rabbis tell an elaborate folktale that roots the Jews' degradation in the language of scripture. In fact, because the biblical Lamentations describes mothers eating their children, rather than sons eating their fathers, the Rabbis had to employ a prooftext from elsewhere in the Tanakh to weave this particular *midrash*. However, the use of the word יינוקא -- literally, a nursing child -- appears to be an allusion to the Lamentations 2:11-12, which describes the suffering of children and babies. In 11c, the word יוֹנֵק, which is the Hebrew equivalent of יינוקא, appears. In 12c the poet describes how children's lives slip away at their mother's breasts. We are forced to face this horrifying fusion of these biblical and rabbinic accounts of suffering children: when catastrophe befell the Jews, children who should have been nursing at their mother's breasts instead ate their fathers' half-decaying bodies.

The *midrash* is framed at its opening and conclusion by Lamentations 1:16 (For these I weep). In the biblical Lamentations, the poet places these words in Jerusalem's mouth.

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[78]. *ibid.*, 139.

However, at the end of this *midrash*, they are placed in the mouth of the Spirit of the Holy One (רוח הקודש). Later, I will look in depth at how the Rabbis fill the spaces in the biblical text created by God's silences. For now, it is sufficient to say that the Rabbis created intersections between God's words of lament and Jerusalem's words of lament. In the biblical Lamentations, Jerusalem calls on God and pleads with God to look and respond. In Lamentations Rabbah, not only does God respond, God uses Jerusalem's own words of lament.

> The second *midrash* that deals with cannibalism reads as follows:
> They said [this] about Doeg ben Yosef who died and left a small son for his mother. She used to measure him with her hands (בטפחיים) and give his weight in gold year after year to the Temple. When the besieging army circled around Jerusalem, she slaughtered him with her hands (טבחתו בידיה) and ate him, and Jeremiah lamented over her and said: *That women should eat their fruit/ the children whom they dandled* (טְפָחִים) (Lam 2:20). And the Spirit of the Holy One (רוח הקודש) cried out and said, *That priests and prophets should be killed in God's sanctuary* (Lam 2:20). And this is Zechariah ben Yehudah Ha'Cohen.[79]

In excruciating detail, this story describes how the wife of Doeg ben Yosef used her hands first to care for her child and then to slaughter him. The midrash spins on the assonance of the Hebrew roots ט-פ-ח (as a verb: "to carry on the palms," "dandle;" as a noun: "span," "hand-breadth"[80]) and ט-ב-ח ("to prepare a feast, to slaughter and dress meat, to cook"[81]). The use of two different words meaning hands (בטפחיים and ידיה) adds an additional layer of bitter irony. First we learn that Doeg ben Yosef's wife used her hands to lovingly assess the weight of this child and to give gold to the Temple in his name. In the next sentence, we learn that she subsequently used her hands to slaughter her child. The story-teller's choice of a verb that is associated with preparing a feast adds to the horror of the story. There is assonance between the sounds of the verbs

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79. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 85-86.
80. Brown, *et al.*, 381.
81. Jastrow, 516.

(טבחתו and טַפָּחִים) but utter dissonance in their meaning. However dissonant these actions might be, the parable provides us with a compelling explanation. The besieging army held Jerusalem in a choke-hold and, overcome by fear and despair, Doeg ben Yosef's wife ate her child. And, so, Jeremiah takes up the lament that was originally Zion's:

Look, God, and see
to whom you have done this,
That women should eat their fruit,
the children whom they dandled (2:20)[82]

This time, Zion/ Jeremiah's lament, which is addressed to God, evinces a response from God. The next line of the lament -- which, again, was originally Zion's lament -- now becomes God's. Here, רוח הקודש is read as grammatically feminine, further underscoring the connection between God and Jerusalem.

Like the biblical poets, the Rabbis are moved to describe suffering in great detail. In a significant departure, however, they introduce the theme of martyrology. These stories are significant for the purposes of this study because they suggest that suffering might be redemptive -- or, at least, transformative. If suffering is to be understood as redemptive, then the project of describing that suffering becomes more important and urgent because martyrdom gives it new meaning. The most simple definition of martyrdom is to choose death over submission to harsh authority. In his book *Dying for God*, Daniel Boyarin argues that martyrdom was not a new phenomenon in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple and the crucifixion of Jesus. Rather, between the 2nd and 4th centuries, new discourses developed around it. Thus, he

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82. Interestingly, this same wordplay on the roots ט-פ-ח and ט-ב-ח appears in the biblical Lamentations, in verses 2:20-22. In verses 20 and 22, Jerusalem describes children (her own children and the children of other women) who were dandled (טַפָּחִים and טִפַּחְתִּי) on knees before God's destruction. In verse 21, Jerusalem accuses God: *you have slaughtered* (טָבַחְתָּ) *without mercy.*

suggests that martyrdom is "a practice of dying for God and of talking about it."[83] Lamentations Rabbah, which was written and compiled during and after the time when these new discourses developed, contains several martyrdom narratives.

One such story, which originally appears in a different version in Maccabees 2 and 4, is recorded in Lamentations Rabbah 1:16. Like the story of the wife of Doeg ben Yosef, which it immediately precedes, it expounds on the phrase *For these I weep*. The story begins as follows:

> A story about Miriam bat Tanhum, who was taken captive along with her seven sons. What did the ruler do to her? He bound each one separately and brought out the first one and said to him, "Bow down to this idol just as your brothers bowed down. He said, "Heaven forbid! My brothers would not bow down and also I will not bow down to it." He said to him, "Why?" Because it is written in the Torah: *I am Adonai your God* (Ex 20:2). He ordered that he be killed.[84]

One by one, six of the brothers are brought out in this manner and then killed. The seventh and youngest son engages in a long dialogue with the (unnamed) ruler, in which he defends the imageless Adonai over mute, immobile, powerless idols. At the point in the story where the guards take the youngest son from his mother in order to kill him, Miriam speaks again:

> His mother said to him, "My son, do not let your heart weaken and do not dismay. You are going to be with your brothers and to be placed into the bosom of Avraham Avinu. Tell [Abraham] in my name: You built one altar and you did not sacrifice your son, but I built seven altars and I sacrificed my sons upon them. Moreover, yours was a test but mine was real. And when [the son] was killed the sages reckoned up that he was a child of six-and-a-half years and two hours. And in that same moment the nations of the world cried out and said, "What is their God, that he does such and such for them and they are killed all the time for him?" They said that, after a few days, this woman went mad and climbed up to the top of a roof and threw herself down and died and they called out over her: *A joyful mother of children* (Ps 113:9). And the רוח הקודש[85] said, For these I weep.[86]

Again, רוח הקודש is grammatically feminine, this time underscoring the close connection --

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83. Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 94.

84. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 84.

85. Once again, רוח הקודש is rendered as feminine.

86. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 85.

and even role reversals -- between God and Miriam bat Tanhum. As Hasan-Rokem points out, "the mourning of the human mother is now the fate of the Holy Spirit, whereas the mother is now joyful to play the heroine in a plot of martyrdom."[87] There is a polemical purpose to this story of the martyrdom of Miriam bat Tanhum's seven sons that is lost in our own context and time. What is important for this study is that the Rabbis tell a story so heartrending and tragic that even God -- who did not shed a tear over the destruction of 587 BCE -- is compelled to weep. Whereas the biblical poet is unable to provoke a response from God, the Rabbis' stories of the gruesome experience of suffering bring forth God's tears. In the next section, I will look in more depth at the devices the Rabbis use to break God's silence.

III.
Filling God's Silences

Norman Cohen writes that rabbinic literature holds two contradictory answers to the question: where does God go when the Jews suffer? On the one hand, the Rabbis described how the Shekhinah went into exile with Israel, meaning that God was present and accessible, despite the destruction of the Temple, God's dwelling place on earth. Not only is God present, God also shares the Jews' pain and weeps and laments with them. On the other hand, another set of traditions introduce the notion of *Histalkut ha'Shekhinah*, which Cohen defines as "the departure of God's indwelling spirit." This response encapsulates the Jews' experiences of loss and abandonment in the wake of the destruction of the Temple. Connected to this tradition, argues Cohen, is the idea that God was justified in abandoning a sinful people.[88] I will look later at the

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87. Hasan-Rokem, 119.

88. Norman J. Cohen, "Shekhinta ba-Galuta: A Midrashic Response to Destruction and Persecution." *The Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period*, Vol. 13, No. 1-2, December 1982, 147-8.

concept of *Histalkut ha'Shekhinah*. First, I turn my attention to the idea of divine empathy, which is illustrated by the following *mashal* (proverb).

> My eyes, my eyes run with water (Lam 1:16). Rabbi Levi told a *mashal* about a doctor who had a weakness in one eye. He said, "My eye weeps over my [other] eye." Thus, Israel is called the eye of the Holy Blessed One, as it is written: Because the eye of humanity (עין אדם) and all the tribes of Israel are God's (Zech 9:1), as if it were possible to say[89] that God said, "My eye weeps over my [other] eye."[90]

Following Norman Cohen, this *mashal* is an example of the rabbinic tradition that shows God suffering alongside Israel. In the biblical Lamentations, the words *My eyes, my eyes run with water* are part of Zion's lament. They immediately follow *For these I weep*. As in the *midrashim* discussed above, Zion's words are again transformed into God's words. Thus, the *mashal* illustrates how Israel and God are intimately connected to one another, sharing each other's pain. At the same time, the *mashal* rehabilitates Israel and raises questions about God's perfection. As God is transformed into a mourner, the simple dichotomy of Israel as sinner and God as punisher breaks down.

In the *mashal*, God is personified as a doctor. The metaphor of God as a healer recurs throughout the Tanakh and is one of many images used to convey God's omnipotence.[91] In this *mashal*, however, the doctor is imperfect, also in need of healing, and vulnerable -- so vulnerable, in fact, that one eye weeps over the weakness in the other eye. Using a verse from Zechariah, Rabbi Levi explains that this weak eye is Israel -- the imperfect, vulnerable, and weeping Chosen People. Elsewhere in the Tanakh, Israel is described in relation to God as אישון

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89. The expression כביכול/ *as if it were possible* introduces anthropomorphic statements about God. See, for example, Yitzhak Frank, *The Practical Talmud Dictionary* (Jerusalem: Ariel Institute, 1991), 118.

90. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 88.

91. See, for example, Num. 12:13, Isa. 19:22, Hos. 7:1, Jer. 33:6, Pss. 60:4.

עין.[92] Literally, this means pupil of the eye, but it is often translated as *apple of my eye*, an English idiom that conveys a special and treasured relationship. The people, then, are simultaneously imperfect and chosen. They transgressed yet they are loved by a God who mourns over their suffering. Furthermore, Israel's imperfection makes the anthropomorphized God imperfect too because Israel is God's weakened eye. As we witness God's imperfection, the question that appears throughout the biblical Lamentations recurs in Lamentations Rabbah: does God's imperfection lie in the excessively harsh punishment that God brought down on Israel?

In Petichta 24, which is perhaps the best known section of Lamentations Rabbah, the idea that God is imperfect and vulnerable is drawn out even more sharply. The Petichta includes a description of what happened when the Shekhinah briefly looked away, and ultimately withdrew, from its place in the Temple, thus allowing the invading forces to enter and destroy it. Following Cohen's paradigm, this concept of *Histalkut ha'Shekhinah* underscores the idea that Israel deserved to be punished. The proem, however, is filled with ambivalent messages about God's behavior. The section of the *petichta* that is excerpted below uses Isaiah 22:12 as its opening verse. This verse concludes the pericope Isaiah 22:1-12, in which Isaiah delivers a pronouncement against Jerusalem.

> Another interpretation: *Adonai the God of Hosts called on that day for weeping and lamenting and tonsuring and girding with sackcloth* (Isa 22:12). In the moment in which the Holy Blessed One called for the destruction he said, "All the time that I am inside it, the nations of the world cannot touch it. But I will turn my eye away from it and I will swear that I will not live in it until the Messianic times, and the enemy will come and destroy it. Immediately, the Holy Blessed One swore with his right hand withdrawn behind him, as it is written: *God turned back his right hand/ in the face of the enemy* (Lam 2:3). In the same moment, the enemy entered the Temple and burned it. As soon as it was burning, the Holy Blessed One said, "I no longer have a dwelling place on earth. I will withdraw my Shechinah from [the Land] and I will go up to my former residence, as it is written: *I will go and I will return to my residence until they acknowledge their guilt and seek out my*

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92. The three occurrences of the phrase are Deut. 32:10, Pss. 17:8, and Prov. 7:2.

Presence (Hosea 5:15). At the same time, the Holy Blessed One was weeping and saying, "Woe is me. What have I done? I caused my Shekhinah to dwell below for the sake of Israel and now they have sinned, I returned to my former residence. Heaven forbid that I will become a laughingstock to the nations and a mockery to all of creation..."[93]

Here, the equation between sin and suffering begins in a straightforward manner: Israel sins and God withdraws, promising to return only when Israel repents. Interestingly, the part of God's body that turns away first is God's eye. Since we already know that God's eye is intimately connected to Israel's suffering, we should not be surprised that God weeps at the same time that God turns away. Thus, *Histalkut ha'Shekhinah* is accompanied by mourning on God's part. At first, however, God is utterly self-absorbed, concerned only for Godself, not for the suffering of the Israelites. As the *petichta* progresses, God undergoes a transformation in which concerns about keeping up appearances are superseded by empathetic grief. The story continues with the appearance of Metatron,[94] the ministering angels, and Jeremiah.

The Holy Blessed One said to the ministering angels, "Come, let us go, I and you, and let us see what the enemy has done to my house." Immediately the Holy Blessed One went with the ministering angels and Jeremiah in front of him. As soon as the Holy Blessed One saw (ראה) the Beit HaMikdash, he said, "Certainly this is my house and my resting place, to which the enemy came and acted according to their will (כרצונם)." At the same time, the Holy Blessed One was weeping and saying, "Woe is me for my house. My children, where (היכן) are you? My priests, where (היכן) are you? Those who love me, where (היכן) are you? What did I do to you? I warned you but you did not perform *teshuvah*."[95]

Here, God oscillates between lament and rebuke, a theme discussed earlier with regard to the *midrashim* that spin on different understandings of the word איכה. God repeatedly calls to different sets of Jerusalemites, echoing the biblical Lamentations, which describes the horrors

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93. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 25.

94. According to Ronald H. Isaacs, Metatron is "the highest celestial figure in the angelic world, sometimes known as the Angel of the Presence." See *Ascending Jacob's Ladder: Jewish Views of Angels, Demons, and Evil Spirits* (Northvale, NJ/ Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1998), 140.

95. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 25.

that befell many different groups of people in the city. The word היכן is semantically related to איכה, emphasizing the ways in which God's desperate questions are a lament. At the same time, God accuses the Israelites of not repenting. Ironically, the reference to *teshuvah* foreshadows not the Israelites' turning, but God's. Through all of this, we are left wondering what happened to the omniscient, omnipotent God of the Tanakh. How can God not know where God's children are? And why does God use the word כרצונם to describe what the enemy did to the Temple, given that this word is usually applied to God? By putting these words into God's mouth, the Rabbis are implicitly rebuking God and lamenting over God. Not only do rebuke and lament become slippery, overlapping categories, so too does the object of the rebukes/ laments.

Meanwhile, God has finally answered the pleas of the biblical Lamentations. Throughout the biblical Lamentations, various speakers implore God to look and see. Here, in the *midrash*, God finally sees (ראה). The Rabbis' use of the verb that is a key word in the biblical text is, surely, deliberate. The allusion to the biblical text underscores how the Rabbis have filled the silences and absences in the biblical text. In their version of the story, God speaks and looks, laments and turns. Thus, the Rabbis rehabilitate not the sinful Israelites but the furiously absent God.

As the story continues, the Rabbis do something even more audacious: they put what can best be described as a rabbinic *mashal* into God's mouth.

> The Holy Blessed One said to Jeremiah, "Today I am like a man who has a single child and makes a wedding canopy for him and [the son] dies inside his canopy, and you are not suffering for me or for my children? Go and call Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses from their graves, because they know how to cry."[96]

David Stern, borrowing from W. J. Verdenius, describes a *mashal* as "an allusive narrative

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96. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 25.

told for an ulterior purpose."[97] In many of the *meshalim* of Lamentations Rabbah, God is likened to a king. Although God does not open this story with the formula typical of a *mashal*, the story that God tells is nonetheless strikingly similar to a *mashal* that appears later in Lamentations Rabbah. An exegesis of Lamentations 4:11 (*God set a fire in Zion/ and consumed its foundations*), this *mashal* describes a king who builds a wedding canopy/ house for his son. In a fit of rage, the king tears down the canopy/ house. When the boy's teacher sits and sings amidst the ruins, the king demands to know why he isn't mourning. The teacher explains: because the king poured out his wrath only on the wedding canopy/ house, not on the son. The *nimshal* (the application of the story[98]) teaches us that, similarly, the psalmist sings because God destroyed only the wood and stones of the Temple, not the people themselves.

The *mashal* that interprets Lamentations 4:11 is part of the subset of the genre that deals with comfort and consolation, which will be dealt with below. For now, the key point is that the Rabbis of Petichta 24 are not yet ready to be comforted. First they must make God express God's enormous loss; God must acknowledge that not only is the Temple in ruins, but Jerusalem's people are dead or scattered. And so God tells a brief tale about Godself. Here, God is not a king but a man (אדם), which underscores both God's fallibility and the fact that God suffers just like a flesh-and-blood person. By putting this *mashal*-like story into God's mouth, the Rabbis make God into a storyteller just like themselves. Like humans, God needs metaphor and *midrash* to give voice to suffering. Like the Rabbis, God finds these stories in the vast corpus of biblical and rabbinic stories that are waiting to be re-used in times of suffering and in

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97. David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1991), 6.
98. *ibid.*, 8.

times of joy. Like humans, God needs someone with whom to weep. And, like humans, God needs someone to talk to but is a difficult companion during times of great crisis. Thus, God lashes out at Jeremiah with words that reflect the disorder of lament, accusing him of not being sufficiently empathetic to God's suffering.

Jeremiah patiently tells God that he does not know where the Patriarchs and Moses are buried. God responds that Jeremiah should stand on the banks of the Jordan and raise his voice and call out, "Ben Amram, ben Amram, stand and see (ראה) your flocks that have been consumed by enemies." In a stunning role reversal, God now seeks a witness, borrowing directly from the words of Zion in the biblical Lamentations. Jeremiah, who is joined by the ministering angels rouses all four men from the dead. When Moses asks why he has been brought back, the angels reply:

> "Do you not know that the Temple has been captured and Israel exiled?" And he screamed and wept until he reached the Patriarchs of the world. Immediately, they too tore their clothes and put their hands to their heads and they were screaming and weeping until [they reached] the gates of the Temple. As soon as the Holy Blessed One saw them, *Adonai the God of Hosts called on that day for weeping and lamenting and tonsuring and girding with sackcloth* (Isa 22:12) and if it were not written in Scripture, it would be impossible to say it. And they were weeping and going from one gate to another like a man whose dead are still before him, and the Holy Blessed One lamented and said, "Woe to the one who is like a king who prevailed in his childhood but did not prevail in his old age."[99]

With this stunning admission of failure, the pericope ends. The remainder of the *petichta*, which is attributed to Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman, is taken up with God's failed attempt to try Israel for its sinfulness and with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Rachel's searing rebukes of God. It concludes with God performing a different type of *teshuvah*: the *teshuvah* of offering comfort to Israel. In contrast to the first half of the *petichta*, God says very little. Instead, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman places long-dead biblical characters at the forefront of the midrash. From

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[99]. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 25-6.

the beginning, Abraham and the other characters are consumed by grief and anger. The *midrash* begins as follows:

> Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said that in the moment when the Holy Blessed One destroyed the Temple, Abraham came before God and wept and plucked at his beard and pulled out the hair on his head and struck his face and tore his clothes and put ashes on his head, and he was walking to the Temple and lamenting and screaming, and he said to the Holy Blessed One, "Why did you make me different from every nation and language that I should come into this shame and disgrace?!"[100]

At this point, the ministering angels reappear in the story and begin to compose laments. The Hebrew reads: קשרו הספד שורות שורות. This phrase lends itself to at least two possible translations. Either, the angels stood in lines, implying that many of them gathered for this urgent task. Like lines of mourners at a cemetery,[101] they accompanied Abraham as he wailed and keened his sorrow. Alternatively, the phrase means that the angels composed lines and lines of eulogy. The scale of the devastation was so great that many, many words had to be dedicated to the task of the lamenting the loss. In both of these interpretations, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman underscores what the original, biblical Lamentations teaches us: we must string together words to lament over loss. Indeed, this is a holy obligation in which even angels engage.

> When the angels have finished their lament, Abraham turns to God and demands:
> Master of the Universe, why did you exile my children and send them out by the hand of the nations and kill them in all manner of different ways and destroy the Temple, the place where I raised up Isaac my son as an offering before You? The Holy Blessed One said to Abraham, "Your children sinned and transgressed the whole Torah, and all the 22 letters that are in it, as it is written, *And all Israel transgressed your Torah* (Dan 9:11).[102]

To bolster this argument, God summons first the Torah and then the first three letters of the

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100. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 26.

101. I am grateful to my thesis advisor, Nancy Wiener, for suggesting this interpretation.

102. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 26.

aleph-bet to testify against Israel. Abraham demands to know how the Torah could testify against the people who chose and embraced it after every other nation spurned it. He makes similar arguments to the letters: *aleph* is the first of all the letters, *bet* is the first letter of the entire Torah, and *gimel* is the first letter of the commandment to make *tzitzit*. With these treasured places in Israel's life, how could these letters testify against Abraham's children? Thus, one by one, the Torah and the letters step away in silence, never offering up the testimony that God demanded. God is left isolated and alone, unable to marshal a defense. We, the readers/ listeners, have little option but to conclude that God's actions are indefensible.

As we know from the biblical Lamentations and elsewhere in Lamentations Rabbah, there is an intimate relationship between rebuke and lament. Initially, God asked Jeremiah to summon Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses so they could lament over the destruction. Indeed, this *midrash* opened with Abraham lamenting over the destruction, but now Abraham's words have become a full-fledged rebuke of God. We can understand Abraham's words as the culmination of the rebukes and calls for justice that hovered just above and below the surface of the biblical Lamentations. Like the poet of the biblical Lamentations, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman lets loose words of protest in which lament models our refusal to submit to suffering at the hands of others. Indeed, first Abraham, and then Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, bring detailed charges against God.

> Immediately, Abraham spoke before the Holy Blessed One and said, "Master of the Universe, when I was 100 years old you gave me a son and when he had reached the age of intellectual maturity and was a young man of 37 years, you said to me, 'Bring him as an offering before me.' I did this to him and acted cruelly towards him and did not have compassion upon him. Instead, I myself bound him. But you did not remember this about me and you did not have mercy on my children?"
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> Isaac spoke and said, "Master of the Universe, when Father said to me, 'God will see to the sheep for the burnt offering, my son,' (Gen 22:8) I did not do anything to prevent what you said and I was bound according to the will of my heart onto the back of the altar and I stretched out my neck under the knife. But you did not remember this about me and you did

not have mercy on my children?"

Jacob spoke and said, "Master of the Universe, was I not in Laban's house for 20 years? And when I left his house, Esau the wicked attacked me and wanted to kill my children and I sent myself towards death on their account. And now they are driven out at the hand of enemies like sheep to the slaughter, after they grew up like chicks of chickens, and I suffered great pain over the children, because many were my days in great suffering on their behalf. But you did not remember this about me and you did not have mercy on my children?"

Moses spoke and said, "Master of the Universe, was I not a faithful shepherd to Israel for 40 years? In the desert, I ran ahead of them like a horse, and when the time came to bring them into the land, you decreed that my bones should fall in the desert. And now that they are exiled you brought me to lament and cry over them. This is the meaning of the proverb that was said by humanity: "My master's good fortune is not good for me, but his bad fortune is bad for me."[103]

As the midrash continues to unfold, Moses declares to Jeremiah that they must go immediately to see the Children of Israel. Jeremiah responds that it is impossible for them to walk along the roads because of the dead bodies strewn there so, instead, they go to the exiles gathered at the Rivers of Babylon. When they see Moses, the people think their redeemer has come but both a *Bat Kol* (Heavenly Voice) and Moses tell them that the decree has been made. Eventually they will be redeemed, but not yet. Unable to save his people a second time, Moses does the only things possible: he bears witness and he laments. He addresses first the people, putting into words their terrible suffering. Then he addresses the sun, accusing it of not turning dark when the enemy entered the Temple. The sun replies that it, too, was attacked by the enemy, who whipped it with fire and ordered it to shine even in the midst of destruction and horror. Next Moses addresses the Temple, lamenting over its lost splendor. Finally, Moses addresses the captors, begging them not to slay a son in his father's presence or a daughter in her mother's, but the captors ignore his words:

But the wicked Chaldeans did not do thus. Rather they set the son in front of his mother and

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[103]. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 27.

said to the father, "Get up and slay him." The mother wept and her tears fell on [the son] and the father hung his head.[104]

Ostensibly a story about a family's wrenching grief, Moses' closing description of the enervated father is perhaps a metaphorical reference to God. The all-powerful Father of humanity silently and helplessly hangs his head. It is this posture, however, that restores God's capacity for compassion. After Moses delivers a final rebuke to God for God's silence, the *petichta* reaches its conclusion with Rachel's appearance in the story. As God listens to Rachel's rebuke, God finally remembers how to feel mercy.

> In that same moment, Rachel Imeinu jumped up before the Holy Blessed One and said, "Master of the Universe, it is revealed before you that Jacob your servant loved me with an expansive love and he worked seven years for father for my sake. But when he had fulfilled those seven years and the time came for my marriage to my husband, my father advised my husband to substitute me for my sister. This thing was extremely hard on me because he informed me of the deceit.[105] I let my husband know and I sent him a sign so that he would know [how to distinguish] between me and my sister, so that my father would not be able to substitute me. But then I had compassion on myself and I was patient with my desire and I had mercy on my sister that she should not go out in shame. In the evening they substituted my sister for me, for my husband. And I gave all the signs to my sister that I had given to my husband, in order that he would know that she was Rachel. And not only this, but I went under the bed on which he was lying with my sister and he was speaking to her and she was silent and I responded to him on every matter in order that he would not know the voice of my sister. I had compassion on her and I was not jealous of her and I did not not let her be shamed. And as for me who is flesh and blood, dust and ashes, I was not jealous of the cause of my troubles. But you, who are a living and enduring and merciful king, why were you jealous of *avodah zarah* that has no worth and exiled my children, and they were killed by the sword and enemies had their way with them?
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> Immediately, the mercy of the Holy Blessed One unfolded and [God] said, "For your sake, Rachel, I will return my children to their place, as it is written: *Thus said God: a voice is heard in Ramah, wailing and bitter weeping; Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted over her children who are gone* (Jer 31:15). And it is written: *Thus said God: restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears because there is reward for your labor, declares God, and they will return from the enemy's land* (Jer 31:16). And it is written: *And there is hope for the future, declares God, the children will return to their*

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104. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 28.

105. Literally "advice," but I have borrowed Neusner's word "deceit" because it more accurately conveys the meaning of the word. See Jacob Neusner, *Lamentations Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 78.

borders (Jer 31:17).[106]

Unlike Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, Rachel moves God to compassion and provides this *petichta* with its *nechemta* (closing words of comfort). I agree with Linafelt and Mintz, who argue that God is ultimately moved by the plight of suffering children -- the suffering of Rachel's children, and the suffering of the children in the concluding section of Moses' lament.[107] This is in keeping with Linafelt's overall argument, noted earlier in this chapter, that stories about suffering children are what move first the poet/ Zion and then the rabbis/ God to speech. Indeed, there are parallels between Zion's interruptions of the poet and Rachel's interruption of God's silence.[108] In both the biblical and rabbinic Lamentations, then, it is the suffering of children that moves the witnesses/ storytellers to protest the obscenity of suffering. To borrow Linafelt's term, Rachel's words of protest represent the "drive for survival" that delivers the final blow to God's recalcitrance, avoidance, self-absorption, and silence. God's *teshuvah* is now complete.

In Petichta 24, as in many of the *midrashim* collected in Lamentations Rabbah, God is a highly anthropomorphized character. In his helpful essay "*Imitatio Hominis*: Anthropomorphism and the Character(s) of God in Rabbinic Literature," David Stern makes the case that this is a tool for telling stories that answer questions about what type of character God is. Borrowing a term from the Mekhilta, Stern suggests that anthropomorphism was "an instrument for 'breaking in the ear.'" In other words, it is a "trope and figure, a turning of language consciously and creatively employed to express truth... a way of exploring the nature of God, of characterizing

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106. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 28.

107. See Mintz, 62, and Linafelt, 115. According to Linafelt, Stern and Kraemer argue that God is moved to compassion out of concern that God not appear petty for being more concerned about empty idols than about the well-being of the Israelites.

108. Linafelt, 114.

His behavior."[109] If we follow Stern's line of thinking, it seems that the Rabbis who anthropomorphized God in Petichta 24 did so in order to rebuke God for God's excesses, to turn God into a lamenter and story-teller, and, ultimately, to offer comfort to their people. It is to this final aspect of Lamentations Rabbah -- its role as a comforter of all those who are mourning loss -- that I now turn my attention.

IV.
Seeing the Entire Narrative:
Comfort, Hope & Re-building in the Wake of Suffering

The biblical Lamentations contains almost no words of comfort. In a striking divergence from this, narratives and theologies that promise restoration run throughout Lamentations Rabbah. The Rabbis are able to do this because of their distance from the disastrous events. Because they are not speaking from the depths of lament, they can see the longer narrative threads of a people's history. They understand that, over the course of a life or a generation, catastrophe is inevitably and necessarily followed by re-building. They are able to speak about survival and continuity because they are the descendants of those who survived and continued. For example, the myth of the establishment of Yavneh is re-told in Lamentations Rabbah. In the wake of the disaster of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, Yohanan ben Zakkai is smuggled out of Jerusalem in a coffin to sow the seeds of an entirely new Jewish project. Clearly, this is a story that can only be told by those who have seen this new project take shape, consider themselves to be its inheritors, and have a story to tell about its significance.[110]

[109.] David Stern, "*Imitatio Hominis*: Anthropomorphism and the Character(s) of God in Rabbinic Literature." *Prooftexts* 12, 1992, 157.

[110.] In Parashah One, pp. 65-9 in Buber's edition.

In addition to being able to see the longer narratives of Jewish life as it stretches over generations, the Rabbis could see the full narrative of other biblical stories. In Lamentations Rabbah 1:2, Rabbi Levi offers the following exegesis of the phrase אֵין־לָהּ מְנַחֵם/ There is none to comfort her:

> There is none to comfort her. Rabbi Levi said that in every place where it says "she has no..." [for example] *And Sarai was barren, she had no child* (Gen 11:30) [but ultimately] she does have, as it is said: *And God took note of Sarah* (Gen 21:1). And this is similar to *And Hannah did not have any children* (I Sam 1:2) [but ultimately] she does, as it is said: *Because God took note of Hannah* (I Sam 2:21). And this is similar to *Zion has no one to inquire after her* (Jer 30:18) [but ultimately] she does, as it is said: *A redeemer came to Zion* (Isa 59:20). Thus, even if you say: *There is none to comfort her*, [actually] there is, as it is said: *I, I am your comforter* (Isa 59:51).[111]

Here, Rabbi Levi takes the examples of Sarah and Hannah's lives. Over the course of these two stories about barrenness and child-bearing, Sarah and Hannah move through sorrow to joy. Rabbi Levi draws a parallel between these two stories and Deutero-Isaiah's description of a fecund Zion surrounded by her children. When we read Lamentations not as a self-contained lament but, rather, as part of the entire biblical canon, we can say with confidence that return and comfort are part of the story.

The problem with this, of course, is that Deutero-Isaiah describes the exiles' return to the Land of Israel in the fifth century BCE, a mere 70 years after the destruction and expulsion. The Rabbis of early Medieval Palestine, however, were still waiting for return. Zion's words of lament could just as well be the Palestinian Rabbis' words too as they await the restoration of the Temple, the return of the Davidic king, and the re-establishment of Eretz Yisrael as the center of Jewish life. Here, post-biblical messianic theologies come into play, holding out the promise of redemption. One such example is as follows:

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[111] *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 61-2.

> Rabbi Yehudah bar Rabbi Simon said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitzhak: the messianic king, if he lives, his name is David, if he dies, his name is David. Rabbi Tanhuma said, "I say that the reason is *He brings great redemption to his king, and is compassionate to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever* (Pss. 18:51). "To David" isn't written here, but "To David and his offspring."[112]

While a full discussion of messianic theology is beyond the scope of this paper, the key point for our purposes is that the Rabbis, unlike the lamenters of Lamentations, were able to speak with confidence about a God who punishes and rewards, who presides over life in narrow places and life rich with promise and optimism -- and everything in between. To return to Walter Brueggeman's argument, since life is filled with both joy and sorrow, so too must be the writings that shed light on our lives.[113] This exegesis of Lamentations 5:18 provides one example of how the Rabbis articulated this understanding.

> *For desolate Mount Zion/ on which foxes wander* (Lam 5:18). Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Elazar, and Rabbi Akiva were already going up to Rome when they heard the great noise of Rome from 120 miles away. They began to weep but Rabbi Akiva began to laugh. They said to Akiva, "We are crying and you are laughing." He said to them, "Why are you crying?" They said to him, "Why would we not cry?! Because those who practice idolatry and make offerings to their gods and bow down to idols dwell in certainty and peace, and the House that is the footstool of our God was burned up in fire and is a dwelling place for animals of the field. Why would we not cry?!" He said to them, "Therefore, I laugh. If those who make God angry do such, all the more so for those who do God's will."
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> Another time they went up to Jerusalem. When they arrived at the Mount of Olives they tore their clothes. They arrived at the Temple Mount and a fox came out from the House of the Holy of Holies. They began to cry and Rabbi Akiva laughed. Rabban Gamliel said to him, "Akiva, you always cause astonishment. We are crying and you are laughing." He said to them, "Why are you crying?" Rabban Gamliel said to them, "Do you see what Akiva said to us? In the place about which it was written *The stranger who comes close shall be put to death* (Num 1:51), a fox came out from inside it. Should we not cry? The verse has been realized upon us. *For this our hearts grow faint... For desolate Mount Zion/ on which foxes wander* (Lam 5:17-18). [Akiva] said to them, therefore I laugh, for as Scripture says, *I will take for myself faithful witnesses: Uriah the Cohen and Zechariah ben Jeberechiah* (Isa 8:2). What is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? What did Uriah say and what did Zechariah say? Uriah said: *Zion will be a ploughed field and Jerusalem will becomes heaps*

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[112]. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 90.

[113]. See Chapter One, pp.38-9.

> *[of ruins] and the Temple Mount will be a shrine in the woods* (Jer 26:18). Zechariah said: Thus said the God of Hosts, *There will yet be old men and old women in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with a staff on hand on account of great age, and the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls laughing in [Jerusalem's] streets* (Zech 8:4-5). The Holy Blessed One said, "These are my two witnesses. If Uriah's words are fulfilled, so too will be Zechariah's words. If Uriah's words are cancelled, so too will be Zechariah's. I laughed because Uriah's words were fulfilled. Ultimately, Zechariah's words will be fulfilled in a future time." At these words they said to Akiva, "We are comforted by you; may you be comforted among those who are given comfort."[114]

Ultimately, Akiva's message of comfort is this: since both lament and laughter are part of life, we need to be able to imagine a God who provides for both, and for everything in between. Significantly, however, the *midrash* ends not with Akiva's *nechemta* but with the other three Rabbis' words of comfort to Akiva. With these words, they recognize that everyone is broken and in need of comfort, even those who spend their days finding words with which to comfort others.

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[114]. *Midrash Eichah Rabbah*, 159-160.

Chapter Three:
Contemporary Voices

This project grew out of the following question: to what extent are biblical and rabbinic texts that lament over, and tell stories about, collective disasters useful mirrors for those who provide pastoral care to survivors of disasters? This chapter weaves together themes from the textual analysis of the first two chapters and material from interviews with those whose professional lives include ministering to survivors of large-scale accidents, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks. The material in this chapter is organized around four themes: the ways in which survivors give voice to laments, stories, and protest; the ways in which pastoral care functions as spiritual witness; the need for pastoral caregivers to take care of themselves and maintain their own sources of comfort; and the ways in which these texts mirror suffering in our own time and affirm the sanctity of lament and protest.

I.
"For these things I weep:"[115]
Giving Voice to Lament, Stories & Protest

Both Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah are driven by the need to give voice to the experience of suffering. The biblical Lamentations is a chaotic lament that lacks an overarching narrative. In it, the poems' speakers are similar to Rabbi, as he is described in the previously-discussed midrash on Lamentations 2:2:

> Rabbi, because he was closer to the destruction of the Temple, would remember and interpret and cry and be comforted and interrupt [himself].

In contrast, the rabbinic Lamentations is characterized by orderly narrative and storytelling.

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[115] Lam. 1:16.

Indeed, the Rabbis who authored these traditions are more like Rabbi Yohanan who, "because he was not close to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, would interpret without interruption."[116] I understand lament as the need to give voice to suffering without necessarily analyzing it or deriving meaning from it, and storytelling as an attempt to spin a narrative that makes meaning out of suffering. My interviews with rabbis suggested another important theme that parallels both Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah: both lament and storytelling are driven by the need to describe suffering. In this chapter, I will suggest that lament and storytelling serve important and distinct pastoral functions. Although elements of both are sometimes woven together into one pastoral encounter, and although pastoral journeys cannot be understood in linear terms, it seems that lament is more characteristic of the first stages after a disaster and that storytelling tends to come later. In this way, the *midrash* on Lamentations 2:2 reflects and mirrors life.

Lament

In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur Frank offers a typology that echoes the distinction between lament and story-telling. Frank, who is himself a survivor of two life-threatening illnesses, explores the types of stories that sick people tell about their illnesses. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on two of these three types: the "chaos narrative," which I equate with lament, and the "quest narrative," which I equate with storytelling. Frank describes "chaos narratives" in this way: "In stories told out of the deepest chaos, no sense of sequence redeems suffering as orderly, and no self finds purpose in suffering."[117] Almost all of the rabbis to whom

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116. Lam. Rabb. 2:2, p. 100 in Buber's edition. See Chapter Two, pp. 46-7.

117. Arthur A. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 105.

I talked described how they listened to survivors, witnesses, first responders, and the bereaved lament in the wake of tragedy. Rabbi Stephen Roberts served as a chaplain after American Airlines flight 587 crash-landed in a neighborhood in Queens, NY. He described being at the site of the crash six days after the disaster as families were leaving a memorial service.

> People would just reach out for each other and there would be physical breakdowns -- the howls or the total withdrawal inside, which is a howl in another way. They are flip sides [of the same thing]. There is the very loud one, and then there is the very, very loud silent one. They are the same sound.[118]

Similarly, Rabbi Seth Bernstein described being at Ground Zero, the site of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City, and intoning prayers over body parts found by rescue workers. The rescue workers' responses included "crying, tears, and silence." In Bernstein's words, "This is conversation right at Ground Zero."[119] Rabbi Nancy Wiener, who also worked at Ground Zero and Family Assistance Centers[120] in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, gave two examples of how lament sometimes intersected with more coherent narrative.

In the first example, the coherent narrative was always a "back story" on the person who was missing or dead. She explained:

> In the first weeks, lament dominated. People were all over the map and I remember clearly times when I couldn't see what the person's connective thread was. There would be spurts of narrative, but the narrative was always about the past. The closer to the present, the less narrative.

In the second example, the coherent narrative constituted a "beginning formula" to what ultimately became rescue worker's inchoate laments:

> With the rescue workers, there was a beginning formula to their narratives: how long they

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118. Interview with Rabbi Stephen Roberts, conducted in person in New York City, June 30, 2008.

119. Interview with Rabbi Seth Bernstein, conducted by phone in New York City, June 20, 2008.

120. In an email dated November 4, 2008, Stephen Roberts described what happened at Family Assistance Centers. They were the places to which surviving family members went to receive financial, social, emotional, spiritual, and legal support.

had been there, whether or not they had been home, and for how long. And for some of them, there was narrative about their buddies. But when talking about their day-to-day work, there was no narrative at all. They had no words for what they were doing. Occasionally they would give it a stab and they would just fall apart.[121]

Coherent narrative, then, is almost completely missing from these conversations, except when people repeated a narrative that had been established prior to the disaster, or when they shared a well-rehearsed formula. Rather, lament is chaotic, disordered, and punctuated with howls of silence.

Silence as Lament

In Lamentations, God is unbearably silent. In Lamentations Rabbah, the Rabbis fill this lacuna by placing words of lament, which were originally Zion's, into God's mouth. In Petichta 24, we find dramatic representations of God weeping and lamenting. Also in this Petichta, God is often silent. While this silence serves the obvious purpose of allowing Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Rachel to deliver their harsh rebukes, it also gives us a model for silent lament. God reminds us that, sometimes, suffering cannot be verbalized. As Simkha Weintraub and Adena Greenberg, co-leaders of a post-9/11 support group at the New York Jewish Healing Center write in an article about their work with bereaved parents, "The survivors who found our program [in the first months after 9/11] were not yet in a place of words or, perhaps, they were far beyond words."[122] This idea is echoed above in Roberts and Bernstein's descriptions of how silence is an integral part of lament. Wiener also describes the centrality of silence:

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[121] Interview with Rabbi Nancy Wiener, conducted in person in New York City, July 22, 2008.

[122] Simkha Y. Weintraub and Adena Greenberg, "Looking Back: Four Years After 9/11/01." *On the Ground After September 11: Mental Health Responses and Practical Knowledge Gained*, eds. Yael Danieli and Robert L. Dingman (New York: Haworth, 2005), 519-525. In this helpful article, Weintraub and Greenberg describe the support group and its activities.

> Days when they found something [i.e. a human remain], people would want to tell someone and then there would be silence. And when they talked about home, there was lots of punctuation with silence, often accompanied by an explanation that they didn't want to talk about home.[123]

When I interviewed Simkha Weintraub, he expanded on these themes, describing how being in the company of those who were also bereaved on September 11, 2001 allowed for abbreviation and the jettisoning of words.

> We live in a grief-aversive and a death-denying society, so there was short tolerance for people falling apart and talking about their son or daughter who had died. They needed a place for that and for the camaraderie of other people who really got it. You didn't need to say the words; they knew what you were feeling from your face and body language.[124]

Weintraub implies that there was a certain relief in silence, an idea that Wiener echoes:

> I was actually often surprised by people's ability to sit with silence. It was more so than in some other situations that I have been in. I remember thinking at times that people didn't realize how much time was passing, that their sense of time was off. Or they just welcomed not being alone.[125]

Just as God laments silently in the Petichta 24, so do we use silence to articulate the unsayable after the unspeakable has happened. There are, however, many different types of silence. In the biblical Lamentations, God's silence constitutes a refusal to face other's suffering. In the second section of this chapter, which deals with witnessing, I will return to this type of silence.

Storytelling

If Frank's "chaos narrative" parallels lament, his "quest narrative" parallels the meaning-making elements of Lamentations Rabbah. He writes,

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123. Wiener, interview.

124. Interview with Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, conducted in person in New York City, July 1, 2008.

125. Wiener, interview.

> Quest stories meet suffering head on; they accept illness and seek to use it. Illness is the occasion of a journey that becomes a quest.[126]

While none of the rabbis I interviewed used words like "quest" to describe the ways people with whom they worked experienced their post-disaster lives, many of them spoke passionately about storytelling as a way of making meaning out of suffering. As Weintraub puts it, "The reason storytelling is so important is it's how we articulate and search for meaning." Indeed, Weintraub's post-9/11 bereavement support group is a crucible for storytelling. In Weintraub's words, "Storytelling is everything. I really mean that. It is all we do."[127]

In 2005, Weintraub's group, which was by then composed of twelve women whose children had been working at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, traveled to Israel to meet with Israelis who had lost family members in the violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the trip, they spent an afternoon with an art therapist who arranged for twelve Israelis to join the New York group. The group spent four and half hours doing an activity that had originally been scheduled to last for no more than two. Each participant told stories about the loved one he or she had lost and shared a song that had been in some way healing. As they told these stories, the therapist projected a picture of their loved one onto the wall. As the Americans and Israelis sang, cried, and looked at the pictures, their need to give voice to their stories spilled far over the scheduled time.[128]

For many of the rabbis I interviewed, the healing potential of these stories lies in the way they shift and evolve over time. In the words of Myrna Matsa, who provides pastoral support in

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126. Frank, 115.
127. Weintraub, interview.
128. Weintraub, interview.

the post-Katrina and Rita Gulf Coast:

> As they tell their stories over and over the story changes shape. They are beginning to find new meaning in the story and changing how they tell it. The story is never fixed. It is always evolving. People are looking to find purpose and meaning in their own ways.[129]

Even in a group of people who know each other well and have heard each other's stories many times, there is an ongoing need for storytelling. As Weintraub says, "Sometimes they need to remind each other where they have been. Sometimes they need to re-trace their steps with other people listening." And he, too, as facilitator of the group, is endlessly curious about the members' continually evolving stories. Even though he knows his participants well, he "still need[s] to hear their story and their updated story and the Rashi on their story."[130]

The stories that ultimately comprise holy texts change slightly with each telling and re-telling until, finally, they are fixed. Unlike canonical texts, the stories we tell about our lives are never finally redacted. For many survivors of disaster, the story is never completely fixed because the process of recovery is perpetually ongoing. Indeed, the drive to tell stories about the impact that Katrina had -- and continues to have -- on their lives still defines Matsa's interactions with survivors:

> Now, three years later, people really do want to get past it. They don't want their lives to be defined by Katrina. Yet I find that wherever I go, people really do want to talk about it.[131]

This need to continually tell and re-tell stories is, in part, shaped by long and unfinished recovery processes. In the case of Katrina, the re-building process is rife with inequalities.[132] In

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129. Matsa, interview.

130. Weintraub, interview. Weintraub's description of "the Rashi on their story" refers to the work of the 11th Century French commentator, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, known by the acronym Rashi. Among other things, Rashi wrote a gloss on the text of the Babylonian Talmud. His comments on, and elucidation of, a particular piece of talmudic text are sometimes simply referred to as "the Rashi."

131. Matsa, interview.

132. See Introduction, p. 6

the case of the September 11th attacks, many loved ones' remains were never identified and never will be. Furthermore, the current plans for a memorial at the World Trade Center site are not necessarily in keeping with the needs of Jewish tradition.[133] Those who lost loved ones on 9/11 face the additional obstacle that, because this disaster fills the collective social consciousness, individual narratives of loss are inevitably bound up with larger political narratives. When Weintraub's group was in Israel, they de-briefed the storytelling activity they shared with the group of bereaved Israelis. Weintraub asked the group what differences they noticed between themselves and the Israelis.

> They said, "[The Israelis] have a coherent narrative for what has happened to them." I realized that that was what our group was in search of: a narrative. To this day, that narrative is impeded and confusing.

Weintraub went on to explain that different political factions have offered various explanations, polemics, or conspiracy theories to explain the tragedy of 9/11, none of which are completely convincing or satisfactory to the members of his group. "The only narrative they have is that their son or daughter went off to work one morning and did not come back." Even the highly contested narratives that swirl around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seemed more concrete and usable than what politicians, the media, and political groups were offering to those who lost loved ones on September 11, 2001.[134]

An acceptable communal narrative might be elusive to the members of Weintraub's group,

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133. In a March 2006, Rabbi Simkha Weintraub wrote a short paper entitled "The World Trade Center Site as Final Burial Site: Some Traditional Jewish Voices and Concerns" in which he articulated the concerns of bereaved Jews. In accordance with Jewish tradition, he called for an above-ground marker with names at the World Trade Center site, and for the symbolic interment of some of the human remains that are currently in the Fresh Kills garbage dump on Staten Island. At the time of writing, neither of these requests has been fulfilled.

134. Weintraub, interview.

but still they tell their own stories. The ultimate purpose, says Weintraub, is "to integrate the loss into one's ongoing narrative," rather than one's whole life being "subsumed under" the stories.[135] Put another way, the story of loss and trauma ultimately becomes part of the longer narrative of a person's life, with all of its suffering and all of its joy. We find literary parallels to this in the Rabbis' stories of continuity and re-building after destruction, for example in the *midrash* about Rabbi Akiva's laughter. As discussed in Chpater Two, the Rabbis were able to see the longer narrative of a people's story, into which they wove stories about loss and tragedy, re-building and laughter. For individuals who have survived tragedy, there is no final narrative, but there are constantly evolving stories, replete with self-generating commentaries and exegeses, that describe survivors' shifting experiences of loss and repair over ever-lengthening spans of time.

Storytelling that Fosters Resilience

Disaster chaplaincy involves working with survivors -- with the people who have lived beyond the immediate impact of the disaster. Chaplains witness survivors' enormous suffering and they also witness the fact of their survival. Matsa described how she understands her role as helping survivors "find the core of strength that is within so they can depend on themselves in their recovery effort."[136] Roberts describes this process as "helping someone to open up their spiritual *otzer* (treasury)."[137] Thus, those chaplains who accompany survivors through the long-term process of recovery help them to access their own resilience in the face of suffering. In her

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135. Weintraub, interview and Weintraub and Greenberg, 520.
136. Matsa, interview.
137. Roberts, interview.

book *The Resilient Spirit*, Polly Young-Eisendrath defines resilience as "the ability to thrive, not just survive, after having encountered some great difficult or adversity."[138] Yael Danieli, Danny Brom and Joe Sills explain that this runs counter to predominant cultural responses to trauma. Writing about the aftermath of September 11, they explain that a key task for those working with survivors was

> the imperative to resist the culturally prevalent (American) impulse to do something, to find a quick fix, to focus on outcome rather than process, to look all too swiftly for closure, and to flee "back to normal."[139]

Those working on the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina understand this all too well. Indeed, Matsa argues that the need to think about the long-term effect of trauma must be reflected in funding priorities.

> Although it's important to get money on the ground in the immediate aftermath, there are a lot of organizations that will do that. It's more important to get money there over the long term. It's also very important to have money stretch over three or five years. A lot of pathologies and issues emerge around the second year anniversary mark.[140]

One of the tasks of those working with survivors over the long-term is to identify what these "pathologies and issues" are so that problems can then be addressed. Matsa describes how her job, which involves working with communities along the Gulf Coast, gives her a bird's eye view that assists with identifying patterns that might otherwise be missed. For example, she has talked to nursery school teachers who describe how even four- and five-year-olds who survived Katrina are more aggressive than children with whom they worked in previous years. Matsa believes it

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138. Polly Young-Eisendrath, *The Resilient Spirit: Transforming Suffering into Insight and Renewal* (New York City: Da Capo Press, 1996), 20.

139. Yael Danieli, Danny Brom and Joe Sills, "The Trauma of Terrorism: Contextual Considerations." *The Trauma of Terrorism: Sharing Knowledge and Shared Care, and International Handbook* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2005), 7.

140. Follow-up interview with Myrna Matsa, conducted by phone in New York City, November 24, 2008.

is likely that this aggression results from

> children not being able to work through the trauma they experienced as their parents were preparing for Katrina. Children experience emotionally what the parents are going through. Even if they do not have cognition, they experience the feelings. If they are caught in a web where they have those same feelings, the trauma erupts.[141]

Matsa and others working in the post-Katrina Gulf Coast have forged an alliance with the Israel Trauma Coalition, which leads trainings in resilience. Building on lessons learned in the Israeli context, the group trains trainers, who can in turn train new leaders so the effects ripples through the community. At an upcoming series of trainings in Hancock County, which was devastated by the eye of Katrina, the Israel Trauma Coalition will train five key groups of community members: hairdressers and barbers; emergency service workers; staff, parents, and children in schools; hospital staff; and clergy people. All of these people were affected by Katrina, need long-term skills to foster their own resilience, and are in a position to help others develop resilience.[142]

Several years ago, the Israel Trauma Coalition trained "every layer" in schools in the Nichols School District -- teachers, administrators, nurses, parents, and children. Matsa told me about a May 2007 meeting of school nurses from Gulfport and Biloxi that she attended. Each nurse described working with children, parents, teachers, and administrators who were stressed beyond their capacity as schools and families tackled the extraordinary challenges that have developed in Katrina's wake. The last nurse to speak was from the Nichols School System. This nurse described the same litany of pressures on her school community but said that, in the wake of the training they had received, "Our children, parents, and administrators are not as stressed because

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141. Matsa, follow-up interview.

142. The Israel Trauma Coalition is an outgrowth of the Community Stress Prevention Center in Kiryat Shmoneh. For more information, see http://icspc.telhai.ac.il/main.html

they have a way of talking and expressing their feelings." Talking about the far-reaching effects of disaster means that survivors can begin to construct a narrative around what happened to them. As Matsa says, "the resilience piece takes place after the initial crisis, when the shock wears off and people begin to think."[143] According to Young-Eisendrath, "What is so striking about the resilient is how smoothly and quickly they create a coherent and meaningful story from hardship, misery, trauma, abuse."[144] Thus, work done by organizations like the Israel Trauma Coalition and chaplains like Matsa is essential to help people create narratives about *both* the far-reaching effects of trauma *and* their ability to reconstruct their lives in the face of this trauma.

The Drive to Describe Suffering

Frank describes how the complete rupture of a serious illness can be likened to "the loss of the 'destination and map' that had previously guided the ill person's life."[145] For him, stories have an explicitly reparative and healing effect: they are "a way of re-drawing maps and finding new destinations."[146] As already noted, the drive to describe suffering lies behind both lament and storytelling. Survivors' need to describe their lives is, in part, about drawing a new map of the strange new place in which they currently reside. For Gulf Coast residents who survived Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, this map is physical. It is filled with empty spaces. These empty spaces mirror Lamentations' descriptions of how no social institution was left unscathed by the Destruction.[147] In an essay that appears in *Disaster Spiritual Care*, Matsa writes:

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143. Matsa, follow-up interview.
144. Young-Eisendrath, 193.
145. Frank, 1.
146. *ibid.*, 53.
147. See Chapter One, pp. 26-8.

> Katrina victims have verbalized it this way, "I didn't just lose my house, I lost my doctor, my post office, my pharmacist, my grocery store, where my children go to school, where I go to church. I have nothing familiar."[148]

When I interviewed Matsa, she distinguished between the losses that a death brings to one family, and the losses that a collective disaster brings to an entire community. "Jewish tradition," she says, running through the series of events from *vidui* to *tahara* to *shiva* to *yarhzeit*, "allows for preparation for death. All of this happens in the embrace of the broader community." Although the mourner's world has changed, the rest of the world is as it was before. "They drive down the street and the library is still standing." For those who survived Katrina and Rita, however, "The strengths that held them together are not intact the way they were before the storm. Whole neighborhoods are wiped out -- that means people's history and people's future."[149]

In other post-disaster stories, the "map" might be metaphorical; it is a place in which home has become utterly elusive. Nancy Wiener describes her conversations with rescue workers at Ground Zero:

> As time went on there was a lot of talk, often late at night, with rescue workers about their inability to know where home was. They had been spending so much time at Ground Zero that when they went home they didn't feel like they could relate to being at home or relate to their families. There was a real sense of existential displacement.[150]

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148. William V. Livingston, Myrna Matsa and Beverly Wallace, "From Honeymoon to Disillusionment to Reconstruction: Recognizing Healthy and Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms and Encouraging Resiliency." *Disaster Spiritual Care*, 130.

149. Matsa, interview.

150. Wiener, interview. For further discussion of the trauma experienced by first responders in the wake of terrorist attacks, see John K. Schorr and Angela S. Bourdreaux, "Responding to Terrorism in the USA: Firefighters Share Experiences in Their Own Words" in *The Trauma of Terrorism*, eds. Danieli, *et al.*, 577-592. In this article, firefighters who worked at the sites of the 1996 bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City, describe the emotional impact of the trauma they experienced and witnessed. Additionally, FDNY firefighters describe their feelings of grief and guilt following the deaths of their colleagues September 11, 2001. As Rabbi Joseph Potasnik said when I interviewed him on July 16, 2008, the FDNY lost 343 members on 9/11, the greatest

As painful as it is to draw these new verbal maps, survivors do it. Like the poet of Lamentations, they are compelled to describe and enumerate the devastation that has rendered their world unrecognizable. By describing their new world, they are also raising a voice of protest about all the things that are wrong and unjust about it.

Protest

In Lamentations 2:20, Zion demands, "Look, God, and see to whom you have done this." In Petichta 24 of Lamentations Rabbah, Rachel accuses God of bringing destruction upon her children out of petty jealousy. In these two accounts of suffering, God is held responsible and rebuked. In contrast, most of the rabbis whom I interviewed reported that they rarely had pastoral conversations in which people held God responsible for the disaster that had ripped through their lives. As Simkha Weintraub says of the 9/11 attacks, "I think [they] were more disappointed in mortals than in God."[151]

People may not have protested about God's role in the disasters, but this does not mean they were not angry. As Matsa says, "People look at the manmade aspects of it and they feel let down, they feel disappointed. There is a lot of anger and a lot of rage." She continued:

> Most of the Jews I've talked to don't see God's role in the disaster. This is just nature. In the case of the levees in New Orleans, they see this as evil in the hearts of men – that people won't build a levee system that will protect vulnerable people.

I asked her if she was surprised that people do not blame God for the destruction wreaked by Katrina and Rita. She responded,

> Yes, I was. I thought people would say, "What kind of God is this, what God would allow this?" But they see it as a natural part of the world. They live in a hurricane alley. But the lament that is very strong is that human beings failed in building a levee system that would work. Legislators used money that was supposed to be for the levees for other purposes, not

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number of casualties among any group.

151. Weintraub, interview.

to strengthen the levees.[152]

In contrast, Craig Miller, who worked at Family Assistance Centers after the September 11, 2001 attacks, was not surprised. He told me, "In a society where we believe in God in the abstract, we don't have any full expectations of God."[153] In the context of contemporary disasters, then, there might not be a cry of *Eichah* that expresses a theological crisis. But, this does not mean that people were not asking existential questions. As Wiener says,

> There were a lot of "How?" and "Why could this happen?" questions. There were many people who were struggling with: "This isn't how I believe the world works."[154]

How and *why,* both of which are possible translations of *Eichah*, are classic words of lament. Walter Brueggeman writes with passion about the need to honor and restore these types of outbursts of lament to liturgy and life. Writing about psalms of lament, Brueggeman asks:

> What difference does it make to have faith that permits and requires this form of prayer [i.e. psalms of lament]? My answer is that it shifts the calculus and *redresses the redistribution of power* between the two parties, so that the petitionary party is taken seriously and the God who is addressed is newly engaged in the crisis in a way that puts God at risk... The lament form thus concerns a redistribution of power. [italics in original][155]

In the examples that the rabbis I interviewed described, humans -- or perhaps the cosmos at large -- were the object of protests and demands. As Brueggeman explains, lament is "a complaint which makes the shrill insistence [that t]hings are not right in the present arrangement." He explains,

> Life isn't right. It is now noticed and voiced that life is not as it was promised to be. The utterance of this awareness is an exceedingly dangerous moment at the throne. It is as dangerous as Lech Walesa or Rosa Parks asserting with their bodies that the system has broken down and will not be honored any longer. For the managers of the system -- political, economic, religious, moral -- there is always a hope that the troubled folks will not notice the dysfunction or that a tolerance of a certain degree of dysfunction can be accepted

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152. Matsa, interview.

153. Interview with Rabbi Craig Miller, conducted in person in New York City, July 7, 2008.

154. Wiener, interview.

155. Brueggeman, 59.

> as normal and necessary, even if unpleasant. Lament occurs when the dysfunction reaches an unacceptable level, when the injustice is intolerable and change is insisted upon.[156]

Thus, the cry is addressed to God but it "is not merely a religious gesture." It also possesses "important and direct links to social processes."[157] Shira Stern, a pastoral counselor who worked extensively with survivors of the September 11, 2001 attacks, described conversations in which survivors addressed their protests to God. She suggests that these cries are manifestations of a critically important psychological process. She explains,

> I find that... protest and anger are two things that protect us from feeling that we are destroyed. If we have a breath left, we protest... I see protest as a really healthy response to an unhealthy situation.

Indeed, Stern encourages people to find and vocalize their anger towards God. This process, she says, "unleashes in them something that they didn't think they had permission to say."[158]

Ultimately, the fact of protest is more important than the addressee of the protest, a theme that Linafelt and Kathleen O'Connor echo. Linafelt argues that laments constitute a "drive for life."[159] In part, this is because lament requires us tell the truth which, in turn, makes denial impossible. For O'Connor, speaking the truth about our lives and the world means we "acquire moral agency by naming [our] world."[160] She takes this argument further, stating that lament

> make[s] space for justice to be born... Without the practice of public lament, collective work for justice is blocked, paralyzed, unable to begin... Prayers of lament are not about what is wrong *with us* but about wrong done *to us*.[161]

While survivors, rescue workers, and the bereaved may or may not understand their cries of

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156. *ibid.*, 62.
157. *ibid.*, 63.
158. Shira Stern, interview, conducted in person in New York City, September 18, 2008.
159. Linafelt, 42.
160. Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 83.
161. *ibid.*, 128.

protest in these terms, pastoral care providers have a window into suffering that shows how the words of protest that weave through Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah echoes through disasters in our own time. As painful as it is to hear these cries and protestations, these stories and laments, this is precisely the purpose of sitting with those who have survived unspeakable pain. Frank calls upon us to increase our "tolerance for chaos as a part of a life story."[162] This is similar to Brueggeman's insistence that we reclaim lament as an intrinsic part of life. In Frank's words, "Until the chaos narrative can be honored, the world in all its possibilities is being denied."[163] Indeed, all of the rabbis I interviewed described how important it was for them to be present and simply listen to these laments. It is this theme, the role of the pastor as witness, to which I now turn my attention.

II.
"How can I be your witness?"[164]
Pastoral Care as Spiritual Witness

Livui Ruchani/ *Spiritual Accompaniment*

> In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Frank writes:
> Witnessing always implies a relationship... Part of what turns stories into testimony is the call made upon another person to receive that testimony.[165]

In the first section of this chapter, I described how, in the wake of disaster, survivors give voice to lament, silence, stories, and protest. They do this because they have a profound need to be heard. Through the act of listening to another's story, witnesses turn survivors' words into

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162. Frank, 111.
163. *ibid.*, 109.
164. Lam. 2:13.
165. Frank, 43.

testimony. Rabbi Joseph Potasnik is a Jewish chaplain with the New York City Fire Department. He still supports firefighters who are coming to terms with the losses of 9/11. He describes his work role as a listener and a witness in this way way:

> [Being heard] is part of the therapy, the healing process. That you know that people care, that you are not going to be abandoned. When people lament, what do they lament about? That they have nobody, that they are totally isolated. So the way to temper that, to bring hope to those who are lamenting, is with love. To show them that they are not isolated.[166]

Pastoral care, then, is profoundly relational. It is about breaking the isolation that is part of suffering and lament. Dayle Friedman, editor of *Jewish Pastoral Care*, uses the Hebrew phrase *livui ruchani*, meaning spiritual accompaniment, to describe pastoral care. She writes,

> The root of this term, *lvh*, is used in biblical and rabbinic texts to refer to one who "walks with" another. Ministering angels, God's presence, friends, priests, and peers all are described as *lvh*, accompanying people as they go on their path. This verb connotes a person involving himself or herself in the journey with the other.[167]

Similarly, in an essay in *Disaster Spiritual Care*, Therese Becker *et al* describe the relational aspects of pastoral care as "accompaniment, witness, solidarity." They go on to explain, "Spiritual care is a painful accompaniment, a deep listening to the rawest expression of human suffering."[168] Witnessing is painful; it requires sharing in some of the suffering that the testifier describes. Indeed, it is a process that requires the witness to relinquish a degree of control and simply be present. Alan Wolfet, cited by Becker *et al*, calls this "companioning." In his list of what constitutes companioning, two attributes are especially significant for the purposes of this discussion:

Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and

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166. Interview with Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, conducted in person in New York City, July 16, 2008.

167. Dayle Friedman, ed., *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, 2nd edition (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2001 and 2005), xvii.

168. Chaplain Therese M. Becker, MA, MDiv; Greg Bodin, BDD, MDiv; and Rev. Arthur Schmidt, DMin, BCC, "Impact and Heroic Phases: Disaster Chaplains and Chaplaincy." *Disaster Spiritual Care*, 92.

logic.

Companioning is about going into the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.[169]

Joseph Potasnik describes companioning this way:

I have learned... that I am not blessed with all the answers; that it is inappropriate and somewhat presumptuous of me to walk into a tragic setting and think that whatever I am going to say is going to make a world of difference.[170]

Rather, the task of a witness is to accompany another human being through the messy chaos of lament. To do this, Stern says, we need to hear the holiness of the lamenter's words. Drawing on the work of her teacher, Rabbi Bonita Taylor, she distinguishes between a lament and a *kvetch* (complaint) saying, "The moment you remind yourself it's a lament, you listen with awe, you listen differently." She continues:

You see it in people's faces when there's a concert that is so moving that everybody's eyes and bodies are engaged. When you listen to a lament, that's the way your face looks. When you listen to a *kvetch*, it's like the life goes out of your face, your body language droops.[171]

To truly listen to a lament means to accept multivocality and ambiguity -- and our own discomfort with these things. In his article, "Lamentations and the Grief Process: A Psychological Reading," Paul Joyce suggests that Lamentations' lack of a coherent theological message mirrors the messiness of life after trauma.[172] Although he writes about the long-term grief process, his insights apply just as well to the immediate aftermath of disaster. Lamentations is inchoate precisely because the experience of loss is inchoate. The ability to hear and sit with inchoate and multivocal testimony is critical. In "Too Much, Too Ugly, Too Fast! How Faith Communities can Respond in Crisis and Disasters," Carol Hacker writes that during a

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169. *ibid.*, 93.

170. Potasnik, interview.

171. Stern, interview.

172. Paul Joyce, "Lamentations and the Grief Process: A Psychological Reading." *Biblical Interpretation* 1, 3 (1993), 304-320.

crisis clergy people may "feel lost, confused, anxious, and angry" and may "have more questions than answers and not know what to say or do."[173] Thus, companioning and witnessing requires that we accept a level of chaos within ourselves, just as within others.

Being a Witness for the Witnesses

Lamentations 5:11-14 is one of many verses that describes how no corner of society was left unscathed by the destruction. In these verses, women, virgins, princes, elders, youths, and young men suffer terrible pain and privation, underscoring the fact that collective tragedies touch the lives of innumerable people.[174] Borrowing a term used by Israelis to describe the far-reaching effects of terrorist attacks, Stern explains that there are "concentric circles of disaster impact." In the wake of 9/11, these concentric circles included all those whose ordinary work lives were sucked up into the many tasks associated with caring for victims. There was a seemingly endless list of such people. As the following three stories illustrate, this list includes rescue workers, lawyers, and boat captains, among many others. Nancy Wiener told me this story about her conversations with rescue workers:

> There were many times in the middle of a conversation when someone would just stop and say, "Have you walked through? Have you seen what it's like down there?" And this sense of, If you haven't been down there, no matter how much I try to describe it, you can't know it. There were numbers of times that I walked through the pile and then the pit. And if I saw someone that I had spoken with and they saw me walking through with my hard hat and my mask on, there was this moment of an expression of "Good" on their faces. One guy I had spoken with said, "You made it," and walked with me for a while. There was a need to speak but there was a need for knowing that they weren't the only people who had visual images of what the destruction was and what the reality was that they were walking into day

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173. Carol Hacker, "Too Much, Too Ugly, Too Fast! How Faith Communities can Respond in Crisis and Disasters," 7. www.ldr.org/resources.

174. See Chapter One, p. 27.

after day after day.[175]

At the 9/11 Family Assistance Centers, Craig Miller was particularly attentive to the needs of lawyers. He told me this story:

> The day they were doing death notifications, nobody had talked to the lawyers about what type of care they were going to need. Remember, these were lawyers; they did legal stuff. None of them were trained in this but, because they were officers of the court, only they were empowered to do whatever certification was needed. So a bunch of us went to the lawyers and introduced ourselves and said, "You are going to hear some really terrible things today. We are around if you need to talk to us." None of [the lawyers] had thought they were going to need to listen to this [over the course of their professional lives]. One lawyer just collapsed and cried. She was taking death notifications for someone her daughter's age.

He also told this story about the captain of a ferry that was taking victims' families down the Hudson River from Pier 94 to Ground Zero.

> I realized no one was talking to the boat driver. How did the boat captain feel? I went upstairs to talk to him. He was thrilled. [I was] the first person to talk to him in days.[176]

These stories convey how disaster chaplains are uniquely positioned to serve as witnesses for the wide cross-section of people whose lives are changed in small and large ways by what they see and hear following a disaster. Just as Lamentations is filled with the voices of various different survivors and witnesses, so too is any given shift in the work life of a disaster chaplain.

Witnesses Raise their Voices

Those who survive disaster have significant social, economic, and political needs. This brings us to an exploration of another view of silence, different from the one offered in the first section of this chapter that explored silence as part of lament. As she works with people who are wrestling with enormous obstacles in their efforts to re-build their lives, Matsa describes

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175. Wiener, interview.

176. Miller, interview.

different ways that clergy people use silence. She distinguishes between silence's power and silence's dangers. On the one hand, it can be profoundly helpful and necessary for pastors to walk in silence with a person. But, Matsa cautions, this silence needs to be followed up with some sort of "advocacy and movement."[177] In the face of great and ongoing suffering, then, part of the job of a chaplain or pastor is to break silences that resemble those of God in Lamentations. Silence can signify neglect and cover-up; at certain stages in the life cycle of a disaster, chaplains are morally obligated to take a stand against this type of silence.

In a powerful example, Matsa described how, two weeks prior to our conversation, a cross had burned on the lawn of an African American family who had recently moved to a New Orleans suburb historically known as home to David Duke followers.[178] Matsa told me that, as the city struggles to put itself back together, racially-motivated crimes are on the increase. There was only a small amount of media coverage of this particular incident. For Matsa, this constituted an unacceptable use of silence. However, she joined with 300 people, including clergy wearing religious garb, to support the family and re-sod the lawn.[179] Sometimes, Zion's call for a witness can be met with silent witness of another's testimony. Other times, the experience of witnessing another's suffering constitutes a moral call that we, too, raise our voices in protest.

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177. Matsa, interview.

178. Duke is a white supremacist and former Louisiana Representative. For more information, see *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements: Volume 4*, ed. Immanuel Ness (Armonk, NY: Sharpe Reference, 2004), 1440, and Duke's own website, davidduke.com.

179. Matsa, interview.

III.
"We are comforted by you; may you be comforted among those who are given comfort."[180]
Witnesses Become Testifiers: Self-care for Pastoral Caregivers

In research documented in *Disaster Spiritual Care*, Stephen Roberts reports that "after a disaster clergy are at a very significant risk for compassion fatigue and must work hard to prevent it."[181] As Shira Stern explains, "The problem with self-care is that it butts up with our need to do the job the way we think we need to do the job." This becomes especially acute in a crisis mode when we shift "from Code Orange to Code Red." She went on to explain,

> Self-care becomes secondary to everything else... It is very difficult to say, "I've had enough" or "I can't see another patient" or "I can't walk in there because the smell will overwhelm me."

The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that life goes on unchanged for many people even as disaster chaplains are completely swept up in the immediacy and urgency of the task at hand. She explains:

> [When doing disaster chaplaincy] you don't necessarily come home to your haven every day. So for two weeks you are in high disaster mode and the compassion fatigue doesn't actually set in until you have come home. It can be a delayed reaction... Someone will say something to you and you'll explode... not realizing that their reality and our reality is different. So self-care is realizing there is a world out there and it didn't necessarily experience the world as you experienced it. Realizing that is really important.

When teaching chaplains, Stern encourages them to think about what toll their work takes on each of their five senses. She described some of the sensory experiences of working at Ground Zero.

> The images of total shock as we entered the area that was Ground Zero... and realized we were looking at the largest cemetery we had every seen in a small, contained area. And the

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180. Lam. Rabb. 5:18.

181. Stephen Roberts, Kevin Ellers, and John Wilson, "Compassion Fatigue." *Disaster Spiritual Care*, 219.

> fact was, the cemetery was in the air we breathed and we knew it... [We asked ourselves,] When I brush the stuff off me on my way back to the ferry, is that someone's loved one I'm brushing off? The sense of touch, the sense of smell, the sense of sight. Hearing. The utter silence at the disaster site when they found a body. Every machine would stop. All the men would stand in place. And they would just watch... If you were aware of what had happened to the five senses -- your own -- then you might say, "I have to heal myself" every time you came home. "I have to take care of myself or I will not be able to do this tomorrow, I will not be able to come back to the site..." Self-care is a crucial part of this work because no one can do it without being touched.

Stern also urges each disaster chaplain to find her own sources of comfort, explaining that "the way to avoid being scarred is to understand what you need in order to renew yourself."[182] When talking about comfort, it is helpful to understand the word with its original, Middle English meaning. Rather than being about achieving physical ease, which is a relatively modern meaning of the word, "comfort" is derived from the Latin "fortis," meaning "strong." Comfort, then, means "strengthening," "support," or "consolation" -- all of which deepen our capacity, ultimately, to continue our work.[183]

The rabbis I interviewed had many different answers to the question of how they take care of themselves when they are actively engaged in disaster spiritual care. Stern described her practices as follows:

> I have to be outside... I need to read quietly... I went to services much more regularly [in the aftermath of 9/11]... I kept in touch with people I really needed to keep in touch with and I didn't postpone that. Re-connecting with things that were living was really important. Talking to friends I hadn't talked to in a while was really important, and avoiding all the stuff I didn't have to do and hated doing.[184]

Craig Miller echoed Stern's theme of the importance of connecting with people who are removed from the immediacy of the disaster. He said, "In terms of self-care, a lot of it was just talking to

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182. Stern, interview.

183. Glynnis Chantrell, *The Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 106.

184. Stern, interview.

people, very openly, about the experiences that were happening."[185] Seth Bernstein reiterated this, and also emphasized the importance of exercise. He told me, "I spent a lot of time with my son and daughter. I did some swimming... Doing some type of physical activity is very helpful."[186] Nancy Wiener, meanwhile, stopped watching television, so as to limit the ways 9/11 could enter her life when she was not actively engaged in disaster chaplaincy. She also distinguished between three different types of restorative activities, and understood that she needed to do each of them after each shift.

> Every time I worked I would make sure that immediately afterwards I would have time by myself, time with [my partner], and then we would have plans with friends doing something that I enjoyed, so that I would have the possibility of all my soothing stuff being able to take place *ad seriatum*.

Despite this, the cumulative short-term burden eventually became too much. Wiener told me, "I reached a point in January or February where I said, 'I just can't do this anymore.' It was taking a really big toll on me." For Wiener, the rest of her life continued as if 9/11 had not happened, further exacerbating the difficulty of maintaining good self-care practices. As she explained, she was still working her usual full-time job and maintaining all her other responsbilities, while also going to Ground Zero or Family Assistance Centers several times each week.[187]

Seth Bernstein and Shira Stern, meanwhile, both lost their fathers in, respectively, August and September 2001. Stern's father died 11 days after 9/11 while she was in the first weeks of what became a three-month period working at the Liberty State Park Family Assistance

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185. Miller, interview.
186. Bernstein, interview.
187. Wiener, interview.

Center.[188] Bernstein's father had died in August; in his words, 9/11 effectively "ended my *sheloshim*." In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Bernstein stayed in Massachussetts to support his congregation. He later spent part of December working at Ground Zero. His work as a congregational rabbi and disaster chaplain was complicated, however, by his own family's traumatic experience of 9/11. Bernstein's son had worked across the street from the World Trade Center and, for four hours, the family "did not know if he was dead or alive." As the post-9/11 weeks unfolded, his son, who had witnessed the attacks, developed PTSD symptoms. Bernstein's tasks, then, encompassed the need to care for his family, his congregation, and New Yorkers who had survived and witnessed the attacks, as well as attend to his own grief over his father's death and his self-care needs.[189]

In Louisiana and Mississippi, meanwhile, Myrna Matsa described the scale of the problem of burnout among clergy people and the development of an institutional response to this. She explained that in the three years since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita wreaked havoc to an area of Louisiana and Mississippi the size of Great Britain, many of the Jewish clergy people who had been working at synagogues in the area have left. The disaster itself and the ensuing re-building process took an enormous toll on those whose vocation is to support the bereaved and the displaced. In response to the scale of the problem of burnout among clergy working in disaster zones, the New York Board of Rabbis and United Jewish Communities teamed up to send Myrna Matsa to the Gulf Coast. In her words, "I am a caregiver to caregivers so they can continue doing their work." However, the circle of support does not end with Matsa. She, too, is in

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188. Stern, interview.

189. Bernstein, interview. In Jewish practice, *sheloshim* is the 30 day period of mourning following the death of an immediate family member.

regular contact with a number of different clergy people who supervise and support her.[190]

For those who are doing disaster chaplaincy without the benefit of someone like Matsa to support them, informal de-briefing at the end of every shift is essential, not least because isolation appears to be a "common thread" among those who suffer from compassion fatigue.[191] As Roberts said when I interviewed him, "When I'm doing direct care, I don't walk away without having sat with someone at the end of the shift and talked about it."[192] To intentionally combat isolation, those chaplains who volunteered with the American Red Cross after 9/11 participated in "mandatory defusing sessions" at the end of each shift and a much longer "debriefing program" when their volunteer service ended.[193] As Craig Miller told me, "I made sure I always got de-briefed [when working at Ground Zero or Family Assistance Centers]. In fact, the one time I didn't, I really felt it."[194]

As described in Chapter One, Lamentations is organized around the twin acts of testifying and witnessing. Throughout the book's five chapters, the voices of testifiers and witnesses overlap with each other. In real life, too, these voices are intertwined. No one is left unscathed by disaster. By working at disaster sites, chaplains join the "concentric circles" of those whose lives are touched and changed by the event. When they de-brief, they join those who seek comfort and relief by testifying in the presence of a witness. Thus, chaplains, too become testifiers, lamenters, and storytellers. To witness suffering brings its own trauma; it contributes to our own brokenness. When Matsa told me the story about the cross-burning and the

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190. Matsa, interview.
191. Roberts, *et al.*, "Compassion Fatigue," 211.
192. Roberts, interview.
193. Roberts, *et al.*, "Compassion Fatigue," 220.
194. Miller, interview.

community's response to it she said:

> You are getting my raw reaction. I am still working through it. My deep disappointment in how we continue, as human beings, to hurt each other, and the racial divides. I find [these things] very painful and troublesome. I was deeply, deeply touched by the prayer service around the re-sodding. When you heard the 300 or so voices responding to the prayer leader, there was something very magical in it, to hear all those voices coming together in a common prayer. There is a mix of feelings, a lot of mix... I think I am lamenting that the world isn't the way I would like it to be right now. Since [the cross-burning incident], I have been on the verge of tears every day.[195]

It is critically important that chaplains and clergy people, like all other helping professionals, are able to see and talk about our own brokenness -- are able to raise a "howl of pain" and a cry of lament. Frank takes this idea further, arguing that there is a symbiotic relationship between the wounded storyteller and the person who hears the story: "Listening and telling are phases of healing; the healer and the storyteller are one."[196] Thus, like Rabbi Akiva, chaplains both give and receive comfort.

IV.
"To what can I compare you?"[197]
Are the Texts of the Biblical and Rabbinic Lamentations Useful Pastoral Care Tools?

When I began this study, I wanted to know how the texts of the biblical and rabbinic Lamentations might be useful to rabbis working with survivors of collective disasters. I wanted to know if it is possible to use these texts in much the same way I used Psalms of Lament in hospital rooms. To my surprise, the rabbis to whom I talked reported that they rarely use liturgy, scripture, or *aggadah* (non-legal rabbinic material) in their pastoral work with survivors of disasters. As Wiener said,

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195. Matsa, interview.
196. Frank, 183.
197. Lam. 2:13.

> It almost felt to me that when I thought of something that was aggadic, it was such a pale something to offer. I had just heard a story, however coherent or incoherent, and that was our story for the day.[198]

Of all the rabbis I interviewed, only Stern integrates Lamentations into her clinical work. In her words:

> I use the imagery of Lamentations to try to articulate the patient's truth. I'll take a passage in Chapter 3, for instance, and I'll read this until I hear my patient's voice coming through and then I will lament in her name in the format of *Eichah* and find an opportunity to merge the sacred text with what I think are [the client's] sacred words.

Stern then presents this new poem to the client, saying, "This is what I heard and I want you to see the sacred text you have created."[199] However, this is work that can only be done with people with whom Stern has a long-term, ongoing relationship. Thus, it was not possible to create poems for people with whom she worked on a short-term basis at Family Assistance Centers.[200]

As described earlier in this chapter, Stern encourages people with whom she is working to let loose their words of protest. The biblical Lamentations and Hasidic stories that describe rabbis venting their anger at God are useful models for this, reminding us that Jewish tradition holds an honored place for complaint and anger. In this spirit, we too can create space for lament and protest in our own lives. Thus, O'Connor describes Lamentations as "an echo chamber and a hall of mirrors." She explains, "Its reflections and sounds need not be literal or mimic the readers' worlds for them to find themselves in the world of the text."[201] I would argue that Lamentations Rabbah can be understood in the same way. Given this, it seems to me that the primary usefulness of the two texts is not so much as a set of stories to hold up to survivors but, rather, as

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198. Wiener, interview.
199. Stern, interview.
200. Email from Shira Stern, dated November 23, 2008.
201. O'Connor, 103-4.

stories to hold close to ourselves to remind ourselves of the multiple emotional cadences within the Jewish textual tradition.

> When they write about spiritual preparedness, Becker *et al* insist that we ask ourselves: What does God ask in the midst of a disaster? What do our holy texts tell us? What does our tradition tell us? What motivates us to reach out our hearts, to stand with another in deep suffering, to risk our own suffering?... Remember. Hold your holy texts close. Stay "prayed up."[202]

This, it seems to me, is what Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah have to offer us. They remind us that Jewish tradition has a place for howls of lament, for brutally honest descriptions of suffering, and for stories about re-building, reconstruction, and hope. They remind us that we are not the first generation to experience the destruction of homes, livelihoods, cities, and the literal and metaphorical maps that hold our lives together. We are not the first to cry out that we do not know how we will go on; nor are we the first to find a way to go on anyway.

We are the inheritors of a vast textual tradition filled with those who cried out and those who listened. We know that communal laments fulfilled a practical, sociological function. Even if the God of Lamentations is silent and absent, living people heard these laments and cried along with the lamenters. Similarly, the Rabbis recorded their stories so they could be heard and repeated and passed down to new generations. In all of these laments and stories, the categories of witness and testifier, lamenter and listener, are slippery and overlapping. All of us, even those whose professional lives involve listening to people express their deepest pain, must sometimes be the lamenter. In Petichta 24 of Lamentations Rabbah, God tells a story through which God expresses extraordinary grief and loss.[203] In this way, God becomes our role model as we find

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[202.] Becker, *et al.*, "Impact and Heroic Phases," 87.

[203.] See Chapter Two, pp. 57-59.

sustenance and solace in the great repository of Jewish tradition and give voice to our own stories.

Conclusion:
Theologies of Pastoral Care

In the preceding chapters, I present textual analyses of Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah that show how these texts embody the drive to describe suffering, to lament, to tell stories, to protest, to sit in silence, and to serve as witnesses in the wake of suffering. I argue that Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah are sacred texts that remind us that holiness is intrinsic to our cries of pain, just as it is intrinsic to our cries of joy. I follow the work of scholars like Brueggeman, Linafelt, Adler, and O'Connor, who argue that Lamentations should be read and understood, first and foremost, as a "howl of pain." In its unrelenting descriptions of suffering, the poems' voices overlap with each other, blurring the lines between testifier and witness. In the midst of God's stubborn silence, we, the readers/ listeners, step into the role of witness and enter into the experience of suffering.

In Lamentations Rabbah, the Rabbis offer laments and stories that describe the suffering of an entirely different time period. Like the poets of Lamentations, they insist that suffering must be described and heard. In their stories, even God must respond to suffering, becoming a testifier who uses rabbinic literature's rich repository as a model for new stories. In addition to this, the Rabbis look beyond suffering. They remind us of the flow of history over lifetimes and generations, and they describe times in which rebuilding was possible and comfort was available. Crucially, they acknowledge that even those who provide comfort to others need to be comforted themselves.

In the chapter dealing with contemporary disaster chaplaincy issues, I suggest that lament, storytelling, silence, and protest are all important pieces of the pastoral journey. In these

journeys, the chaplain serves as a spiritual witness. But, as we know from Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah, the lines between testifier and witness are easily blurred. Thus, pastoral caregivers also become lamenters in need of witnesses, and this becomes an essential element of self-care. In journeys that revolve around witnessing and testifying, the poems and stories of Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah remind us of the multiple emotional cadences of Judaism's sacred canon. Lament and protest are just as much a part of our textual inheritance as praise and celebration, and the biblical and rabbinic Lamentations are sacred texts that affirm the sanctity of our words and reactions in the immediate aftermath of catastrophe and during the long, hard process of re-building. They provide us with a blueprint for testifying and for witnessing, for telling the truth about pain and suffering and for being willing to listen to those truths.

As I describe in Chapter Three, the rabbis I interviewed reported that people with whom they worked rarely mentioned God. Regardless, they understood their work as profoundly holy. When I asked these rabbis about their theologies of pastoral care, many of them described how these theologies revolve around being present for others. For Seth Bernstein, this presence is a way to imitate God and walk in God's ways. He said, "As God visited Abraham at the tent when he had his circumcision, I try to visit people at the tent."[204] For Simkha Weintraub, the holiness lies in the fact that both he and the client/ patient are made in the image of God. In his words, the client/ patient is a "fellow *tzelem elohim.*" He explains, "It means I am a fellow traveler. That even though I didn't have the exact same experience, I know something about vulnerability and loss from my own life and I want to bring something of myself to travel with them."[205] For

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[204]. Bernstein, interview.

[205]. Weintraub, interview.

Stephen Roberts, the obligation to be present for others is a covenantal obligation. He says,

> We are truly the partners of God in finishing creation. It's a theology of covenant and a theology of feeling commanded to repair the world -- and to do it in a way that makes sense for me with the gifts that I have.[206]

In all three of these approaches, pastoral journeys -- which I understand as the act of lamenting and/or telling stories in the presence of another person -- are steeped in *kedushah* (holiness). We walk in God's ways, we have a fundamental connection to all of humanity because we are all made in the image of God, and we are partners with God in completing the perpetually unfinished task of creation. This is true even though God's name may never be mentioned along the way. It is true even though the lamenter/ storyteller may, like Zion in the biblical Lamentations, feel God's utter absence. Thus, an encounter can be filled with *kedushah* regardless of whether God's presence can be tangibly experienced by the person who is in pain.

My own work as a chaplain, my conversations with the rabbis I interviewed, and my study of Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah lead me to offer another theology of pastoral care, one that revolves around the Shekhinah's presence in the midst of the world's brokenness. As already described, the Rabbis of Antiquity had two ways of understanding what happened to the Shekhinah after the Destruction of the Temple. In one version, she ascended to Heaven, to God's former abode, far from the places where we live our everyday lives. In another version, she stayed right here on earth with God's suffering people. It is to this second interpretation that I want to turn my attention. In Pirkei Avot, which is part of the Mishnah and the earliest layer of Rabbinic literature, the Rabbis offer this teaching about the Shekhinah:

> Rabbi Halafta ben Dosa of Kfar Hananya said, When ten people sit together and occupy themselves with the study of Torah, the Shekhinah abides among them, as it is said: *God stands in the divine assembly.* (Psalm 82:1) From where do we know that the same applies even to five? It is said: *God founded God's band upon the earth.* (Amos 9:6) From where

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206. Roberts, interview.

> do we know that the same applies even to three? It is said: *In the midst of divine beings, God judges.* (Psalm 82:1) From where do we know that the same applies even to two? It is said: *Then those who were in awe of God spoke, each person to his neighbor, and God was attentive and heard.* (Malachi 3:16) From where do we know that the same applies even to one? It is said: *In every place where I cause my name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you.* (Exodus 20:21).[207]

Lamentations Rabbah is, in part, a collection of *midrashim* about re-building, about living on after catastrophe. These lines from Pirkei Avot are part of this process of re-building. In the wake of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the emerging Rabbinic project required the formulation of completely new ways of encountering God. These words from Pirkei Avot are a bold assertion that the Shekhinah, God's presence, dwells anywhere that people are engaged in the study of Torah – no matter how broken the post-destruction world might be. For the Rabbis, the new conception of Jewish life without the Temple revolved around three things: Torah (study), *avodah* (prayer), and *gemilut chasadim* (the performance of *mitzvot*). I would like to propose that we extend this passage to cover all three of these things, which would include pastoral care.

Indeed, this idea already exists, in some form, in rabbinic thinking. According to the laws of *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick), the Shekhinah rests above the head of the sick person.[208] Whether or not the sick person knows it or experiences it, the Rabbis teach that the Shekhinah is present in the midst of their suffering. Pastoral conversations in hospital rooms and at disaster sites are often filled with stories of brokenness, yet rabbinic Judaism teaches that the Shekhinah dwells in the midst of them, just as she dwells in any *beit midrash* or synagogue. Indeed, the Shekhinah resides in these conversations, affirming the holiness of the pastoral encounter. In

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[207]. Pirkei Avot 3:7.

[208]. Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, 335:3. I am grateful to Nancy Wiener, my thesis advisor, for pointing out this teaching's relevance to the current discussion.

Exodus 20:21, God says that God will bestow God's blessing on those who mention God's name. Whether or not a pastoral exchange involves explicit mention of God, I believe that pastoral presence is a metaphorical mention of God's name, a way of sanctifying the most profane of places and exchanges. And so, the holiness of the encounter lies in the sanctity of two people sharing words, silence, and time as they give voice to cries of pain and seek new narratives after loss.

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Appendix One:
The Book of Lamentations - A Translation

Chapter One

1 Alas! She sits alone, the city once full of people. She has become like a widow, once great among the nations. Once a prince among countries, she has become a forced laborer.	א אֵיכָה יָשְׁבָה בָדָד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עָם הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבָּתִי בַגּוֹיִם שָׂרָתִי בַּמְּדִינוֹת הָיְתָה לָמַס:
2 Bitterly she sobs by night[209] with tears on her cheeks. There is no one to comfort her from among all who love her. All her friends have betrayed her, they have become her enemies.	ב בָּכוֹ תִבְכֶּה בַּלָּיְלָה וְדִמְעָתָהּ עַל לֶחֱיָהּ אֵין־לָהּ מְנַחֵם מִכָּל־אֹהֲבֶיהָ כָּל־רֵעֶיהָ בָּגְדוּ בָהּ הָיוּ לָהּ לְאֹיְבִים:
3 Judah went into exile after suffering and great toil. She dwelt among the nations but found no rest. All who pursued her overtook her in a narrow place.	ג גָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה מֵעֹנִי וּמֵרֹב עֲבֹדָה הִיא יָשְׁבָה בַגּוֹיִם לֹא מָצְאָה מָנוֹחַ כָּל־רֹדְפֶיהָ הִשִּׂיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים:
4 Zion's roads are filled with mourning, no pilgrims come for festivals. All of her gates are desolate, her priests groan, Her virgins grieve, she is bitter.	ד דַּרְכֵי צִיּוֹן אֲבֵלוֹת מִבְּלִי בָּאֵי מוֹעֵד כָּל־שְׁעָרֶיהָ שׁוֹמֵמִין כֹּהֲנֶיהָ נֶאֱנָחִים בְּתוּלֹתֶיהָ נוּגוֹת וְהִיא מַר־לָהּ:

[209] The infinitive absolute adds emphasis that English does not have. Berlin renders the phrase as *Bitterly she sobs at night* and Hillers as *By night she weeps aloud.*

5 Her enemies have gained mastery, her foes rest easy, Because God[210] made her suffer for her many sins. Her children were driven as prisoners before the foe.	ה הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ אֹיְבֶיהָ שָׁלוּ כִּי־יְהוָה הוֹגָהּ עַל רֹב־פְּשָׁעֶיהָ עוֹלָלֶיהָ הָלְכוּ שְׁבִי לִפְנֵי־צָר:
6 Departed from Dear Zion[211] is all her splendor. Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture, And go on without strength before the pursuer.	ו וַיֵּצֵא מִן־בַּת־צִיּוֹן כָּל־הֲדָרָהּ הָיוּ שָׂרֶיהָ כְּאַיָּלִים לֹא־מָצְאוּ מִרְעֶה וַיֵּלְכוּ בְלֹא־כֹחַ לִפְנֵי רוֹדֵף:
7 Jerusalem remembered in the days of her misery and trouble all her treasures of earlier times. When her people fell into the hands of foes and there was none to help her, The enemies saw her and mocked her collapse.	ז זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם יְמֵי עָנְיָהּ וּמְרוּדֶיהָ כֹּל מַחֲמֻדֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם בִּנְפֹל עַמָּהּ בְּיַד־צָר וְאֵין עוֹזֵר לָהּ רָאוּהָ צָרִים שָׂחֲקוּ עַל מִשְׁבַּתָּהּ:

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210. Throughout this translation, I render יְהוָה as God. While some writers prefer the gender neutral name The Eternal, I have chosen to use God because I think it is the most accessible and readily-understandable name used by Jews and Christians. However, I use masculine pronouns for God, because the gender-neutral pronoun form makes awkward the English rendering of the poetry.

211. Berlin (p. 12) explains that the moniker *Bat X* "connotes emotional tenderness or protectiveness" and is also "a term of endearment." She follows exegetes who translate Bat as "Dear," which is what I have done too. Hillers (p. xxxviii) points out that the names "help make explicit the personification of the people or city as a woman." As he points out, it is incorrect, therefore, to translate the names as Daughter *of* Zion, etc.

8 Jerusalem has sinned terribly, therefore she must wander aimlessly.[212] All who honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness. She herself groans and falls back.	ח חֵטְא חָטְאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל־כֵּן לְנִידָה הָיָתָה כָּל־מְכַבְּדֶיהָ הִזִּילוּהָ כִּי־רָאוּ עֶרְוָתָהּ גַּם־הִיא נֶאֶנְחָה וַתָּשָׁב אָחוֹר:
9 Her impurity is on her skirts, she did not think of the future. She has come down astonishingly with no one to comfort her. Look, God, upon my misery, because the enemy is made great.[213]	ט טֻמְאָתָהּ בְּשׁוּלֶיהָ לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ וַתֵּרֶד פְּלָאִים אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ רְאֵה יְהוָה אֶת־עָנְיִי כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב:
10 The enemy spread his hands over all her treasures. Indeed, she saw the nations enter her temple, Concerning whom you had commanded, "They shall not enter your assembly."	י יָדוֹ פָּרַשׂ צָר עַל כָּל־מַחֲמַדֶּיהָ כִּי־רָאֲתָה גוֹיִם בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָה לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בַקָּהָל לָךְ:
11 All her people are groaning, searching for bread. They gave their treasure for food to sustain life. Look, God, and see, I have become worthless.	יא כָּל־עַמָּהּ נֶאֱנָחִים מְבַקְּשִׁים לֶחֶם נָתְנוּ מַחֲמַדֵּיהֶם בְּאֹכֶל לְהָשִׁיב נָפֶשׁ רְאֵה יְהוָה וְהַבִּיטָה כִּי הָיֵיתִי זוֹלֵלָה

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212. JPS renders עַל־כֵּן לְנִידָה הָיָתָה as *therefore she is become a mockery* and Hillers as *people shake their heads at her*. Berlin (pp. 53-4) notes that both of these renderings are based on the translation of the root נ-ו-ד as "to move or shake [the head]" or "to mock or deride." Berlin, however, chooses to translate the root as "wander." She renders the phrase as *therefore has she been banished*. My choice of *wander aimlessly* is in this same semantic range. Berlin notes that it is incorrect to translate לְנִידָה as *menstruant* because the root of this word is נ-ד-ד. She also makes the point that being a menstruant refers to ritual impurity, not moral impurity, and therefore should not be associated with sin. However, she points out that the references to "nakedness" and "impurity" in the subsequent lines mean "[i]t may be best to conclude that all three associations adhere to the word, and the dominant one shifts from line to line -- from the consequence of sin, to the scorn of others, to the idea of nakedness and impurity in her skirts." See also note on 1:17.

213. Berlin translates this phrase as *for the enemy is triumphant*. In her note (p. 46), she explains that the phrase הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב means *the enemy boasts about his superiority*. However, this wordy phrase loses the terseness of the Hebrew.

12 May it never happen to you, all you who pass along the road. Look and see: Is there any pain like my pain, that I was dealt, With which God afflicted me on the day of God's burning anger.	יב לוֹא אֲלֵיכֶם כָּל־עֹבְרֵי דָּרֶךְ הַבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ אִם־יֵשׁ מַכְאוֹב כְּמַכְאֹבִי אֲשֶׁר עוֹלַל לִי אֲשֶׁר הוֹגָה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ:
13 From on high God sent fire into my bones and sent it down. He spread a net over my legs and sent me backwards. He gave me desolation and sickness all day long.	יג מִמָּרוֹם שָׁלַח־אֵשׁ בְּעַצְמֹתַי וַיִּרְדֶּנָּה פָּרַשׂ רֶשֶׁת לְרַגְלַי הֱשִׁיבַנִי אָחוֹר נְתָנַנִי שֹׁמֵמָה כָּל־הַיּוֹם דָּוֶה:
14 My yoke of transgressions was fashioned,[214] Bound together by God's hand.[215] They placed it upon my neck and made me weak. God gave me into the hands of those against whom I cannot stand.	יד נִשְׂקַד עֹל פְּשָׁעַי בְּיָדוֹ יִשְׂתָּרְגוּ עָלוּ עַל־צַוָּארִי הִכְשִׁיל כֹּחִי נְתָנַנִי אֲדֹנָי בִּידֵי לֹא־אוּכַל קוּם:
15 God tossed aside my strong ones, the God who is close to me. He proclaimed a set time against me to destroy my young men. He trod the winepress of Dear Maiden Judah.	טו סִלָּה כָל־אַבִּירַי אֲדֹנָי בְּקִרְבִּי קָרָא עָלַי מוֹעֵד לְשַׁבֵּר בַּחוּרָי גַּת דָּרַךְ אֲדֹנָי לִבְתוּלַת בַּת־יְהוּדָה:

214. Berlin notes (p. 46) that the word נִשְׂקַד does not appear anywhere else in the Bible "and has been the subject of much conjecture... I have chosen a neutral word to convey that a yoke is being made." I have borrowed Berlin's translation of this phrase.

215. BDB translates the root ש-ר-ג as *be intertwined* (p. 974). I have used this literal translation here but it is worth noting that JPS renders the entire phrase as *The yoke of my offenses is bound fast,/ Lashed tight by His hand.* This rendering, while less literal, conveys the sense that God is responsible for Israel's suffering.

16 For these things, I weep; My eyes, my eyes run with water. Because a comforter is far from me, one who can restore my soul. My children have become desolate because the enemy has prevailed.	טז עַל־אֵלֶּה	אֲנִי בוֹכִיָּה עֵינִי	עֵינִי יֹרְדָה מַיִם כִּי־רָחַק מִמֶּנִּי מְנַחֵם מֵשִׁיב נַפְשִׁי הָיוּ בָנַי שׁוֹמֵמִים כִּי גָבַר אוֹיֵב:
17 Zion spread out her hands, there is no one to comfort her. God has commanded for Jacob that he is surrounded by enemies. Jerusalem has become a menstruating woman[216] among them.	יז פֵּרְשָׂה צִיּוֹן בְּיָדֶיהָ	אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ צִוָּה יְהוָה לְיַעֲקֹב סְבִיבָיו צָרָיו הָיְתָה יְרוּשָׁלַם לְנִדָּה בֵּינֵיהֶם:
18 God is in the right because I rebelled against his mouth. Listen well, all you peoples, and see my pain. My young women and men have gone into captivity.	יח צַדִּיק הוּא יְהוָה	כִּי פִיהוּ מָרִיתִי[217] שִׁמְעוּ־נָא כָל־עַמִּים וּרְאוּ מַכְאֹבִי בְּתוּלֹתַי וּבַחוּרָי הָלְכוּ בַשֶּׁבִי:
19 I called to all who love me; they deceived me. My priests and my elders died in the city While seeking food to sustain their lives.	יט קָרָאתִי לַמְאַהֲבַי	הֵמָּה רִמּוּנִי כֹּהֲנַי וּזְקֵנַי בָּעִיר גָּוָעוּ כִּי־בִקְשׁוּ אֹכֶל לָמוֹ וְיָשִׁיבוּ אֶת־נַפְשָׁם:
20 See that I am distressed, God, my belly churns, My heart is turned over inside me because I am truly bitter. Outside, the sword bereaved; in the house, there is death.	כ רְאֵה יְהוָה כִּי־צַר־לִי	מֵעַי חֳמַרְמָרוּ נֶהְפַּךְ לִבִּי בְּקִרְבִּי כִּי מָרוֹ מָרִיתִי מִחוּץ שִׁכְּלָה־חֶרֶב בַּבַּיִת כַּמָּוֶת:[218]

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216. Berlin argues that, unlike in 1:8, Jerusalem is being compared to a menstruant here. She explains, "Zion is seeking a comforter, but God made those around her -- her allies who should comfort her -- into enemies, so that she has no comforter." That is, she is like a *nidda* which whom no one can have sexual relations (p. 59).

217. See Chapter One, pp. 21-23 for a discussion of the translations of מָרִיתִי in 1:18 and 1:20.

218. See Chapter One, pp. 27-28 for a discussion of the asseverative *kaf* in כַּמָּוֶת.

21 They heard me groan, "There is no one to comfort me." All of my enemies heard my distress and rejoiced that you had caused it. Bring the day you proclaimed and they will be like me.	כא שָׁמְעוּ כִּי נֶאֱנָחָה אָנִי אֵין מְנַחֵם לִי כָּל־אֹיְבַי שָׁמְעוּ רָעָתִי שָׂשׂוּ כִּי אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ הֵבֵאתָ יוֹם־קָרָאתָ וְיִהְיוּ כָמוֹנִי:
22 Let all their wickedness come before you, And deal with them as you dealt with me for all my crimes Because my groans are many and my heart is sick.	כב תָּבֹא כָל־רָעָתָם לְפָנֶיךָ וְעוֹלֵל לָמוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר עוֹלַלְתָּ לִי עַל כָּל־פְּשָׁעָי כִּי־רַבּוֹת אַנְחֹתַי וְלִבִּי דַוָי:

Chapter Two

1 Alas! With his anger, God makes Dear Zion an abomination. God sent down from heaven to earth Israel's splendor, And did not remember his footstool on the day of his anger.	א אֵיכָה יָעִיב בְּאַפּוֹ אֲדֹנָי אֶת־בַּת־צִיּוֹן הִשְׁלִיךְ מִשָּׁמַיִם אֶרֶץ תִּפְאֶרֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־זָכַר הֲדֹם־רַגְלָיו בְּיוֹם אַפּוֹ:
2 God devoured without mercy all of Jacob's dwellings.[219] In his wrath, God destroyed Dear Judah's fortresses. He brought down to the ground and desecrated the kingdom and its princes.	ב בִּלַּע אֲדֹנָי לֹא חָמַל אֵת כָּל־נְאוֹת יַעֲקֹב הָרַס בְּעֶבְרָתוֹ מִבְצְרֵי בַת־יְהוּדָה הִגִּיעַ לָאָרֶץ חִלֵּל מַמְלָכָה וְשָׂרֶיהָ:

219. נְאוֹת could be translated as either *dwellings* or *pastures*. (See *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 627, for the two meanings of the root). I have rendered the word as *dwellings* because the poet is describing destruction in an urban, not rural, setting.

3 In his wrath, God cut off every horn of Israel; He turned back his right hand in the face of the enemy; And he burned in Jacob like a flaming fire, consuming all around.	ג גָּדַע בָּחֳרִי־אַף כֹּל קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵשִׁיב אָחוֹר יְמִינוֹ מִפְּנֵי אוֹיֵב וַיִּבְעַר בְּיַעֲקֹב כְּאֵשׁ לָהָבָה אָכְלָה סָבִיב:
4 God bent his bow like an enemy, He poised his right hand. Like a foe, he killed all those who delight the eye. In the tent of Dear Zion, God poured out his wrath.	ד דָּרַךְ קַשְׁתּוֹ כְּאוֹיֵב נָצַב יְמִינוֹ כְּצָר וַיַּהֲרֹג כֹּל מַחֲמַדֵּי־עָיִן בְּאֹהֶל בַּת־צִיּוֹן שָׁפַךְ כָּאֵשׁ חֲמָתוֹ:
5 God became an enemy, he consumed Israel. He devoured all her citadels, cut down her fortresses And made plentiful in Dear Judah moaning and mourning.	ה הָיָה אֲדֹנָי	כְּאוֹיֵב בִּלַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּלַּע כָּל־אַרְמְנוֹתֶיהָ שִׁחֵת מִבְצָרָיו וַיֶּרֶב בְּבַת־יְהוּדָה תַּאֲנִיָּה וַאֲנִיָּה:
6 God demolished his sukkah as if in a garden, and destroyed his tabernacle. He caused everything to be forgotten in Zion, festival and Shabbat, And in fierce anger he spurned king and priest.	ו וַיַּחְמֹס כַּגָּן שֻׂכּוֹ שִׁחֵת מוֹעֲדוֹ שִׁכַּח יְהוָה	בְּצִיּוֹן מוֹעֵד וְשַׁבָּת וַיִּנְאַץ בְּזַעַם־אַפּוֹ מֶלֶךְ וְכֹהֵן:
7 God rejected his own altar, rejected his sanctuary. He delivered into the hands of the enemy the walls of her citadels. They raised their voices in God's house as on a festival day.	ז זָנַח אֲדֹנָי	מִזְבְּחוֹ נֵאַר מִקְדָּשׁוֹ הִסְגִּיר בְּיַד־אוֹיֵב חוֹמֹת אַרְמְנוֹתֶיהָ קוֹל נָתְנוּ בְּבֵית־יְהוָה כְּיוֹם מוֹעֵד:

8 God planned to destroy the walls of Dear Zion. He stretched out a line and did not hold back his hand from devouring. He caused rampart and wall to mourn, languishing together.	ח חָשַׁב יְהוָה לְהַשְׁחִית חוֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן נָטָה קָו לֹא־הֵשִׁיב יָדוֹ מִבַּלַּע וַיַּאֲבֶל־חֵל וְחוֹמָה יַחְדָּו אֻמְלָלוּ:
9 Sunk into the ground are her gates, defeated and broken are her bars. Her kings and princes are among the nations, the Teaching is no more; Her prophets, too, find no vision from God.	ט טָבְעוּ בָאָרֶץ שְׁעָרֶיהָ אִבַּד וְשִׁבַּר בְּרִיחֶיהָ מַלְכָּהּ וְשָׂרֶיהָ בַגּוֹיִם אֵין תּוֹרָה גַּם־נְבִיאֶיהָ לֹא־מָצְאוּ חָזוֹן מֵיְהוָה:
10 They sat on the ground and wailed, the elders of Dear Zion; They put dirt on their heads, put on sackcloth, They brought their heads down to the ground, the maidens of Jerusalem.	י יֵשְׁבוּ לָאָרֶץ יִדְּמוּ זִקְנֵי בַת־צִיּוֹן הֶעֱלוּ עָפָר עַל־רֹאשָׁם חָגְרוּ שַׂקִּים הוֹרִידוּ לָאָרֶץ רֹאשָׁן בְּתוּלֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם:
11 My eyes are worn out with tears, my belly churns, My liver bile is poured out on the ground, on account of the breaking of my Dear People, As children and babies fainted in the squares of the city.	יא כָּלוּ בַדְּמָעוֹת עֵינַי חָמַרְמְרוּ מֵעָי נִשְׁפַּךְ לָאָרֶץ כְּבֵדִי עַל־שֶׁבֶר בַּת־עַמִּי בֵּעָטֵף עוֹלֵל וְיוֹנֵק בִּרְחֹבוֹת קִרְיָה:
12 They said to their mothers, "Where are grain and wine?" They fainted as if they were wounded in the streets of the city As their lives slipped away in their mothers' breasts.	יב לְאִמֹּתָם יֹאמְרוּ אַיֵּה דָגָן וָיָיִן בְּהִתְעַטְּפָם כֶּחָלָל בִּרְחֹבוֹת עִיר בְּהִשְׁתַּפֵּךְ נַפְשָׁם אֶל־חֵיק אִמֹּתָם:

13 How can I be your witness? To what can I liken you, Dear Jerusalem? To what can I compare you so I can console you, Dear Maiden Zion? Because your ruin is as big as the sea, Who will heal you?	יג מָה־אָעִידֵךְ מָה אֲדַמֶּה־לָּךְ הַבַּת יְרוּשָׁלִַם מָה אַשְׁוֶה־לָּךְ וַאֲנַחֲמֵךְ בְּתוּלַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן כִּי־גָדוֹל כַּיָּם שִׁבְרֵךְ מִי יִרְפָּא־לָךְ:
14 Your prophets saw visions that were empty and insubstantial; They did not reveal your iniquity so as to restore your fortunes; They saw for you oracles that were empty and deceptive.	יד נְבִיאַיִךְ חָזוּ לָךְ שָׁוְא וְתָפֶל וְלֹא־גָלוּ עַל־עֲוֹנֵךְ לְהָשִׁיב שְׁבִיתֵךְ וַיֶּחֱזוּ לָךְ מַשְׂאוֹת שָׁוְא וּמַדּוּחִים:
15 They clapped their hands at you, everyone who passed by, They hissed and shook their heads at Dear Jerusalem, "Is this the city that they say is perfect beauty, the delight of all the earth?"	טו סָפְקוּ עָלַיִךְ כַּפַּיִם כָּל־עֹבְרֵי דָּרֶךְ שָׁרְקוּ וַיָּנִעוּ רֹאשָׁם עַל־בַּת יְרוּשָׁלִָם הֲזֹאת הָעִיר שֶׁיֹּאמְרוּ כְּלִילַת יֹפִי מָשׂוֹשׂ לְכָל־הָאָרֶץ:
16 They opened their mouths at you, all of your enemies; They hissed and gnashed their teeth, they said, "We consumed [her] This is the day we waited for; we have found it and we have seen it."	טז פָּצוּ עָלַיִךְ פִּיהֶם כָּל־אוֹיְבַיִךְ שָׁרְקוּ וַיַּחֲרְקוּ־שֵׁן אָמְרוּ בָּלָעְנוּ אַךְ זֶה הַיּוֹם שֶׁקִּוִּינֶהוּ מָצָאנוּ רָאִינוּ:
17 God has done as he had planned, He fulfilled his word with violence, That which he commanded from days of old. God destroyed and did not have mercy. The enemy rejoices over us and lifts up the horn of your foes.	יז עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם בִּצַּע אִמְרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מִימֵי־קֶדֶם הָרַס וְלֹא חָמָל וַיְשַׂמַּח עָלַיִךְ אוֹיֵב הֵרִים קֶרֶן צָרָיִךְ:

18 Their heart cried out to God. Wall of Dear Zion, Shed tears like a river, day and night. Do not allow yourself to cease, do not rest your eyes.	יח צָעַק לִבָּם אֶל־אֲדֹנָי חוֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן הוֹרִידִי כַנַּחַל דִּמְעָה יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה אַל־תִּתְּנִי פוּגַת לָךְ אַל־תִּדֹּם בַּת־עֵינֵךְ׃
19 Arise! Cry loudly at night, at the beginning of the watch; Pour out your heart like water, in front of God's presence; Lift up your hands to God, for the sake of your children's lives, The ones who faint from hunger on every street corner.	יט קוּמִי	רֹנִּי בַלָּיְלָ לְרֹאשׁ אַשְׁמֻרוֹת שִׁפְכִי כַמַּיִם לִבֵּךְ נֹכַח פְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי שְׂאִי אֵלָיו כַּפַּיִךְ עַל־נֶפֶשׁ עוֹלָלַיִךְ הָעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעָב בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חוּצוֹת׃
20 Look, God, and see to whom you have done this, That women should eat their fruit, the children whom they dandle, That priests and prophets should be killed in God's sanctuary.	כ רְאֵה יְהוָה וְהַבִּיטָה לְמִי עוֹלַלְתָּ כֹּה אִם־תֹּאכַלְנָה נָשִׁים פִּרְיָם עֹלֲלֵי טִפֻּחִים אִם־יֵהָרֵג בְּמִקְדַּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כֹּהֵן וְנָבִיא׃
21 Lying on the ground in the streets are young and old alike. Young women and men fall to the sword. You have killed on the day of your anger, you have slaughtered without mercy.	כא שָׁכְבוּ לָאָרֶץ חוּצוֹת נַעַר וְזָקֵן בְּתוּלֹתַי וּבַחוּרַי נָפְלוּ בֶחָרֶב הָרַגְתָּ בְּיוֹם אַפֶּךָ טָבַחְתָּ לֹא חָמָלְתָּ׃
22 You invoke, as if it were a festival, my attackers who surround. On the day of God's anger there is no remnant or survivor; Those whom I dandled and raised the enemy has finished.	כב תִּקְרָא כְיוֹם מוֹעֵד מְגוּרַי מִסָּבִיב וְלֹא הָיָה בְּיוֹם אַף־יְהוָה פָּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד אֲשֶׁר־טִפַּחְתִּי וְרִבִּיתִי אֹיְבִי כִלָּם׃

Chapter Three

1 I am the man who has seen suffering. By the rod of his anger	א אֲנִי הַגֶּבֶר רָאָה עֳנִי בְּשֵׁבֶט עֶבְרָתוֹ׃ ב אוֹתִי נָהַג וַיֹּלַךְ חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא־אוֹר׃
2 Me, he drove and forced to go, in darkness and not in light.	ג אַךְ בִּי יָשֹׁב יַהֲפֹךְ יָדוֹ כָּל־הַיּוֹם׃
3 Against me he turns his again and again his hand, all day long.	
4 He has worn out my flesh and my skin, broken my bones;	ד בִּלָּה בְשָׂרִי וְעוֹרִי שִׁבַּר עַצְמוֹתָי׃ ה בָּנָה עָלַי וַיַּקַּף רֹאשׁ וּתְלָאָה׃
5 He built for me and encircled me with poverty and hardship;	ו בְּמַחֲשַׁכִּים הוֹשִׁיבַנִי כְּמֵתֵי עוֹלָם׃
6 He caused me to live in dark places like the eternally dead.	
7 He walled me in with no way out and weighed me down with chains.	ז גָּדַר בַּעֲדִי וְלֹא אֵצֵא הִכְבִּיד נְחָשְׁתִּי׃ ח גַּם כִּי אֶזְעַק וַאֲשַׁוֵּעַ שָׂתַם תְּפִלָּתִי׃
8 Even when I scream and cry, he shuts out my prayer.	ט גָּדַר דְּרָכַי בְּגָזִית נְתִיבֹתַי עִוָּה׃
9 He walled in my roads with hewn stone, and twisted my paths.	
10 A lurking bear is he to me, a lion in hiding.	י דֹּב אֹרֵב הוּא לִי אֲרִיֵה בְּמִסְתָּרִים׃ יא דְּרָכַי סוֹרֵר וַיְפַשְּׁחֵנִי שָׂמֵנִי שֹׁמֵם׃
11 My paths he turned aside and apart, bringing total destruction to me.	יב דָּרַךְ קַשְׁתּוֹ וַיַּצִּיבֵנִי כַּמַּטָּרָא לַחֵץ׃
12 He bent his bow and set me up as a target for his arrow.	
13 He shot his bow into my innards; 14 I am the laughingstock of all of my people, they mock me with songs all day long. 15 He filled me up with bitterness, sated me with wormwood.	יג הֵבִיא בְכִלְיוֹתָי בְּנֵי אַשְׁפָּתוֹ׃ יד הָיִיתִי שְׂחֹק לְכָל־עַמִּי נְגִינָתָם כָּל־הַיּוֹם׃ טו הִשְׂבִּיעַנִי בַּמְרוֹרִים הִרְוַנִי לַעֲנָה׃

16 He grinds my teeth into gravel, tramples me into the dust. 17 My soul despairs of finding peace, I have forgotten goodness; 18 I thought: "my future is lost and my hope from God."[220]	טז וַיְגַרֵס בֶּחָצָץ שִׁנָּי הִכְפִּישַׁנִי בָּאֵפֶר: יז וַתִּזָּנַח מִשָּׁלוֹם נַפְשִׁי נָשִׁיתִי טוֹבָה: יח וָאֹמַר אָבַד נִצְחִי וְתוֹחַלְתִּי מֵיְהוָֹה:
19 To remember my affliction and bitterness, is wormwood and poison.[221] 20 Remembering well and downcast is my soul within me, 21 But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:	יט זָכֹר־עָנְיִי וּמְרוּדִי לַעֲנָה וָרֹאשׁ: כ זָכוֹר תִּזְכּוֹר וְתָשִׁיחַ עָלַי נַפְשִׁי: כא זֹאת אָשִׁיב אֶל־לִבִּי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל:
22 God's kindness has not ended, his compassion is not finished; 23 They are new every morning, and your faithfulness is great. 24 God is my portion, I say to myself, therefore I have hope.	כב חַסְדֵי יְהוָֹה כִּי לֹא־תָמְנוּ כִּי לֹא־כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו: כג חֲדָשִׁים לַבְּקָרִים רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ: כד חֶלְקִי יְהוָֹה אָמְרָה נַפְשִׁי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל לוֹ:
25 God is good to those who hope, to the soul that seeks God. 26 It is good to wait and be still, for God's deliverance. 27 It is good for a man to take up the yoke in his youth.	כה טוֹב יְהוָֹה לְקַוּו לְנֶפֶשׁ תִּדְרְשֶׁנּוּ: כו טוֹב וְיָחִיל וְדוּמָם לִתְשׁוּעַת יְהוָֹה: כז טוֹב לַגֶּבֶר כִּי־יִשָּׂא עֹל בִּנְעוּרָיו:

220. In this chapter, I have used the word "God" only where it appears in the Hebrew. Throughout most of the sections that carry messages of despair, God is unnamed. Various names for God appear primarily in the sections of the chapter that offer a hopeful message.

221. As Berlin explains (p. 82), זָכֹר could be either an imperative or an infinitive construct. She translates it as an imperative, addressed to God: *Remember my misery and trouble/ wormwood and misery*. Here, the four nouns are all objects of the verb. Hillers, JPS, and O'Connor all choose to render the verb as an infinitive construct, in which the poet is remembering his woes. As O'Connor (p. 47) explains, "the infinitive makes more sense in view of verse 20 which seems to continue the thought of verse 19," and, I would add, the first person thoughts of verses 17-18. In this rendering, which I have followed, the phrase *wormwood and poison* describes the bitter experience of remembering.

28 He should sit alone and be still because he put it upon him; 29 He should put his mouth in the dust; maybe there is hope; 30 He should give his cheek to the smiter, sate himself with shame.	כח יֵשֵׁב בָּדָד וְיִדֹּם כִּי נָטַל עָלָיו׃ כט יִתֵּן בֶּעָפָר פִּיהוּ אוּלַי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה׃ ל יִתֵּן לְמַכֵּהוּ לֶחִי יִשְׂבַּע בְּחֶרְפָּה׃
31 Because God will never reject him; 32 Rather, he hurts and is compassionate in his great kindness, 33 Because he does not deliberately afflict or torment human beings.	לא כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי׃ לב כִּי אִם־הוֹגָה וְרִחַם כְּרֹב חֲסָדָו׃ לג כִּי לֹא עִנָּה מִלִּבּוֹ וַיְגֶּה בְּנֵי־אִישׁ׃
34 Crushing under his foot all the prisoners of the land, 35 Denying justice to a man[222] before the presence of the Most High, 36 Subverting a man in his cause -- God does not see?	לד לְדַכֵּא תַּחַת רַגְלָיו כֹּל אֲסִירֵי אָרֶץ׃ לה לְהַטּוֹת מִשְׁפַּט־גָּבֶר נֶגֶד פְּנֵי עֶלְיוֹן׃ לו לְעַוֵּת אָדָם בְּרִיבוֹ אֲדֹנָי לֹא רָאָה׃
37 Who said it and it came to be if God did not command it?[223] 38 From the mouth of the Most High does not evil and good come? 39 How can a living person complain, a man about his punishments?[224]	לז מִי זֶה אָמַר וַתֶּהִי אֲדֹנָי לֹא צִוָּה׃ לח מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא הָרָעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב׃ לט מַה־יִּתְאוֹנֵן אָדָם חָי גֶּבֶר עַל־חַטָּאָו׃

222. I have used *man* here and in 3:39 to highlight the repeated use of גבר in this chapter.

223. I have followed Berlin's translation here. She explains, "I supply the word 'if' to make the meaning [of verse 37] more intelligible." (p. 83)

224. See Chapter One, pp. 23-25 for a discussion of possible ways to translate this phrase.

40 Let us search and examine our ways and return to God; 41 Lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven. 42 We have transgressed and rebelled; you have not forgiven.	מ נַחְפְּשָׂה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנַחְקֹרָה וְנָשׁוּבָה עַד־יְהוָֹה: מא נִשָּׂא לְבָבֵנוּ אֶל־כַּפָּיִם אֶל־אֵל בַּשָּׁמָיִם: מב נַחְנוּ פָשַׁעְנוּ וּמָרִינוּ אַתָּה לֹא סָלָחְתָּ:
43 Enveloped in anger, you pursued us; you killed and did not have mercy. 44 You screened yourself in that cloud of yours so that no prayer could get through. 45 You made us rejected filth among the nations.	מג סַכּוֹתָה בָאַף וַתִּרְדְּפֵנוּ הָרַגְתָּ לֹא חָמָלְתָּ: מד סַכּוֹתָה בֶעָנָן לָךְ מֵעָבוֹר תְּפִלָּה: מה סְחִי וּמָאוֹס תְּשִׂימֵנוּ בְּקֶרֶב הָעַמִּים:
46 They opened their mouths against us, all our enemies; 47 Panic and pitfall were ours, ruin and devastation. 48 Streams of water flow from my eyes over the breaking of my Dear People.	מו פָּצוּ עָלֵינוּ פִיהֶם כָּל־אֹיְבֵינוּ: מז פַּחַד וָפַחַת הָיָה לָנוּ הַשֵּׁאת וְהַשָּׁבֶר: מח פַּלְגֵי־מַיִם תֵּרַד עֵינִי עַל־שֶׁבֶר בַּת־עַמִּי:
49 My eyes pour and do not cease, without respite, 50 Until he looks and sees God in heaven. 51 My eyes have brought me grief more than all the daughters of my city.	מט עֵינִי נִגְּרָה וְלֹא תִדְמֶה מֵאֵין הֲפֻגוֹת: נ עַד־יַשְׁקִיף וְיֵרֶא יְהוָֹה מִשָּׁמָיִם: נא עֵינִי עוֹלְלָה לְנַפְשִׁי מִכֹּל בְּנוֹת עִירִי:
52 They hunted me like a bird, my enemies, for no reason; 53 They took my life in a pit and threw stones at me; 54 They covered my head with water; I said, "I am cut off."	נב צוֹד צָדוּנִי כַּצִּפּוֹר אֹיְבַי חִנָּם: נג צָמְתוּ בַבּוֹר חַיַּי וַיַּדּוּ־אֶבֶן בִּי: נד צָפוּ־מַיִם עַל־רֹאשִׁי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְזָרְתִּי:

55 I called out your name, God, from the lowest pit; 56 Hear my voice, do not shut your ears to my cry for relief. 57 Come close on the day that I call you, say, "Do not fear."	נה קָרָאתִי שִׁמְךָ יְהוָה מִבּוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת: נו קוֹלִי שָׁמָעְתָּ אַל־תַּעְלֵם אָזְנְךָ לְרַוְחָתִי לְשַׁוְעָתִי: נז קָרַבְתָּ בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָאֶךָּ אָמַרְתָּ אַל־תִּירָא:
58 Champion my cause, God, redeem my life; 59 See, God, the injustice done to me, judge my case; 60 See all their vengefulness, all their plots against me.[225]	נח רַבְתָּ אֲדֹנָי רִיבֵי נַפְשִׁי גָּאַלְתָּ חַיָּי: נט רָאִיתָה יְהוָה עַוָּתָתִי שָׁפְטָה מִשְׁפָּטִי: ס רָאִיתָה כָּל־נִקְמָתָם כָּל־מַחְשְׁבֹתָם לִי:
61 Hear their reproaches, God, all their plots against me, 62 The mouthings and thoughts of those who rise against me are upon me all day long. 63 When they sit and when they rise, look, I am their tune.	סא שָׁמַעְתָּ חֶרְפָּתָם יְהוָה כָּל־מַחְשְׁבֹתָם עָלָי: סב שִׂפְתֵי קָמַי וְהֶגְיוֹנָם עָלַי כָּל־הַיּוֹם: סג שִׁבְתָּם וְקִימָתָם הַבִּיטָה אֲנִי מַנְגִּינָתָם:
64 Give them their recompence, God, for their hands' actions; 65 Cover their hearts, curse them; 66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under God's heaven.	סד תָּשִׁיב לָהֶם גְּמוּל יְהוָה כְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם: סה תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מְגִנַּת־לֵב תַּאֲלָתְךָ לָהֶם: סו תִּרְדֹּף בְּאַף וְתַשְׁמִידֵם מִתַּחַת שְׁמֵי יְהוָה:

225. Although this is written in the past tense, I have followed Berlin and Hillers, rather than JPS and O'Connor, in translating it in the imperative. Thus, the גבר continues to plead to God from the lowest pit. Rather than rehearsing God's previous deeds, the גבר is desperately calling for God's return.

Chapter Four

1 Alas! The gold is tarnished, the fine gold is debased; Sacred jewels pour out at every street corner.	א אֵיכָה יוּעַם זָהָב יִשְׁנָא הַכֶּתֶם הַטּוֹב תִּשְׁתַּפַּכְנָה אַבְנֵי־קֹדֶשׁ בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חוּצוֹת:
2 Zion's precious people were once weighed as pure gold, Alas, now they are considered earthen pottery, the work of an artisan's hands.	ב בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הַיְקָרִים הַמְסֻלָּאִים בַּפָּז אֵיכָה נֶחְשְׁבוּ לְנִבְלֵי־חֶרֶשׂ מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי יוֹצֵר:
3 Even jackals offer their breast, nurse their young. My Dear People seem cruel[226] like ostriches in the wilderness.	ג גַּם־תַּנִּין חָלְצוּ שַׁד הֵינִיקוּ גּוּרֵיהֶן בַּת־עַמִּי לְאַכְזָר כַּיְ עֵנִים בַּמִּדְבָּר:
4 The infant's tongue cleaves to his palate from thirst. Children ask for bread; no one gives it to them.	ד דָּבַק לְשׁוֹן יוֹנֵק אֶל־חִכּוֹ בַּצָּמָא עוֹלָלִים שָׁאֲלוּ לֶחֶם פֹּרֵשׂ אֵין לָהֶם:
5 Those who used to feast on dainties are desolate in the streets; Those raised in crimson embrace refuse heaps.	ה הָאֹכְלִים לְמַעֲדַנִּים נָשַׁמּוּ בַּחוּצוֹת הָאֲמֻנִים עֲלֵי תוֹלָע חִבְּקוּ אַשְׁפַּתּוֹת:

226. I have followed Berlin (p. 101) in rendering the *lamed* as an emphatic particle, thus translating the phrase as *seem cruel* rather than as *has become cruel*. This emphasizes the involuntary nature of the degradation, in which women are unable to nurse because of famine.

6 The punishment of my Dear People is greater than the punishment of Sodom,[227] which was overthrown in a moment with no hand laid on it.	ו וַיִּגְדַּל עֲוֹן בַּת־עַמִּי מֵחַטַּאת סְדֹם הַהָפוּכָה כְּמוֹ־רָגַע וְלֹא־חָלוּ בָהּ יָדָיִם:
7 Whiter than snow were her nobles, clearer than milk; Ruddier than coral were their limbs, their physique like sapphire.	ז זַכּוּ נְזִירֶיהָ מִשֶּׁלֶג צָחוּ מֵחָלָב אָדְמוּ עֶצֶם מִפְּנִינִים סַפִּיר גִּזְרָתָם:
8 Their faces became darker than black; they were not recognizable in the streets. Their skin shriveled on their bones; it was as dry as wood.	ח חָשַׁךְ מִשְּׁחוֹר תָּאָרָם לֹא נִכָּרוּ בַּחוּצוֹת צָפַד עוֹרָם עַל־עַצְמָם יָבֵשׁ הָיָה כָעֵץ:
9 Better off are those stabbed by the sword, than those stabbed by famine; Those whose life ebbed from a wound, rather than from the field's lack of produce.	ט טוֹבִים הָיוּ חַלְלֵי־חֶרֶב מֵחַלְלֵי רָעָב שֶׁהֵם יָזוּבוּ מְדֻקָּרִים מִתְּנוּבַת שָׂדָי:
10 With their own hands compassionate women cooked their children; This was their sustenance during the breaking of my Dear People.	י יְדֵי נָשִׁים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת בִּשְּׁלוּ יַלְדֵיהֶן הָיוּ לְבָרוֹת לָמוֹ בְּשֶׁבֶר בַּת־עַמִּי:
11 God vented all his anger, poured out his blazing fury; Set a fire in Zion and consumed its foundations.	יא כִּלָּה יְהוָה אֶת־חֲמָתוֹ שָׁפַךְ חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וַיְּצֶת־אֵשׁ בְּצִיּוֹן וַתֹּאכַל יְסוֹדֹתֶיהָ:

227. JPS, Hillers, and O'Conner understand עֲוֹן and חַטַּאת as "sin," whereas Berlin understands them as "punishment." I follow Berlin's translation, since the second half of the verse describes the destruction (i.e. punishment) of Sodom.

12 They could not believe, the kings of the earth, nor any of the inhabitants of the world, That foe and enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem.	יב לֹא הֶאֱמִינוּ מַלְכֵי־אֶרֶץ וְכֹל יֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל כִּי יָבֹא צַר וְאוֹיֵב בְּשַׁעֲרֵי יְרוּשָׁלִָם:
13 On account of the sins of her prophets, the transgressions of her priests, Who shed in her midst the blood of the righteous.	יג מֵחַטֹּאת נְבִיאֶיהָ עֲוֹנוֹת כֹּהֲנֶיהָ הַשֹּׁפְכִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ דַּם צַדִּיקִים:
14 They wandered blind in the streets, defiled with blood; No one was able to touch their clothing.	יד נָעוּ עִוְרִים בַּחוּצוֹת נְגֹאֲלוּ בַּדָּם בְּלֹא יוּכְלוּ יִגְּעוּ בִּלְבָשֵׁיהֶם:
15 "Away! Unclean!" they shouted to them, "Away, Away! Do not touch!" As they wandered and wandered again[228] they said, "They can no longer live among the nations."	טו סוּרוּ טָמֵא קָרְאוּ לָמוֹ סוּרוּ סוּרוּ אַל־תִּגָּעוּ כִּי נָצוּ גַּם־נָעוּ אָמְרוּ בַגּוֹיִם לֹא יוֹסִיפוּ לָגוּר:
16 God's presence scattered them,[229] he no longer sees them; The faces of priests are no longer lifted up, elders are no longer shown grace.	טז פְּנֵי יְהוָה חִלְּקָם לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַבִּיטָם פְּנֵי כֹהֲנִים לֹא נָשָׂאוּ זְקֵנִים לֹא חָנָנוּ:
17 We still wear out our eyes looking for our help, in vain. As we watched endlessly for a nation that did not save.	יז עוֹדֵינָה תִּכְלֶינָה עֵינֵינוּ אֶל־עֶזְרָתֵנוּ הָבֶל בְּצִפִּיָּתֵנוּ צָפִינוּ אֶל־גּוֹי לֹא יוֹשִׁעַ:

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228. Berlin notes that most translations take נָצוּ and נָעוּ to be synonyms (p. 102). She translates them as a hendiadys -- "wander aimlessly." I have adopted JPS's approach, which highlights both the double verb use and the aimlessness of the wandering.

229. This is the only instance in which the phrase פְּנֵי יְהוָה is used in the context of God turning against God's own people. In Genesis 19:13, the phrase appears in relationship to Sodom, but פְּנֵי יְהוָה hears the cries of the people of Sodom. In Psalm 34:17, the psalmist praises פְּנֵי יְהוָה, which sets itself against evildoers and erases them from the earth. The phrase is often used in the context of people appearing before God (Deut 16:16, 31:11), entering into the

18 They hunted our steps so we could not walk in our streets; Our end grew close, our days were numbered, because our end was coming.	יח צָדוּ צְעָדֵינוּ מִלֶּכֶת בִּרְחֹבֹתֵינוּ קָרַב קִצֵּינוּ מָלְאוּ יָמֵינוּ כִּי־בָא קִצֵּינוּ:
19 Swifter were our pursuers than eagles in the heavens; Over mountains they pursued us, in the desert they ambushed us.	יט קַלִּים הָיוּ רֹדְפֵינוּ מִנִּשְׁרֵי שָׁמָיִם עַל־הֶהָרִים דִּלָּקָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר אָרְבוּ לָנוּ:
20 The breath of our life,[230] God's anointed, was captured in their traps, The one about whom we had said, "In his shade we will live among the nations."	כ רוּחַ אַפֵּינוּ מְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה נִלְכַּד בִּשְׁחִיתוֹתָם אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְנוּ בְּצִלּוֹ נִחְיֶה בַגּוֹיִם:
21 Rejoice and be glad, Dear Edom, those who dwell in the land of Uz, The cup will come to you too, you will get drunk and be stripped naked.	כא שִׂישִׂי וְשִׂמְחִי בַּת־אֱדוֹם יוֹשֶׁבֶת בְּאֶרֶץ עוּץ גַּם־עָלַיִךְ תַּעֲבָר־כּוֹס תִּשְׁכְּרִי וְתִתְעָרִי:
22 Your punishment is complete, Dear Zion, you will no longer be exiled; He will note your transgressions, Dear Edom, Expose your sins.[231]	כב תַּם־עֲוֹנֵךְ בַּת־צִיּוֹן לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתֵךְ פָּקַד עֲוֹנֵךְ בַּת־אֱדוֹם גָּלָה עַל־חַטֹּאתָיִךְ:

service of God (I Sam 2:18) or entreating God (II Sam 21:1). The phrase, or a variation on it, appears two other times in Lamenations -- in 2:19 (*Pour out your heart like water/ in front of God's presence*) and 3:35 (Denying justice to a man/ before the presence of the Most High).

230. Literally *the breath of our nostrils*. I follow JPS and Berlin with the more aesthetically-pleasing rendering: *the breath of our life*. The verse is generally thought to refer to Zedekiah. See, for example, Dillers, p. 92.

231. Berlin notes that all the verbs in this verse are in the perfect tense, as if God has already completed the punishment of the other nations. I have translated 22b in the future tense, however, to echo the tradition, common in ancient laments, of calling on God to punish the national enemies of the suffering group. See also Ferris, pp. 59-60.

Chapter Five

1 Remember, God, what has become of us, look and see our degradation.	א זְכֹר יְהוָה מֶה־הָיָה לָנוּ הַבִּיטָה וּרְאֵה אֶת־חֶרְפָּתֵנוּ׃
2 Our ancestral land is turned over to outsiders, our homes to foreigners.	ב נַחֲלָתֵנוּ נֶהֶפְכָה לְזָרִים בָּתֵּינוּ לָנָכְרִים׃
3 Orphans are we, there is no father, our mothers have become widows.	ג יְתוֹמִים הָיִינוּ אֵין אָב אִמּוֹתֵינוּ כְּאַלְמָנוֹת׃
4 Our water we pay to drink, our wood comes at a price.	ד מֵימֵינוּ בְּכֶסֶף שָׁתִינוּ עֵצֵינוּ בִּמְחִיר יָבֹאוּ׃
5 At our necks we are pursued; we are weary and their is no rest for us.	ה עַל צַוָּארֵנוּ נִרְדָּפְנוּ יָגַעְנוּ לֹא הוּנַח־לָנוּ׃
6 To Egypt we extended our hand, to Assyria for our fill of bread.	ו מִצְרַיִם נָתַנּוּ יָד אַשּׁוּר לִשְׂבֹּעַ לָחֶם׃
7 Our fathers sinned and are no more, we suffer their punishments.	ז אֲבֹתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ אֵינָם אֲנַחְנוּ עֲוֹנֹתֵיהֶם סָבָלְנוּ׃
8 Slaves rule over us, there is no rescue from their hands.	ח עֲבָדִים מָשְׁלוּ בָנוּ פֹּרֵק אֵין מִיָּדָם׃
9 We risk our lives for bread because of the sword of the wilderness.[232]	ט בְּנַפְשֵׁנוּ נָבִיא לַחְמֵנוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב הַמִּדְבָּר׃

232. JPS notes that this could also be rendered as *heat of the wilderness*, based on the use of חֳרֶב in Deut. 28:22. For survivors in search of food, both the enemy's sword and the scorching heat would present dangers. However, I have chosen to translate the Hebrew literally. My translation echos the idea, also found in Lam. 4:19, that the wilderness is a place of danger forsaken by God.

10 Our skin burns hot like an oven because of the raging heat of hunger.	י עוֹרֵנוּ כְּתַנּוּר נִכְמָרוּ מִפְּנֵי זַלְעָפוֹת רָעָב:
11 Women in Zion they raped, virgins in the streets of Judah.	יא נָשִׁים בְּצִיּוֹן עִנּוּ בְּתֻלֹת בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה:
12 Princes were hanged by their hands, elders they did not honor.	יב שָׂרִים בְּיָדָם נִתְלוּ פְּנֵי זְקֵנִים לֹא נֶהְדָּרוּ:
13 Youths carried millstones, young men stumbled under loads of wood.	יג בַּחוּרִים טְחוֹן נָשָׂאוּ וּנְעָרִים בָּעֵץ כָּשָׁלוּ:
14 Elders are gone from the gate, youths no longer make music.	יד זְקֵנִים מִשַּׁעַר שָׁבָתוּ בַּחוּרִים מִנְּגִינָתָם:
15 Gone from our hearts is joy, turned into mourning is our dancing.	טו שָׁבַת מְשׂוֹשׂ לִבֵּנוּ נֶהְפַּךְ לְאֵבֶל מְחֹלֵנוּ:
16 Fallen is the crown from our head, woe is us because we have sinned.	טז נָפְלָה עֲטֶרֶת רֹאשֵׁנוּ אוֹי־נָא לָנוּ כִּי חָטָאנוּ:
17 For this, our hearts grow faint, for these, our eyes grow dark,	יז עַל־זֶה הָיָה דָוֶה לִבֵּנוּ עַל־אֵלֶּה חָשְׁכוּ עֵינֵינוּ:
18 For desolate Mount Zion on which foxes wander.	יח עַל הַר־צִיּוֹן שֶׁשָּׁמֵם שׁוּעָלִים הָלְכוּ־בוֹ:
19 You are God, enthroned forever, your throne endures from generation to generation.	יט אַתָּה יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תֵּשֵׁב כִּסְאֲךָ לְדֹר וָדוֹר:
20 Why do you forget us eternally, abandon us for the length of our days?	כ לָמָּה לָנֶצַח תִּשְׁכָּחֵנוּ תַּעַזְבֵנוּ לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים:

21 Take us back, God, and we will return to you, renew our days as of old. 22 For if truly you have rejected us, bitterly raged against us...[233]	כא הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם׃ כב כִּי אִם־מָאֹס מְאַסְתָּנוּ קָצַפְתָּ עָלֵינוּ עַד־מְאֹד׃

233. I have borrowed Linafelt's translation of 5:22 (p. 60). He explains his translation as follows:

It has often been noted that one might expect the phrase *ki im* to introduce a conditional statement, but that the second colon of 5:22 does not seem to state the consequence of the first as would be expected in a true conditional statement. While this is true, it does not rule out the conditional nature of *ki im*. thus, I have chosen to translate the line as a conditional statement that is left railing off, leaving a protasis without an apodasis, or an "if" without a "then." The book is left opening out into the emptiness of God's nonresponse. by leaving a conditional statement dangling, the final verse leaves open the future of the ones lamenting. It is hardly a hopeful ending, for the missing but implied apodasis is surely negative, yet it does nevertheless defer that apodasis. And by arresting the movement from an "if" to a "then" the incomplete clause allows the reader, for a moment, to imagine the possibility of a different "then," and therefore a different future. (pp. 60-61)

Appendix Two:
The Book of Lamentations - A Structural Outline

Chapter One
Jerusalem's Desolation: The Poet Witnesses and Zion Testifies

I. Verses 1:1-11
A Witness Describes Zion's Desolation
(With Occasional Interruptions from Zion Herself)

1-3	The poet describes Zion's utter isolation
4-7	The poet describes the transformation of the city and its people
8-9b	The poet describes Jerusalem's sinfulness
9c	Zion calls to God
10	The poet describes the enemy's invasion of the city and the Temple
11a-b	The poet describes the people's hunger
11c	Zion again calls to God

II. Verses 1:12-22
Zion Testifies about her Suffering
(With an Interruption from the Poet)

12	Zion calls to passersby
13-15	Zion describes God's terrible treatment of her
16	Zion testifies that she has none to comfort her
17	The poet interrupts; Zion has none to comfort her
18a	Zion affirms God's justness, acknowledges her rebellion
18b-19	Zion describes the pain of isolation
20	Zion calls to God, describes her bitterness/ rebellion, the prevalence of death
21a-b	Zion says her enemies rejoice over her plight
21c-22	Zion asks God to deal with her enemies as God dealt with her

Chapter Two
Anger: God's and Jerusalem's

I. Verses 2:1-10
The poet describes God's destruction of Jerusalem

1-8	The poet describes God's consuming anger and its disastrous effects
9-10	The poet describes Jerusalem's defeat and her people's mourning

II. Verses 2:11-19
A survivor speaks

11	A survivor describes extraordinary grief
12	A survivor describes the suffering of infants and children
13	A survivor addresses Zion and asks, "How can I be your witness?"
14	A survivor accuses Zion's prophets of empty visions
15-17	A survivor describes how passersby mock Zion and celebrate her destruction
18-19	A survivor exhorts Zion to cry out to God

III. Verses 2:20-22
Jerusalem addresses and accuses God

20a-b	Zion describes her inner tumult
20c	Zion tells God that death is everywhere
21a	Zion repeats that there is none to comfort her
21b-c	Zion tells God that her enemies are rejoicing at the suffering God has caused
22	Zion calls on God to deal with her enemies as God dealt with her

Chapter Three
Walled in and Cut off: The *Gever*/ Everyman Speaks

I. Verses 3:1-21
The *gever's* first lament: he is walled in by God and cut off from God

1-9	God leads the *gever* into a place from which he cannot escape
10-18	God is a dangerous animal, a hunter
19-20	The *gever* is crushed by his memories
21	The *gever* remembers what hope feels like

II. Verses 3:22-42
The *gever's* call for repentance; this is the way to the compassionate God

22-24	God's compassion is eternal
25-36	All suffering will culminate in mercy; patience is worthwhile
37-39	God is the source of both good and evil
40-42	The *gever* calls upon the people to confess and repent, concludes that God has not forgiven

III. Verses 3:43-66
The *gever's* second lament

43-54	The *gever* and his people are cut off, in a pit
55-57	The *gever's* accusation I: God heard but did not act
58-63	The *gever's* accusation II: God saw but did not act
64-66	The *gever* begs God for vengeance against Zion's enemies

Chapter Four
Utter Debasement

I. Verses 4:1-10
The poet describes how no punishment could be worse than this

1-2	The poet describes how Zion's people are debased
3	The poet describes how Zion's people debase their children
4-5	The poet describes how children and adults thirst and starve
6	The poet recalls that not even Sodom was punished like this
7-8	The poet says all color is blackened
9	The poet concludes that death by sword is preferable to death by famine
10	The poet describes how women cannibalize their children

II. Verses 4:11-16
The poet's description of the horror: from fiery ruins to complete exile

11	The poet describes how God's anger burned up Zion
12	The poet reports that the world is in disbelief
13	The poet explains that Zion's prophets and priests sinned
14-15	The poet reports that Zion's people are unclean
16	The poet says that Zion's people are in exile, ignored by God

III. Verses 4:17-22
The people speak of suffering and vengeance

17	The people say: We looked in vain for help
18-20	The people say: Our pursuers were too swift us
21-22	The people curse the enemy, call for vengeance

Chapter Five
The People Lament

I. Verse 5:1
The people call to God to see

1	The people call on God to remember and to see

II. Verses 5:2-10
The people lament about the impact on individuals and families

2-3	The people lament that they have lost land, homes, and loved ones
4	The people lament that they must pay for their own water and wood
5	The people lament that they are pursued without rest
6	The people lament that they are dependent on outsiders for sustenance
7	The people believe they are punished for their ancestors' sins
8	The people lament that they are ruled by outsiders
9-10	The people lament that they are starving

III. Verses 5:11-15
The people describe how the world is turned upside down

11	The people describe how women and virgins are raped in public places
12	The people describe how princes and elders are debased and killed
13	The people describe how young men have become slave laborers
14a	The people describe how the elders are dispersed from public gates
14b-15	The people report that music, dancing, and joy are turned into mourning

IV. Verses 5:16-18
The people lament that the Temple and throne are destroyed

16a	The people lament that they have lost their king and crown
16b-17	The people acknowledge their sinfulness, describe their visceral suffering
18	The people report that Mount Zion is now home to foxes

V. Verses 5:19-22
The people again address God, who is eternal but absent

19	The people address God: You are eternal
20	The people address God: Your abandonment is eternal
21	The people plead with God: Let us return to You
22	The people wonder: Is God's rejection complete?

Appendix Three:
Lamentations Rabbah Texts

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פתיחתא יא</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 41-42.

רבי יצחק פתח. תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלהיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל, ועבדת את אויביך וגו' (דברים כח מז מח). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה תבאמו ותטעמו בהר נחלתך (שמות טו יז), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם, הרי אתם קוראים תבא כל רעתם לפניך (איכה א כב). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה שמעו עמים ירגזון (שמות טו יד), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם, הרי אתם קוראים שמעו כי נאנחה אני (איכה א כא). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה ראה ראיתי את עני עמי אשר במצרים (שמות ג ז), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם, הרי אתם קוראים ראה ה' כי צר לי מעי חמרמרו (איכה א כ). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה וקראתם בעצם היום הזה (ויקרא כג כא), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים קראתי למאהבי (איכה א יט). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה צדק צדק תרדוף (דברים טז כ), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים צדיק הוא ה' כי פיהו מריתי (איכה א יח). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה פתח תפתח את ידך (דברים טו יא), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים פרשה ציון בידיה (איכה א יז). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה אלה מועדי ה' (ויקרא כג ד), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים על אלה אני בוכיה (איכה א טז). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה במסלה נעלה (במדבר כ יט), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים סלה כל אבירי אדני (איכה א טו). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה ואשבור מוטות עולכם (ויקרא כו יג), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים נשקד עול פשעי בידו (איכה א יד). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח (ויקרא ו ו), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים ממרום שלח אש בעצמותי (איכה א יג). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה בכל הדרך אשר הלכתם (דברים א לא), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים לא אליכם כל עוברי דרך (איכה א יב). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה ואכלתם לחמכם לשובע (ויקרא כו ה), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים כל עמה נאנחים מבקשים לחם (איכה א יא). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה ולא יחמוד איש את ארצך (שמות לד כד), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים ידו פרש צר על כל מחמדיה (איכה א י). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם וגו' (ויקרא טז ל), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים טומאתה בשוליה (איכה א ט). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו (ויקרא שם /ט"ז, ל'/), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים חטא חטאה ירושלים (איכה א ח). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה ונזכרתם לפני ה' אלהיכם (במדבר י ט), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים זכרה ירושלים ימי עניה (איכה א ז). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה והתהלכתי בתוככם (ויקרא כו יב), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים ויצא מן בת ציון כל הדרה (איכה א ו). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה ונתנך ה' לראש (דברים כח יג), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים היו צריה לראש אויביה שלו (איכה א ה). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה שלוש פעמים בשנה (דברים טז טז), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים דרכי ציון אבילות (איכה א ד). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה וישבתם לבטח (ויקרא כו ה), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים גלתה יהודה מעוני (איכה א ג). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה ליל שמורים הוא לה' (שמות יב מב), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים בכה תבכה בלילה (איכה א ב). אלו זכיתם הייתם קוראים בתורה איכה אשא לבדי (דברים א יב), ועכשיו שלא זכיתם הרי אתם קוראים איכה ישבה בדד (איכה א א).

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פתיחתא ד</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 42-43.

רבי אבהו פתח. והמה כאדם עברו ברית (הושע ו ח). והמה כאדם זה אדם הראשון, אמר הקב"ה אדם

הראשון הכנסתיו לגן עדן וצויתיו, ועבר על צווי, ודנתיו בגירושין ודנתיו בשילוחין, וקוננתי עליו איכה, הכנסתיו לגן עדן, שנאמר ויקח ה' אלהים את האדם ויניחהו בגן עדן וגו' (בראשית ב טו). וצויתיו, שנאמר ויצו ה' אלהים על האדם לאמר וגו' (שם שם /בראשית ב'/ טז). ועבר על צווי, שנאמר המן העץ אשר צויתיך וגו' (שם /בראשית/ ג יא). ודנתיו בגירושין, שנאמר ויגרש את האדם (שם שם /בראשית ג'/ כד). ודנתיו בשילוחין, שנאמר וישלחהו ה' מגן עדן (שם שם /בראשית ג'/ כג), וקוננתי עליו איכה, שנאמר ויאמר לו איכה (שם שם /בראשית ג'/ כ), איכה כתיב. אף בניו הכנסתי אותם לארץ ישראל, שנאמר ואביא אתכם אל ארץ הכרמל (ירמי' ב ז), וצויתים, שנאמר צו את בני ישראל (ויקרא כד ב). ועברו על צווי, שנאמר וכל ישראל עברו את תורתך (דניאל ט יא). ודנתי אותם בגירושין, שנאמר מביתי אגרשם (הושע ט טו). ודנתי אותם בשילוחין, שנאמר שלח מעל פני ויצאו (ירמיה טו א), וקוננתי עליהם איכה ישבה בדד.

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 43-44.

ר' יהודה ור' נחמיה. ר' נחמיה אמר אין לשון איכה אלא לשון קינה, [המד"א ויקרא ה' אלהים אל האדם ויאמר לו איכה (בראשית ג ט)]. ר' יהודה אמר אין לשון איכה אלא לשון תוכחה, [המד"א] איכה תאמרו חכמים אנחנו (ירמיה ח ח).

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה ד</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 45-46.

לא נכרו בחוצות. א"ר אלעזר בר צדוק מעשה בעני אחד שבא ועמד על פתח בית אבא, אמר לי אבא בני צא וראה שמא מבני ירושלים הוא, הלכתי ומצאתי אשה אחת שנשל שערה ולא היה אדם יודע אם זכר אם נקבה, ולא היתה תובעת אלא דבילה לבד, לקיים מה שנאמר לא נכרו בחוצות.

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה ב</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 46-47.

רבי היה דורש בלע ד' עשרין וארבע אפין, ור' יוחנן הוה דריש אשיתין אפין, לאו ר' יוחנן רבא מן דרבי, אלא רבי על שהיה סמוך לחרבן בית המקדש היה נזכר והיה דורש ובוכה ומתנח וחוזר ובוכה ומתנחם ופוסק, ור' יוחנן על ידי שלא היה סמוך לחרבן בית המקדש היה דורש והולך ולא פוסק.

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 48-50.

[ד"א] על אלה אני בוכיה. אדריינוס שחיק עצמות הושיב שלש משמרות, אחת בחמת גדר, ואחת בבית לחם, ואחת בכפר לקטיא, אמר כל מאן דיעירוק מן הכא מתציד הכא, אפיק כרוזין מכריזין ואומרים, כל הן דאית יהודאי מטמר אית ליה מילא ויפוק ליה הוי כרוזייא יהודאין משמדין הוו מכריזין ויהי אפרים כיונה פותה אין לב (הושע ז יא), שאול מפלגא מתון צלון דלא תיסב שאירא כל אילין דהוו ידעין מאן אינון שמעין הוו נפקין להון ומתצדין כניש כולהון בחדא בקעתא, ואומר לשר צבא שלו עד שאני אוכל מקרן הקלוסקין הזה וירך התרנגולת הזה נבעי עד מנהון קוים על רגלוי ולא אשכח, אילין דהוו מטמרין הוו נפקין בליליא

ואזלי לריח קטיליהון ומייתי מנהון ואכלין. עובדא הוה בחד סייעא דהוו מטמרין בחדא מערה, אמרי לחד מנהון זיל אייתי לן חד קטול ולכליניה, נפק ואשכח לאבוי קטיל וטמריה, ויהב עלוי סימן, עאל ואמר להון לא אשכחת כלום, נפק אחרא מנהון ואזיל לריחיה דההוא קטילא וגלוי עלוי ואייתיתיה, יתבין אילין אכלין ליה קהיין שינוי דיינוקא, א״ל מן הן את אייתיתיה האי קטילא, א״ל מן זיו פלני, א״ל מה סימן הוה עלוי, א״ל מילא פלנית ומילא פלנית, אמר וי להההוא טליא מבשר אבוי אכל, לקיים מה שנאמר לכן אבות יאכלו בנים (בקרבך) [בתוכך] ובנים יאכלו אבותם (יחזקאל ה י), ורה״ק =ורוח הקודש= צווח על אלה אני בוכיה.

איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א

See Chapter Two, pp. 50-52.

אמרו עליו על דואג בן יוסף שמת והניח בן קטן לאמו והייתה מודדתו בטפחיים, ונותנת משקלה זהב בכל שנה ושנה [לשמים], וכיון שהקיפה מצודה על ירושלים טבחתו בידיה ואכלתו, ועליה מקונן ירמיהו ואומר אם תאכלנה נשים פרים עוללי טפוחים (איכה ב כ), ורוח הקודש צווחת ואומרת אם יהרג במקדש ה׳ כהן ונביא (שם שם /איכה ב׳ כ׳/) [זה זכריה בן יהודע הכהן].

איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א

See Chapter Two, pp. 52-53.

מעשה במרים בת תנחום שנישבת היא ושבעה בניה עמה, מה עשה לה השלטון חבש כל אחד בפני עצמו, הוציא את הראשון ואמר לו השתחוה לצלם כשם שהשתחוו אחיך, א״ל ח״ו אחי לא השתחוו, אף אני לא אשתחוה לו, א״ל למה, שכתוב בתורה אנכי ה׳ אלהיך (שמות כ ב), צוה עליו להרגו. הוציא את השני, א״ל השתחוה לצלם, כמו שהשתחוו אחיך, א״ל ח״ו לא השתחוו אחי, אף אני איני משתחוה לו, א״ל למה, שכתוב בתורה לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני (שם שם /שמות כ׳/ ג), מיד צוה עליו להרגו. הוציא את השלישי, א״ל השתחוה לצלם כשם שהשתחוו אחיך, א״ל ח״ו לא השתחוו אחי, אף אני איני משתחוה לו, א״ל למה, שכתוב בתורה זובח לאלהים יחרם (שם /שמות/ כב יט), צוה עליו להרגו. הוציא את הרביעי א״ל השתחוה לצלם כשם שהשתחוו אחיך, א״ל ח״ו לא השתחוו אחי, אף אני לא אשתחוה לו, א״ל למה, שכתוב בתורה לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם (שם /שמות/ כ ד), צוה עליו להרגו. הוציא החמישי, א״ל השתחוה לצלם כשם שהשתחוו אחיך, א״ל ח״ו לא השתחוו אחי, אף אני לא אשתחוה, א״ל למה, שכתוב בתורה וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך כי ה׳ הוא האלהים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד (דברים ד לט), צוה עליו להרגו. הוציא הששי, וא״ל השתחוה לצלם, כשם שהשתחוו אחיך, א״ל ח״ו לא השתחוו אחי, אף אני לא אשתחוה, א״ל למה, שכתוב בתורה שמע ישראל ה׳ אלהינו ה׳ אחד (דברים ו ד). הוציא את השביעי, והוא היה הקטון שבהם, א״ל השתחוה לצלם כשם שהשתחוו [אחיך], א״ל ח״ו לא השתחוו אחי לצלם, אף אני לא אשתחוה, א״ל למה, שכבר נשבענו לאלהינו שאין אנו ממירין אותו ביראה, שנאמר את ה׳ האמרת היום (דברים כו יז), וכשם שנשבענו לו, כך נשבע לנו, שלא להמירנו באומה אחרת, שנאמר וה׳ האמירך היום (שם שם /דברים כ״ו/ יח), א״ל א״כ אני אזרוק הטבעת זו לפני הצלם, ולך הביאהו כדי שיראו ויאמרו קיים מצות הקיסר, א״ל אללי לך קיסר, ממך שאתה בשר ודם אתייראַ, ולא אתייראַ מפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקב״ה שהוא אלוה של עולם, א״ל וכי יש אלוה בעולם, א״ל אללי לך קיסר וכי עולם של הפקר ראית, א״ל וכי יש פה לאלהיכם, א״ל בע״ז שלכם כתיב פה להם ולא ידברו (תהלים קטו ה), אבל באלהינו כתיב בדבר ה׳ שמים נעשו (שם /תהלים/ לג ו), א״ל וכי יש עינים לאלהיכם, א״ל בע״ז שלכם כתיב עינים להם ולא יראו (שם /תהלים/ קטו ה), אבל באלהינו כתיב תמיד עיני ה׳ אלהיך בה (דברים יא יב), א״ל וכי יש אזנים לאלהיכם, א״ל בע״ז שלכם כתיב אזנים להם ולא ישמעו (תהלים קטו ו), אבל באלהינו כתיב ויקשב ה׳ וישמע (מלאכי ג טז), א״ל וכי יש אף לאלהיכם, א״ל בע״ז שלכם כתיב אף להם ולא יריחון (תהלים שם /קט״ו/), אבל באלהינו כתיב וירח ה׳ את ריח הניחוח (בראשית ח כא), א״ל וכי יש ידים לאלהיכם, א״ל בע״ז שלכם כתיב ידיהם ולא ימישון (תהלים שם /קט״ו/

ז), אבל באלהינו כתיב אף ידי יסדה ארץ (ישעיה מח יג), א״ל וכי יש רגלים לאלהיכם, א״ל בע״ז שלכם כתיב רגליהם ולא יהלכו (תהלים שם שם /קט״ו, ז׳/), אבל באלהינו כתיב ועמדו רגליו ביום ההוא (זכריה יד ד), (ועמד) [וירד] ודרך על במותי ארץ (מיכה א ג), א״ל וכי יש גברון /גרון/ לאלהיכם, א״ל בע״ז שלכם כתיב לא יהגו בגרונם (תהלים שם שם /קט״ו, ז׳/), אבל באלהינו כתיב חכו ממתקים וכלו מחמדים (שה״ש שיר השירים ה טז), א״ל אם יש לו כל המדות הללו, מפני מה לא הציל אתכם מידי כשם שהציל חנניה מישאל ועזריה א״ל חנניה מישאל ועזריה היו זכאין ונפלו ביד מלך זכאי, אבל אנו חייבים, ונפלנו ביד מלך חייב ואכזרי, כדי שיתבע דמנו, כי הרבה דובים והרבה נמרים יש לו להקב״ה שיפגעו בנו, ולא מסרנו הקב״ה אלא בידך בשביל שהוא עתיד לתבוע את דמנו מידך, מיד צוה עליו להרגו, א״ל אמו בחייך קיסר תנה לי את בני ואנשקהו ואחבקהו, ונתנו לה את בנה, והוציאה את דדיה והניקתהו חלב, לקיים מה שנאמר דבש וחלב תחת לשונך (שה״ש =שיר השירים= ד יא), אמרה לו אמו בחיי ראשך קיסר תנה חרב על צוארי ועל צוארו ביחד, א״ל ח״ו אינו עושה הדבר הזה, שכתוב בתורתכם אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד (ויקרא כב כח), א״ל אותו תינוק רשע, וכי כל התורה כולה קיימת חוץ מפסוק זה, מיד לקחוהו ממנה להרגו, אמרה לו אמו בני אל ירך לבבך ואל תחת, אצל אחיך אתה הולך, ואתה ניתן בתוך חיקו של אברהם אבינו, ואמור לו משמי, אתה בנית מזבח אחד ולא הקרבת את בנך, אבל אני בניתי שבעה מזבחות והקרבתי את בני עליהם, ולא עוד אלא דידך נסיון, ודידי עובדין, וכיון שנהרג שיערו חכמים שנותיו של אותו תינוק ונמצא בן שש שנים ומחצה וב׳ שעות, באותה שעה צעקו כל אוה״ע =אומות העולם= ואמרו ומה אלהיהם של אלו עושה להם כך וכך, והם נהרגים עליו בכל שעה, אמרו לאחר ימים נשתטית האשה ההיא, ועלתה לראש הגג והשליכה עצמה ומתה וקראו עליה אם הבנים שמחה (תהלים קיג ט), ורוח הקודש אומרת על אלה אני בוכיה.

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 52-55.

עיני עיני יורדה מים. א״ר לוי משל לרופא שחשש עינו אחת אמר עיני תבכה על עיני, כך ישראל נקראו עינו של הקב״ה, הה״ד כי לה׳ עין אדם וכל שבטי ישראל (זכריה ט א), כביכול אמר הקב״ה עיני תבכה על עיני.

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פתיחתא כד</u>

See Chapter Two, pp. 55-65.

ד״א ויקרא ה׳ אלהים צבאות ביום ההוא לבכי ולמספד וגו׳. בשעה שבקש הקב״ה להחריב את בית המקדש אמר כל זמן שאני בתוכו אין אומות העולם נוגעין בו, אלא אכביש את עיני ממנו, ואשבע שלא אזקק לו עד עת קץ, ויבואו האויבים ויחריבו אותו, מיד נשבע הקב״ה בימינו והחזירה אחוריו, הה״ד השיב אחור ימינו מפני אויב (איכה ב ג) באותה שעה נכנסו אויבים להיכל ושרפוהו, וכיון שנשרף אמר הקב״ה שוב אין לי מושב בארץ, אסלק שכינתי ממנה, ואעלה למכוני הראשון, הה״ד אלכה ואשובה אל מקומי עד אשר יאשמו ובקשו פני (הושע ה טו), באותה שעה היה הקב״ה בוכה ואומר אוי לי מה עשיתי, השריתי שכינתי למטה בשביל ישראל, ועכשיו שחטאו חזרתי למקומי הראשון, חס ושלום שהייתי שחוק לגוים ולעג לבריות, באותה שעה בא מטטרון ונפל על פניו, ואמר לפניו, רבש״ע אני אבכה ואתה לא תבכה, אמר לו אם אין אתה מניח לי לבכות עכשיו אכנס למקום שאין לך רשות ליכנס ואבכה, שנאמר ואם לא תשמעוה במסתרים תבכה נפשי מפני גוה וגו׳ (ירמיה יג יז). אמר להן הקב״ה למלאכי השרת בואו ונלך אני ואתם ונראה בביתי מה עשו אויבים בו, מיד הלך הקב״ה ומלאכי השרת וירמי׳ לפניו, וכיון שראה הקב״ה את בית המקדש, אמר בוודאי זהו ביתי וזהו מנוחתי שבאו אויבים ועשו בו כרצונם, באותה שעה היה הקב״ה בוכה ואומר אוי לי על ביתי, בני היכן אתם, כהני היכן אתם, אוהבי היכן אתם, מה אעשה לכם, התריתי בכם ולא חזרתם בתשובה, אמר הקב״ה לירמיה אני דומה היום לאדם שהי׳ לו בן יחידי, ועשה לו חופה ומת בתוך חופתו, ואין לך כאב לא עלי ולא על בני, לך וקרא לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב ומשה

מקבריהם שהם יודעים לבכות, אמר לפניו רבש"ע איני יודע היכן משה קבור, אמר לו הקב"ה לך עמוד על שפת הירדן והרם קולך וקרא בן עמרם בן עמרם עמוד וראה צאנך שבלעום אויבים, מיד הלך ירמי' למערת המכפלה ואמר לאבות העולם, עמדו שהגיע זמן שאתם מתבקשין לפני הקב"ה, אמרו לו למה, אמר להם איני יודע, מפני שהיה מתירא שלא יאמרו בימיך היתה לבנינו זאת, הניחן ירמיה ועמד על שפת הירדן וקרא בן עמרם בן עמרם עמוד הגיע זמן שאתה מבוקש לפני הקב"ה, אמר לו מה היום מיומים שאני מבוקש לפני הקב"ה, אמר לו ירמי' איני יודע, הניחו משה והלך אצל מלאכי השרת, שהיה מכיר אותן משעת מתן תורה, אמר להם משרתי עליונים, כלום אתם יודעים מפני מה אני מתבקש לפני הקב"ה, אמרו לו בן עמרם אי אתה יודע שבית המקדש חרב וישראל גלו, והיה צועק ובוכה עד שהגיע לאבות העולם, מיד אף הם קרעו בגדיהם, והניחו ידיהם על ראשיהם, והיו צועקים ובוכין עד שערי בית המקדש, כיון שראה אותם הקב"ה מיד ויקרא ה' אלהים צבאות ביום ההוא לבכי ולמספד ולקרחה ולחגור שק, ואלמלא מקרא שכתוב אי אפשר לאומרו, והיו בוכין והולכין משער זה לשער זה, כאדם שמתו מוטל לפניו, והיה הקב"ה סופד ואומר אוי לו למלך שבקטנותו הצליח ובזקנותו לא הצליח. א"ר שמואל בר נחמן בשעה שחרב בית המקדש בא אברהם לפני הקב"ה בוכה וממרט זקנו, ותולש שערות ראשו, ומכה את פניו, וקורע את בגדיו, ואפר על ראשו, והיה מהלך בבית המקדש וסופד וצועק, אמר לפני הקב"ה מפני מה נשתניתי מכל אומה ולשון שבאתי לידי בושה וכלימה זאת, כיון שראוהו מלאכי השרת אף הם קשרו הספד שורות שורות, ואומרין נשמו מסלות שבת עובר אורח וגו' (ישעי' לג ח), מאי נשמו מסלות, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה מסילות שהתקנת לירושלים שלא יהו עוברי דרכים פוסקים מהם היאך היו לשממה. שבת עובר אורח. אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה דרכים שהיו ישראל עוברים ושבים בהם בחגים, היאך שבתו. הפר ברית (שם /ישעיהו ל"ג/). אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע הופר ברית של אברהם אביהם שעל ידו מתישב העולם ועל ידו הכירוך בעולם שאתה אל עליון קונה שמים וארץ. מאס ערים (שם /ישעיהו ל"ג/). אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה מאסת ירושלים וציון לאחר שבחרת בהם, הה"ד המאוס מאסת את יהודה ואם בציון געלה נפשך וגו' (ירמי' יד יט). לא חשב אנוש (ישעי' שם /ל"ג/). אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה אפילו כדור אנוש שהיו ראש לע"ז לא חשבת את ישראל, באותה שעה נזקק הקב"ה למלאכי השרת אמר להם מה לכם קושרין מספד בענין הזה שורות שורות, אמרו לפניו רבש"ע מפני אברהם אוהבך שבא לביתך וספד ובכה, מפני מה לא השגחת עליו, אמר להם מיום שנפטר אוהבי מלפני לבית עולמו לא בא לביתי, ועכשיו מה לידידי בביתי (ירמי' יא טו). אמר אברהם לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם מפני מה הגלית את בני ומסרתן ביד האומות, והרגום בכל מיתות משונות, והחרבת בית המקדש מקום שהעליתי את יצחק בני עולה לפניך, אמר לו הקב"ה לאברהם, בניך חטאו ועברו על כל התורה, ועל כ"ב אותיות שבה, הה"ד וכל ישראל עברו את תורתך (דניאל ט יא), אמר אברהם לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע מי מעיד בהם בישראל שעברו את תורתך, אמר לו תבא תורה ותעיד בהם בישראל, מיד באה תורה להעיד בהן, אמר לה אברהם בתי את באה להעיד בהן בישראל שעברו על מצותיך ואין לך בושת פנים מפני, זכרי יום שהחזירך הקב"ה על כל אומה ולשון ולא רצו לקבלך עד שבאו בני להר סיני וקבלו אותך וכבדוך, ועכשיו את באה להעיד בהם ביום צרתם כיון ששמעה תורה כך עמדה לצד אחד ולא העידה בהן, אמר לו הקב"ה לאברהם יבאו עשרים ושתים אותיות ויעידו בהן בישראל, מיד באו עשרים ושתים אותיות. באה אל"ף להעיד בישראל שעברו על התורה, אמר לה אברהם, אל"ף את ראש לכל האותיות ובאת להעיד בישראל ביום צרתם, זכרי יום שנגלה הקב"ה על הר סיני ופתח בך אנכי ה' אלהיך (שמות כ ב), ולא קבלוך אומה ולשון אלא בני, ואת באת להעיד בבני, מיד עמדה אל"ף לצד אחד ולא העידה בהן. באה בי"ת להעיד בהם בישראל, אמר לה אברהם בתי את באת להעיד על בני שהם זריזין בחמשה חומשי תורה שאת בראש התורה הה"ד בראשית ברא אלהים (בראשית א א), מיד עמדה בי"ת לצד אחד ולא העידה כלום. באתה גימ"ל להעיד בישראל, אמר לה אברהם גימ"ל את באת להעיד בבני שעברו על התורה, כלום יש אומה שמקיימת מצות ציצית, שאת נתונה בראש אלא בני, הה"ד גדילים תעשה לך (דברים כב יב), מיד עמדה גימ"ל לצד אחד ולא העידה כלום, וכיון שראו כל האותיות שהשתיקן אברהם נתביישו ועמדו בעצמן ולא העידו בישראל. מיד פתח אברהם לפני הקב"ה ואמר רבש"ע למאה שנה נתת לי בן, וכשעמד על דעתו והיה בחור בן שלשים ושבע שנים, אמרת לי העלהו עולה לפני, ונעשיתי עליו כאכזרי ולא ריחמתי עליו, אלא אני בעצמי כפתתי אותו, ולא תזכור לי זאת ולא תרחם על בני. פתח יצחק ואמר רבש"ע כשאמר לי אבא, אלהים יראה לו השה לעולה בני (בראשית כב ח), לא עכבתי על דבריך ונעקדתי ברצון לבי על גבי המזבח ופשטתי את צוארי תחת הסכין, ולא תזכור לי זאת, ולא תרחם על בני. פתח יעקב ואמר רבש"ע לא עשרים שנה עמדתי בבית לבן, וכשיצאתי מביתו פגע בי עשו הרשע ובקש להרוג את בני, ומסרתי עצמי למיתה עליהם, ועכשיו נמסרו ביד אויביהם כצאן לטבחה,

לאחר שגדלתים כאפרוחים של תרנגולים, וסבלתי עליהם צער גידול בנים, כי רוב ימי הייתי בצער גדול בעבורם, ועתה לא תזכור לי זאת לרחם על בני. פתח משה ואמר רבש"ע לא רועה נאמן הייתי על ישראל ארבעים שנה, ורצתי לפניהם כסוס במדבר, וכשהגיע זמן שיכנסו לארץ, גזרת עלי במדבר יפלו עצמותי, ועכשיו שגלו שלחת לי לספוד ולבכות עליהם, זהו המשל שאומרים בני אדם מטוב אדוני לא טוב לי, ומרעתו רע לי. באותה שעה אמר משה לירמי' לך לפני שאלך ואביאם ואראה מי מניח ידו עליהם, אמר לו ירמי' אי אפשר לילך בדרך מפני ההרוגים, א"ל אעפ"כ, מיד הלך משה וירמי' לפניו, עד שהגיעו לנהרות בבל, ראוהו למשה ואמרו זה לזה בא בן עמרם מקברו לפדותינו מיד צרינו, יצאה בת קול ואמרה גזירה היא מלפני, מיד אמר להם משה בני להחזיר אתכם אי אפשר, שכבר נגזרה גזירה, אלא המקום יחזיר אתכם במהרה, והניח אותם. באותה שעה הרמו קולם בבכיה גדולה עד שעלתה בכייתם למרום, הה"ד על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו (תהלים קלז א), כיון שבא משה אצל אבות העולם, אמרו לו מה עשו האויבים בבנינו, אמר להם מהם הרגו, ומהם כפתו ידיהם לאחוריהם, ומהם אסורים בכבלי ברזל, ומהם נפשטים ערומים, ומהם מתו בדרך ונבלתם לעוף השמים ולבהמות הארץ, ומהם מושלכים לחמה רעבים וצמאים. מיד פתחו כלם ובכו וקוננו בקינות ווי על דמטא לבנן, היכי הוייתון כיתמא בלא אבא, היכי דמכיתון בטיהרא ובקייטא בלא לבושא ובלא כסו, היכי סגיתון בטורי ובחצצי חליצי מסאני ובלא סנדלא, היכי טעניתון מובלי טעוני דחלא, היכי הוו ידיכון כפיתין לאחוריכון, היכי לא בלעתון ריקא בפומיכון. פתח משה ואמר ליטא שמשא אמאי לא חשכת בשעה דעאל שנאה לבית מקדשא, אהדר ליה שמשא בחייך משה רעיא מהימנא, היכי אהוי חשוכא דלא שבקין לי ולא רפו לי דנקטין לי בשיתין שוטי דנורא, ואמרין לי פוק ונהר נהוריך. תוב פתח משה ואמר ווי על זיוך מקדשא היכי חשך ווי כי מטא זמניה די חרב והיכלא מיקלייא ודרדקי דבי רב מתקטלין, ואבוהון אזלין בשביה וגלותא ובחרבא. תוב פתח משה ואמר שבאי אי בחייכון אתון קטולי לא תקטלון קטולה אכזראה ולא תשוון כלאה גמירא, ולא תקטלון ברא באנפוהי דאבא וברתא באנפה דאמא דמטא זימנא דמרי שמיא חושבנא חשיב מנכון, וכשדאי רשיעיא לא עבדין הכי אלא מותבין ליה לברא באנפי' דאמיה ואמרין ליה לאבוה קום נכסיא בכיא אמיה ונתרין דמעתא עלוהי ואבוהי תלה ליה רישיה. ועוד אמר משה לפניו רבש"ע כתבת בתורתך ושור או שה אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד (ויקרא כב כח), והלא כבר הרגו בנים ואמותיהם כמה וכמה ואתה שותק. באותה שעה קפצה רחל אמנו לפני הקב"ה ואמרה רבש"ע גלוי לפניך שיעקב עבדך אהבני אהבה יתירה, ועבד בשבילי לאבא שבע שנים, וכשהשלימו אותן שבע שנים, והגיע זמן נשואי לבעלי, יעץ אבי להחליפני לבעלי בשביל אחותי, והוקשה עלי הדבר עד מאד, כי נודעה לי העצה, והודעתי לבעלי ומסרתי לו סימן שיכיר ביני ובין אחותי, כדי שלא יוכל אבי להחליפני, ולאחר כן נחמתי בעצמי וסבלתי את תאותי, ורחמתי על אחותי שלא תצא לחרפה, ולערב חלפו אחותי לבעלי בשבילי, ומסרתי לאחותי כל הסימנין שמסרתי לבעלי, כדי שיהא סבור שהיא רחל, ולא עוד אלא שנכנסתי תחת המטה שהיה שוכב עם אחותי והיה מדבר עמה והיא שותקת, ואני משיבתו על כל דבר ודבר, כדי שלא יכיר לקול אחותי, וגמלתי חסד עמה, ולא קנאתי בה, ולא הוצאתיה לחרפה, ומה אני שאני בשר ודם עפר ואפר לא קנאתי לצרה שלי ולא הוצאתיה לבושה ולחרפה, ואתה מלך חי וקיים רחמן, מפני מה קנאת לע"ז שאין בה ממש והגלית בני, ונהרגו בחרב, ועשו אויבים בם כרצונם, מיד נתגללו רחמיו של הקב"ה ואמר בשבילך רחל אני מחזיר את ישראל למקומן, הה"ד כה אמר ה' קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה על בניה מאנה להנחם על בניה כי איננו (ירמי' לא יד), וכתיב כה אמר ה' מנעי קולך מבכי ועיניך מדמעה כי יש שכר לפעולתך וגו' (שם שם /ירמיהו ל"א/ טו), וכתיב ויש תקוה לאחריתך נאם ה' ושבו בנים לגבולם (שם שם /ירמיהו ל"א/ טז).

<u>איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א</u>

See Chapter Two, p. 66.

אין לה מנחם. א"ר לוי כל מקום שנאמר אין הוה לה, ותהי שרי עקרה אין לה ולד (בראשית יא ל), והוה לה, שנאמר וה' פקד את שרה (שם /בראשית/ כא א), ודכוותיה ולחנה אין ילדים (ש"א =שמואל א'= א ב), והוה לה, שנאמר כי פקד ה' את חנה וגו' (שם /שמואל א'/ ב כא), ודכוותיה ציון היא דורש אין לה (ירמיה ל יח), והוה לה, שנאמר ובא לציון גואל (ישעיה נט כ), אף כן את אומר אין לה מנחם, והוה לה, שנאמר אנכי אנכי הוא מנחמכם (שם /ישעיהו/ נא יב).

איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה א

See Chapter Two, p. 67.

ר׳ יהודה בר סימון אמר בשם ר׳ שמואל בר יצחק הדין מלכא משיחא אי מחייא הוא, דוד שמיה, אי ממיתיא הוא, דוד שמיה, א״ר תנחומא אנא אומר טעמיה מגדיל ישועות מלכו ועושה חסד למשיחו לדוד ולזרעו (תהלים יח נא), ולדוד אין כתיב כאן, אלא לדוד ולזרעו.

איכה רבה (בובר) פרשה ה

See Chapter Two, pp. 67-68.

על הר ציון ששמם שועלים הלכו בו. כבר היו רבן גמליאל ור׳ יהושע ור׳ אלעזר בן עזריה ור׳ עקיבה עולין לרומי ושמעו קול המונה של רומי רחוק מאה ועשרים מיל, התחילו הם בוכים ור׳ עקיבה משחק, אמרו לו עקיבה אנו בוכים ואתה שוחק, אמר להם למה בכיתם, א״ל לא נבכה שעובדי ע״ז וזובחים לאלילים ומשתחוים לעצבים ויושבים לבטח ובשלוה, ובית הדום רגל אלהינו היה לשריפת אש ומדור לחיות השדה לא נבכה, אמר להם לכך אני שוחק אם למכעיסיו כך לעושי רצונו עאכ״ו. שוב פעם אחת עלו לירושלים כיון שהגיעו לצופים קרעו בגדיהם, והגיעו להר הבית והיה שועל יוצא מבית קדש הקדשים, התחילו בוכים ור׳ עקיבה שוחק, א״ל רבן גמליאל עקיבה לעולם את מתמיה אנו בוכים ואתה שוחק, אמר להם למה בכיתם, אמר להם רבן גמליאל ראו מה עקיבה אומר לנו, מקום שכתוב בו והזר הקרב יומת (במדבר א נב), שועל יוצא מתוכו, לא נבכה, עלינו נתקיים הכתוב על זה היה דוה לבנו, על הר ציון [ששמם שועלים הלכו בו], א״ל לכך אני שוחק שאומר הכתוב, ואעידה לי עדים נאמנים את אוריה הכהן ואת זכריהו בן יברכיהו (ישעיה ח ב), וכי מה ענין אוריה אצל זכריה, מה אמר אוריה ומה אמר זכריה, אוריה אמר ציון שדה תחרש וירושלים עיים תהיה, והר הבית לבמות יער (ירמיה כו יח), זכריה אמר כה אמר ה׳ [צבאות] עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלים ואיש משענתו בידו מרוב ימים, ורחובות עיר ימלאו ילדים וילדות משחקים ברחובותיה (זכריה ח ד ה), אמר הקב״ה יש לי שנים עדים הללו, אם קיימים דברי אוריה, יהיו קיימים דברי זכריה, ואם בטלים דברי אוריה, יהיו בטלים דברי זכריה, שמחתי שנתקיימו דברי אוריה, סוף שיתקיימו דברי זכריה לעתיד לבוא, כלשון הזה אמרו לו עקיבה ניחמתנו תתנחם במנחמים.