

Jeremiah 14

8. O hope of Israel, his Savior at time of trouble, why should you be like a stranger in the land, and like a **guest for the night**?

9. Why should You be like a man overcome, like a mighty man, unable to save? For You are in our midst, O Lord, and Your name is called upon us; forsake us not!

Megillah 29a

The verse states: **“Yet I have been to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they have come”** (Ezekiel 11:16). **Rabbi Yitzhak said: This is referring to the synagogues and study halls in Babylonia... It is taught: Rabbi Elazar HaKappar says: In the future, the synagogues and the study halls in Babylonia will be transported and reestablished in Eretz Yisrael.**

S.Y. Agnon, A Guest for the Night (chapter 1)

On the eve of the Day of Atonement, in the afternoon, I changed from the express to the local train that runs to my home town. The Jews who had traveled with me got out and went their way, while Gentile townsfolk, men and women, made their way in. The wheels rolled sluggishly between hills and mountains, valleys and gorges; at every station the train stopped and lingered, let out people and baggage, and started up again. After two hours, signs of Szibucz sprouted from both sides of the road. I put my hand to my heart. My hand throbbed against my heart, just as my heart throbbed under my hand. The townsfolk put out their pipes and shoved them into their leggings, got up to collect their baggage, and sat down again; the women elbowed their way to the window, crying “Rubberovitch,” and laughed. The train whistled and puffed, whistled again, then sprawled to rest opposite the station. Along came the dispatcher called “Rubberovitch”; his left arm had been lost in the war; the new one they gave him was made of rubber. He stood erect, waving the flag in his hand, and called: “Szibucz!” It was many years since I had heard the name of Szibucz coming from the lips of a man of my town. Only he who is born there and bred there and lives there knows how to pronounce every single letter of that name.

S.Y. Agnon, A Guest for the Night (chapter 2)

After the service they did not recite psalms, nor did they chant the Song of Unity or the Song of Glory, but locked the synagogue and went home. I walked to the river and stood there on the bridge, just as my father, of blessed memory, used to do on Atonement Eves; he used to stand on the bridge over the river because the odor of the water mitigates thirst and leads men to repentance; for as this water, which now meets your eye, was not here before this moment and will not be here afterwards, so this day, which was given us to repent of our sins, was not yet in the world before and will never be in the world again, and if you do not use it for repentance you have wasted it. The water comes and the water goes; as it comes, so it goes, and an odor of purity rises from it. It seems as if nothing has changed since the day I stood here with Father, of blessed memory, and nothing will change here until the end of all the generations. Along came a group of boys and girls with cigarettes in their mouths. No doubt they had come from the feast they had held that night, as they do [...] to show that they are not in awe of the Day of Atonement.

S.Y. Agnon, A Guest for the Night (chapter 5)

The worshippers drew nearer to the cantor and surrounded the reading desk with their prayer books to catch a little of the light from the candle that burned there. Perhaps the light sensed their presence and perhaps not, but in any case it leaped up toward them. The cantor clapped both his hands in joy and read, “Israel is delivered by the Lord with an eternal deliverance”; clapped once again, and said, “Even today they will be delivered by the word of Thy mouth, O Dweller on high.” A sound of weeping rose from the darkness, like the voices of a crowd supporting the cantor in his prayer. The doors of the Ark stood open, like a heavenly ear attentive to Israel’s prayer. From the table in the south beside the door there was a dull sound, like wood striking on wood. Daniel Bach had changed his position. Again the same sound was heard, as of wood striking on wood. It seemed that his foot could find no rest. The cantor took a watch out of his pocket, looked at it, and began to

רמיה פרק יד

(ח) מְקוֹה יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעוֹ בְּעֵת צָרָה לְמָה תִּהְיֶה כְּגֵר בְּאֶרֶץ וּכְאֶרֶץ נֹטָה לְלוֹן: (ט) לְמָה תִּהְיֶה כְּאִישׁ נֹדֵם כְּגִבּוֹר לֹא יוּכַל לְהוֹשִׁיעַ וְאַתָּה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ יְדוּד וְשִׁמְךָ עָלֵינוּ נִקְרָא אֶל תַּנְחֵנוּ:

מסכת מגילה דף כט ע"א

”וַאֲהֵי לְהֵם לְמַקְדַּשׁ מַעֲטִי” (יחזקאל יא, טז) – אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק אֱלוֹ בְּתֵי כְּנַסְיוֹת וּבְתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת שְׁבַבְבַּל...
תֵּנִיָּא רַבִּי אֱלֵעָזָר הַקַּפָּר אֹמֵר עֵתִידִין בְּתֵי כְּנַסְיוֹת וּבְתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת שְׁבַבְבַּל שִׁיקְבִיעוּ בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

shorten the chants, for the sake of the old men who had not the strength to remain on their feet on account of the fast. When he came to the verse “Every city is builded in its place and the City of God is degraded to the depths of hell,” he wept for a long time.

S.Y. Agnon, *A Guest for the Night* (chapter 79)

...So I sat in the shadow of sweet tranquility with my wife and children—that sweet tranquility which no man savors except when he is sitting in his own home. I occupied myself with my affairs, and my wife with hers. One day she was going through my pieces of luggage and laid them out in the sun. Then she took my satchels to mend them, for through much use the leather inside had been torn and holes had appeared. While she was busy with the satchels she called out to me and asked, “What is this?” I saw she was holding a big key that she had found in the crevices of one of the satchels. I was stunned and astonished. It was the key of our old Beit Midrash. ...my wife handed it to me and I saw that this was not the key the old locksmith had made. It was the key the elders of the old Beit Midrash had handed over to me on the Day of Atonement just before the Closing Service. A thousand times I had sought it, a thousand times I had despaired of it, a thousand times I had sought it again without finding it, and had had another key made, and now, when I had no need of one or the other, it had come back to me. How had it disappeared and how had it appeared again? No doubt one day I had left it in my satchel and it had slipped into a hole so that I could not see it, or perhaps on the day when I put on my new coat I had taken out the key from my summer clothes to put it in my winter clothes and forgotten it. How much sorrow and distress, how much trouble I would have avoided if I had had the key at the right time! But there is no argument against the past. After I had recovered somewhat from my emotions, I told the whole story to my wife, who knew nothing of it, because I had not mentioned it in my letters, for I had wanted to explain the whole matter in detail and had not managed to write before the key was lost, and once it was lost I did not mention it in my letters.

“What are you thinking of doing with the key?” said my wife, “send it to Szibucz?” “The one they have is superfluous,” said I, “and you tell me to burden them with a second key!” “Well,” said my wife, “what will you do with it?” There came into my mouth the saying of our sages, of blessed memory: “The synagogues and Batei Midrashot abroad are destined to be established in the Land of Israel.” And I said to myself: When they establish themselves in the Land of Israel, this man will have the key in his possession.

So I rose and put the key in a box, and hung the key of the box over my heart. I did not hang the key of the old Beit Midrash over my heart, for it was too heavy for my heart to bear; the early craftsmen used to make their keys too big and heavy for the measure of our hearts.

The key being put away in its place, I returned to my work, and whenever I remembered it, I would repeat to myself: “The synagogues and the Batei Midrashot are destined . . .,” and I would open my window and look outside to see if perhaps they were making their way to establish themselves in the Land of Israel. Alas, the land was desolate and silent, and the sound of the steps of the synagogues and Batei Midrashot was not heard. And still the key lies there, waiting with me for that day. However, it is made of iron and brass, and it can wait, but I, who am flesh and blood, find it hard to endure.



**For more on S.Y. Agnon, and online learning opportunities, visit
www.webyeshiva.org/agnon**

Agnon Library at Toby Press – www.tobypress.com/agnon