

THE MISSING TEMPLE: THE STATUS OF THE TEMPLE IN JEWISH CULTURE FOLLOWING ITS DESTRUCTION

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Abstract

Almost 2,000 years after its destruction, the Jerusalem Temple remains present in the Jews' imagination and imagery. The Temple is remembered in Jewish tradition as a place of unity, utmost purity and holiness, an intersection between the divine and the human, between Jew and Jew, between the vertical and the horizontal. Generations of Jews have prayed to be able to behold the restoration of the Temple but have not been privileged to witness it. Nevertheless, it shaped their language and encapsulated their hopes for redemption. The Temple was the essence to which all other practices were compared; after its destruction, the Temple itself became the measure of many contemporary rabbinic practices. This article surveys the different ways the Jews kept the symbolism of the Temple and embedded it in their lives. It also examines the contemporary state of affairs – what was viewed in the past as an almost imaginary messianic hope, is now on the agenda of some right-wing groups who wish to hasten rebuilding of a Temple on the Temple Mount.

Introduction

Physicians report that people who lose a limb sometimes feel a 'phantom' pain in that part of the body (Nikolajsen & Jensen 2001: 107–116). Likewise, the Jewish people still feel the loss of the Temple in Jerusalem even though it was destroyed almost two thousand years ago. In fact, for most of its existence the Jewish people lived without a Temple. In this case, the lost part of the body was not just a limb but the heart of the Jewish people. How can a people survive without what once was its beating heart? This is the conundrum of the Jewish people – who not only survived but even flourished despite the loss of the Temple.

As I write this article I am aware of the extraordinary circumstances of my existence in Jewish history – a Jew born in Jerusalem living in the capital of

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the sovereign state of Israel. Throughout history, Jews had an unattainable longing for Jerusalem. They remembered Jerusalem in their prayers and supplications; Jerusalem shaped their internal language and hopes for redemption even though it was not a concrete component of their lives. For generations Jews prayed to see the re-establishment of Jerusalem but were not privileged to do so. The yearnings for the restoration of the Temple's prominence and worship formed an inherent component of the longing for Jerusalem and the return to Zion:

Just as a navel is set in the middle of a person, so the land of Israel is the navel of the world. Thus it is stated (in Ezek. 38:12): 'Who dwell on the navel of the earth.' The land of Israel sits at the centre of the world; Jerusalem is in the centre of the land of Israel; the sanctuary is in the centre of Jerusalem; the Temple building is in the centre of the sanctuary; the ark is in the centre of the Temple building; and the foundation stone, out of which the world was founded, is before the Temple building. (TanB 7.10 Lev, 309–310; see also Sanh 37a; Yoma 54b)

The notion of the land of Israel as 'the navel of the world' is inseparable from that of Jerusalem and the Temple as the navel (or focal point) of 'the navel of the world'.

Another midrash describes the world as an eye and the Temple as its centre. Here, as well, the Temple is viewed as an integral part of nature:

Abba Hanan says in the name of Samuel the Younger: The world may be compared to the eye of man: the white of the eye is the Ocean which surrounds the whole world; the iris is the inhabited land; the pupil is Jerusalem; the face in the pupil is the Temple – May it soon be rebuilt. (*Derek Erez* 7:38, 56)

According to Jewish tradition, the world was created from the Foundation Stone located inside the Temple. The land of Israel > Jerusalem > Temple > Sanctuary > Ark > Foundation Stone – these narrowing concentric circles are perceived to be an expression of Jewish cosmogony (Böhl 1974: 253–270). Jewish liturgy often refers to the future rebuilding of the Temple as part of the redemption narrative, which demonstrates the Temple's centrality.

The *Amidah*, the central prayer in the Jewish liturgy, contains the following supplications: for the ingathering of the exiles, righteousness and justice, the end of evildoers, the reward for righteous people, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, the coming of the Messiah and finally, for the restoration of the sacrificial worship. The redemption narrative views the rebuilding of the Temple as a necessary and natural stage (Hoffman 1998: 17–36).

This article will examine the status of Jerusalem in Jewish consciousness, and in particular, the symbolic significance of the Temple as a centre of Jewish worship, especially in the aftermath of its destruction. In order to complete the picture, there is also a need to explore the reactions to the destruction in

Jewish apocalyptic thinking, Jewish mysticism and Hekhalot literature as well as that of early Christianity, although I will not deal with these aspects here. Instead I will focus on the perception of the Temple after its destruction in prayer, worship, rabbinic literature as well as later responses. In conclusion, various thoughts on the status of the Temple in modern Jewish life will be presented. Although the Jewish people have now returned to their homeland, the rebuilding of the Temple appears more distant than ever. This issue has become a subject of heated debate in Israeli dialogue.

Confronting the Destruction of the Second Temple; the Commandment of ‘Remembering the Temple’

Even prior to 70 C.E., the Jewish people began to prepare for the period following the Temple’s destruction. For example, the Pharisees removed various religious rituals from the Temple precincts, such as eating meat in a state of purity, and expanded them to include the general populace outside of the Temple. Although the Pharisees attributed great importance to the Temple, such actions laid the foundation for the possibility of a significant Jewish existence after the Temple’s destruction (Ames 2005: 339–356; Neusner 1972: 13–30). Likewise, the account of Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai leaving Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction and establishing a spiritual centre in Yavneh became a formative narrative (Schäfer 1979: 43–101). For generations, Yavneh symbolised the birth of rabbinic Judaism. It was transformed into an alternative centre to Jerusalem not only in the geographical sense but also in its spiritual features – in its ambiance, leadership and religious worship. Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai enacted nine religious rulings under the category of ‘remembrance of the Temple’ (or ‘remembrance of Jerusalem’). These rulings memorialised the Temple and preserved its importance while utilising and delegating its authority to post-destruction Jewish leadership. Yet the Temple continued to be present in Jewish life in various ways. Rabbi Joshua, one of the pupils of Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai who lived during the period of the Temple’s destruction and thereafter (according to one tradition he assisted Rabban Johanan in his escape from Jerusalem [bGit59b]), formulated the approach to Jewish life after the Temple:

After the last Temple was destroyed, abstainers became many in Israel, who would not eat meat or drink wine. Rabbi Joshua engaged them in discourse, saying to them: ‘My children, on what account do you not eat meat?’ They said to him: ‘Shall we eat meat, for every day a continual burnt offering [of meat] was offered on the altar, and now it is no more?’ He said to them: ‘Then let us not eat meat. And why are you not drinking wine?’ They said to him: ‘Shall we drink wine, for every day wine was poured out as a drink-offering on the altar, and now it is no more?’ He

said to them: 'Then let us not drink it.' He said to them: 'But if so, we should also not eat bread, for from it did they bring the Two Loaves and the Show-Bread. We should also not drink water, for they did pour out a water-offering on the festival. We should also not eat figs and grapes, for they would bring them as First Fruits on the festival of Aseret [Shavu'ot].' They fell silent.

He said to them: 'My children, mourning too much is not possible (and not to mourn at all is not possible). But thus have the sages said: 'A man puts on plaster on his house but leaves open a small area, as a memorial to Jerusalem. A man prepares what is need for a meal but leaves out some small things, as a memorial to Jerusalem. A woman prepares her ornaments but leaves out some small thing, as a memorial to Jerusalem, since it is said: 'if I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy! (Ps. 137:5–6).' And whoever mourns for her in this world will rejoice with her in the world to come, as it is said: 'Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her' (Is. 66:10). (TSot 15:11–15:15 in Neusner 2002: 893; a more detailed parallel is found in BB 60b; see also T:BB 2:17)

Rabbi Joshua cites the suggestion of those who declared that one should abstain from the joys of life, such as eating meat and drinking wine, bringing it *ad absurdum* by carrying the proposition to its logical conclusion – that one should not consume anything hence, life cannot go on. He proposes a middle path: 'mourning too much is not possible and not to mourn at all is not possible'. In other words, to continue with one's daily life while marking the Temple's absence. For example, it is permissible to paint a house but one should leave a small area unpainted as a sign of mourning for the Temple. The same is true for festive meals and women's jewellery. Thus, on the one hand, the Temple and its destruction are always remembered, while on the other hand, our daily lives continue as usual. In this way, Judaism does not merely survive but also develops and cultivates beauty ('A woman prepares her ornaments').

The main question is as follows: did the rabbis aspire to support Jewish existence until the time would arrive for the building of the Third Temple? Or, did they experience their lives after the destruction as a permanent reality that required transforming Judaism so that the Temple would be unnecessary? In other words, did the sages intend to propose temporary substitutes for Temple worship due to the fact that there was no alternative? Or, were these aimed to be sustainable and permanent substitutes that would make the Temple and its worship unnecessary, and consequently, its priests as well? The responses to this question represent, to a large extent, the viewpoint and religious outlook of the respondent more than the Jewish reality in the years following the Temple's destruction (Zohar 1989: 1–28).

Still, establishing permanent (and even preferable) substitutes for the Temple's sacrificial service as well as its symbolic presence in Jewish life also express the Temple's absence.

A Temple in the Absence of a Temple: Substitutes for Temple Worship

I will now discuss several substitutes for Temple worship: (a) the study of Torah; (b) acts of loving kindness and the Jewish home; (c) the institution of prayer; (d) repentance. These practices, especially the study of Torah and prayer were at times competing (Reif 1993: 95–102).

The Study of Sacrifices as a Substitute for Sacrificial Worship

Tannaitic literature was created during a period when Jerusalem lay in ruin, and eventually Jews were not permitted to enter the city. Thus the reality of a concrete Temple did not exist for the rabbinic tradents. Still, at least four out of six orders of the Mishnah focus on matters related to the priestly cult, sacrifices and the Temple. The tractates in these orders provide a detailed and strict description of the various laws connected to the sacrificial worship. Citing Alfred Korzybski's expression concerning 'man without territory', Jacob Neusner notes that the Mishnah represents a map that ignores real territory and creates an imaginary one for '[n]ot only is map not territory. Map is also all one has, for now there is no territory' (Neusner 1979: 103–127).

While the sacrificial service could take place only in the Temple and only be performed by people born into a priestly caste with the proper preparation, Torah study could now be achieved by anyone (albeit, men only) at any time and place, with the appropriate learning ability (Ibid.: 123–128).

Rabbinic culture emphasises the study of Torah. The Mishnah presents Torah learning as something that cannot be measured (it has no 'fixed measure'), together with other practices connected to the Temple (such as the First Fruits, Pilgrimage) (*Peah* 1.1). The Gemara, however, cites a tannaitic tradition that presents a more extreme approach towards the importance of Torah study (and other deeds): 'There are six things, the fruit of which man eats in this world, while the principal remains for him for the world to come' (Shab 127a, Epstein trans, 1938a: 632).

The Temple's appearance, aroma, voices and the emotions of its pilgrims are preserved in the Mishnah's succinct text. The rabbinic democratic revolution is encapsulated in the transition from sacrificial worship to learning. Now the focus is not upon a specific place or religious act but rather upon the word and the study. For generations, the study of the Mishnah, in particular the tractates from the Order of *Kodashim*, was viewed as a concrete expression of

contemporary Temple worship. In the past, such study had a purely theoretical nature. Today, however, it has the potential to engender a practical expression that may have radical implications.

Gemilut hasadim (Acts of Loving Kindness) and the Jewish Home as a Substitute for the Temple

In the following tradition, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai declares that although the Temple was destroyed there is a substitute of equal value which can atone for the people's sins – ethical relations among people:

A story is told about Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai that he was walking along the road when Rabbi Joshua ran after him and said to him: Woe to us because the house of our life has been destroyed, the place which used to atone for our sins. He answered: Do not despair we have another atonement instead of it. He asked; what is it? Johanan answered: 'For I desire loving kindness and not sacrifices'. (Hos. 6:6) (ARN 8:38. Saldarini trans. (1975), 75)

Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, the person most identified with the reform embodying the transition from Temple to Rabbinic Judaism, proposes 'another atonement' as a substitute for sacrifices – *Gemilut hasadim* (acts of loving kindness). Similarly, the abovementioned tractate *Peah* (1:1) lists alongside practices that are performed in the Temple (First Fruits, Pilgrimage) other practices that take place outside of the Temple (acts of loving kindness and the study of Torah). The Mishnah ascribes these practices an equal status, thereby laying the groundwork for viewing commandments unassociated with the Temple as having an equal status to those that are connected. (See also *T'Peah* 4.19. 21; Bokser 1983a: 44–47.)

Baruch Bokser notes that the tannaim did not suggest replacing the sacrificial rite with acts of loving kindness. They merely state that acts of loving kindness are of equal value to the sacrifices in the Temple. The amoraim, however, present a much more revolutionary approach. Similar to the case of Torah study as a substitute for Temple worship, they describe acts of loving kindness as being more important than sacrifices (Bokser 1983a: 38–61). For example: 'Rabbi Eleazar stated: Greater is he who performs charity than [he who offers] all the sacrifices, for it is said, "To do charity and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice"' (Hos 10:12) (*Suk* 49b).

In a parallel text, Rabbi Eleazar speaks of prayer as superior to sacrifices (*Ber* 32b, for the significance of these traditions and their parallels, see Bokser 1983b: 349–374). In both of the cases described above, sacrifices are presented as not only impossible in the rabbinic period but also as, to some extent, less desirable, and the substitutes are not merely a necessary default. The Jewish home and the proper life therein are presented as a symbolic Temple. In other words, they are a partial representation and substitute for the Temple. For

example: ‘Rabban Johanan and Rabbi Eleazar both said: While the Temple still stood the altar used to make atonement for a person, but now that the Temple no longer stands a person’s table makes atonement for him’ (*Men* 97a and see also *Ber* 55b, *Hag* 27a).

A person’s table, representing normal routine, resembles the altar since, like the altar, it atones for him. One thousand years later, David Abudarham, a fourteenth-century Sephardic exegete on the prayer-book, explains the reason for the ritual washing of the hands upon awakening: ‘This act resembles that of the high priest who sanctifies his hands prior to offering a sacrifice. Similarly, a person should sanctify his hands before praying to God so that we may worship Him with purified hands’ (*Abudarham HaShalem* 1959, 39). Similarly, a rather surprising comparison was made in a *tehine* (a private personal devotion for women) between a woman lighting candles on Friday night and the high priest who lit the candles in the Temple is even more surprising (Weissler 1991: 1–26).

The Institution of Prayer as a Substitute for Sacrifice

The first paragraph in tractate Berakhot, which is also the beginning of this entire Mishnah literature, determines the time for the reading of the evening *Shema* in accordance with the time that ‘the priests enter to eat of their priestly tithe’. In other words, the liturgical project is based on the sacrificial rite in the Temple, and the Mishnah does not mention that it had ceased to exist many decades ago. Later on, the Amoraim, the Talmud sages, determined that public prayer is equivalent to the grain offering (PT *Ber* 2.1.4b; *ibid.*, 5.1.8d; see also Bokser 1983a: 52–53, Reif 1993: 95–102).

Rabbinic literature provides two main explanations for the origins of Jewish prayer. Firstly, the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – instituted these prayers. Secondly, ‘the prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices’ (*bBer* 26b). A third explanation is given in Palestinian sources, claiming that the prayers were instituted according to the different parts of the day – the sunrise, noon and evening (*Gen Rab* 68, 9; PT *Ber* 4.1.7a-b). According to the second opinion made in the Gemara, prayer replaced the daily sacrifices from the time that they ceased to be offered. Although it is difficult to find any historical basis, this explanation does contain an internal logic (Reif 1993: 101–102). Still there is one difficulty – only two daily sacrifices were offered in the Temple – a morning and an afternoon sacrifice – while Jewish tradition established three daily prayers. The Talmud provides a rather weak justification for this: ‘Because the limbs and fat which were not consumed [on the altar] by the evening could be brought for the whole of the night’ (*bBer* 26b). In fact, the sages’ attempt to replace the system of two sacrifices with three prayers actually demonstrates their desire to indicate that the synagogue and prayer represent an authentic substitute for the Temple and the sacrificial rite.

The following midrash recounts an imaginary conversation between God and Abraham, wherein God promises Abraham that the prayer will be an adequate substitute for sacrifice if the Temple is destroyed (which of course had not yet been built):

He [Abraham] then said to him: Master of the Universe, ‘Let me know whereby I shall inherit it’. [Gen 15:8]

[God] answered: ‘Take me a heifer of three years old and a she-goat of three years old’ etc. [ibid. 9].

Abraham then continued: Master of the Universe! This holds good whilst the Temple remains in being, but when the Temple will no longer be what will become of them?

[God] replied: I have already long ago provided for them in the Torah the order of the sacrifices and whenever they read it I will deem it as if they had offered them before me and I will grant them pardon for all their iniquities. (Tan 27b; Meg 31b; see also RH 17a, and a transformation of this tradition in Pirkei dRabbi Eliezer, Friedman p. 42)

According to this midrash, Abraham foresees that in the future the people of Israel will exist without a Temple, and asks how will they be able to atone for their sins. God replies that he instituted a text, termed ‘the sacrificial order’, and that its recitation would be the [virtual] enactment of the sacrifices. This ‘sacrificial order’ apparently meant the description of the sacrifices read during the *Amidah* prayer of the morning service. According to this midrash, ‘the order of atonement’ that God revealed to Moses not only replaces the sacrifices but was created as such from the outset. This legitimate substitutional system, reflected in the biblical expression ‘instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips’ (Hos 14:3), recited as part of the liturgy for Israel acknowledging its sins and requesting God’s forgiveness, also expresses the validity of substituting prayer for sacrifice.

Consequently, although many scholars maintain that structured prayers existed before the Temple’s destruction, the sages believed that prayer was a novelty, a legitimate and adequate substitute for the sacrificial rite. They ask: ‘What is “the service [*avodah*] of the heart?” You should say – it is prayer’. And the Palestinian Talmud asks: ‘Is there service [*avodah*] in Babylonia, and what is it?’ And they reply: ‘It is prayer’ (PT Ber 4, 1; 29a-b; see also bTan 2a). According to this approach, the prayer of one’s heart represented not only a substitute for the sacrificial rite but was the correct and exact performance of the biblical command.

Repentance as a Substitute for Sacrificial Worship

The following tradition, uttered by the amora Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, presents one who repents as one who ‘sacrifices his [evil] inclination and confesses

[his sin] over it' (San 43b). This description of the act of repentance in terminology taken from the sacrificial rite is not a trivial matter. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi continues:

When the Temple was in existence, if a person brought a burnt offering, he received credit for a burnt offering; if a meal offering, he received credit for a meal offering; but he who was humble in spirit, Scripture regarded him as though he had brought all the offerings, for it is said 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.' (Ps 51:19) And furthermore, his prayers are not despised, for it is written 'A broken and contrite heart, God, You shall not despise.' (San 43b)

In the first part of the homily, Rabbi Joshua equates repentance with the sacrificial worship. In the second part, he shows that a humble person is preferable to any sacrifice and is viewed as one who has offered all the sacrifices. In the third part Rabbi Joshua determines that prayer which causes repentance is preferable to sacrifice since it is not 'despised', that is, ended or wasted (see also Lev Rab 9,1, 150–152; Bokser 1983a: 51–53).

We have seen how the sages presented various practices unrelated to the Temple as equal or even superior to sacrifice. While in the past everything was compared to the Temple and its rites, now other practices became the yardstick, with the people and their actions as the focus point (Neusener 1976: 255–256). Instead of the Temple rite, the elements of intention in prayer, repentance and interpersonal relations attained a prominent standing in Judaism.

Although this article does not profess to offer a historical developmental approach, an interesting picture arises from this analysis. The tannaitic texts present practices external to the Temple together with those performed in it, without any attempt to show that one is a substitute for the other. Later texts, those of the amoraic period, on the other hand, present prayer and acts of loving kindness as substitutions for, and at times even superior to, the Temple rite. This may be due to the amoraim's relative distance from the Temple experience and the hopelessness (and perhaps even the undesirability) of rebuilding the Temple (Bokser 1983a; idem 1981: 557–574; idem 1990: 1–19).

Formative Memory: The Representation of the Temple in Jewish Life

Supplications and Petitions for Rebuilding the Temple and Reinstating the Sacrificial Rite

The plea to speedily rebuild the Temple is found in all major Jewish prayers, it is a cornerstone in the liturgical redemption narrative. For example, it

comprises the central part in each of the three daily *Amidah* prayers: first there is a plea to gather and return the exiles from the four corners of the earth; a proper leadership is required for this ingathering and therefore there is a plea for the restoration of the faithful judges. These leaders will punish the evildoers (the *minim*) and in contrast the righteous will be rewarded. Only then will Jerusalem be rebuilt and the Messiah will come. The blessing in the *Amidah* that completes this set of national blessings describes the Temple service. It was apparently composed during the Second Temple period and its content was amended for the post-destruction period (Elbogen 1993: 50–51). This blessing, the 17th benediction of the *Amidah*, represents the essence and pinnacle of the redemption narrative in the *Amidah*: ‘Accept O Lord Our God the prayer of Your people Israel and restore the sacrificial rite to the sanctuary of Your Temple. May the sacrifices and prayers of Your People Israel be lovingly accepted. May the rite of your people Israel always be acceptable to you’.

Consequently, the pinnacle of redemption is the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of the sacrificial rite, which will be possible with the return of God to Zion. The rebuilding of the Temple is also an important motif in the blessings recited after the weekly prophetic reading, the Grace after Meals, the Additional prayer service and in the above-mentioned morning blessings, which contain the sacrificial order.

Paraliturgical References to Jerusalem and the Temple

Supplications for Jerusalem and the Temple are mentioned in many contexts, particularly those connected to the yearly and life cycles. The recitation of the phrase: ‘Next year in Jerusalem’ added in the Middle Ages (and in later generations it is customary to add ‘rebuilt Jerusalem’) represents a paraliturgical reference to Jerusalem connected to the yearly cycle. This phrase is recited at the end of the Passover Haggadah and at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service. Jerusalem is also evoked during life cycle ceremonies. At a Jewish wedding, the groom recites the following verse and then breaks a wine glass: ‘If I forget you Jerusalem let my right hand forget its cunning, let my tongue cleave to its palate if I do not remember thee’ (Ps 137:5–6). Since the late Middle Ages, this custom became associated with mourning for the Temple’s destruction (Goldberg 2003: 149–161; for new symbolism related to this custom see Prashizki 2008: 89–110). In this way, the groom carries out his commitment to remember Jerusalem’s destruction on his joyous celebration. This remembrance is accompanied by the breaking of a wine glass, which is viewed as a reenactment of the Temple’s destruction. The many Jewish rites performed during the circumcision ceremony include the recitation of this verse by the father of the baby boy. Thus, the joy of a child’s birth is accompanied by the active remembrance of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is remembered not only during joyful times. Rabbinic literature emphasises the comforting of mourners as one of the most important religious commandments. The customary formula for comforting mourners among Ashkenazi Jews incorporates comforting the individual together with the historical mourning over Jerusalem: ‘May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem’. In the special Grace after Meals recited in a house of mourning it is customary to add:

Comfort, Lord our God, the mourners of Zion and the mourners of Jerusalem and those who are comforted from this mourning, comfort them from their mourning and make their sorrow into joy, as it is written: ‘As a mother comforts her son so I will comfort you; you shall find comfort in Jerusalem’ (Isa 66:13). And it is written: ‘The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; He gathers in the exiles of Israel’ (Ps 147:2). And it is written: ‘There I will make a horn sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for My anointed one’ (ibid. 132:17). Blessed are You Lord, who comforts the mourners of His city Zion and who builds Jerusalem. (Mahzor Vitry, 1968: 248)

Here the individual’s sorrow is integrated into that of the national mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem. The individual’s grief is included with that of the nation and indirectly the mourner is promised that his comfort will be the same as that promised to Jerusalem.

We have seen how Jews who could not merit to see Jerusalem with their own eyes included it in pivotal transitional times and connected it to their inner emotions, both during times of misfortune and in yearly and life cycle events.

Physical Gestures in Prayer Referring to Jerusalem

Although Jewish prayers are written in a text format, certain important elements are not expressed verbally. The fact that vast majority of the traditional synagogues throughout the world face Jerusalem is significant. It represents a link in the chain of command aimed at directing Jewish prayer to the heart of holiness, to the Holy of Holies of the Temple:

If one is standing outside the Land of Israel, he should turn towards the land of Israel. . .

If one stands in the land of Israel, he should turn towards Jerusalem. . .

If one is standing in Jerusalem, he should turn towards the Sanctuary. . .

If one is standing in the Temple, he should turn towards the Holy of Holies. . .

If one was standing in the Holy of Holies, he should turn towards the Ark-cover.

If one was standing behind the Ark-cover, he should imagine himself to be in front of the Ark-cover. (bBer 30a; see also bBB 25a for another opinion)

This system can be described as an entry from the most distant point to the nucleus. As a person approaches holiness, he must direct his prayer more exactly until he perceives himself inside the Holy of Holies, standing in front of the Ark-cover. Yet, this description is a rather theoretical one, at least in part, since only the high priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, and only on one day during the year – on the Day of Atonement. Thus the imagery that guides the person praying brings him closer to the sanctity than would have been possible when the Temple was in existence.

In the above text, devotion appears to be the result of mental and spiritual intention combined with the physical direction of the person's body. And, according to rabbinic thought, the heart is the body's central organ. Still, directing one's heart towards Jerusalem transcends the individual's prayer experience. The Gemara continues to describe the issue of praying towards Jerusalem: 'Consequently, all Israel will be turning their hearts towards one place. Rabbi Abin – or some say Rabbi Abina – said: what text confirms this? "Your neck is like the Tower of David, built to *talpiot*" (Cant 4:4), the elevation [*tel*] towards which all mouths [*piyot*] turn (ibid.)'. The midrash terms the Temple Mount (or Jerusalem) '*talpiyot*' based on the verse from Song of Songs. It then divides the word *talpiyot* into two parts (*tel* + *piyot*), and interprets it to mean 'the elevation of mouths'. In other words, it is the mount towards which all mouths turn in prayer.

Therefore, the function of turning towards Jerusalem, the Temple and the Holy of Holies is not merely to direct one's prayers to the holiest site but also to fulfill a national-social role. All Jews, wherever they live, should focus their prayer in one direction. According to tradition, this place contains the foundation stone upon which the world was established; it is also the site of the Temple, which will be rebuilt in future times. Thus, even if Jews are dispersed among the nations, the fact that they direct their prayers to Jerusalem engenders a feeling of togetherness despite the physical distance from the city and the time gap from past generations.

This beating heart continues to sustain the Jewish people even though its physical manifestation is long gone. Directing one's prayer towards the site of the Temple integrates the vertical dimension (towards God in heaven) and the horizontal dimension (towards the entirety of Israel). This accords with Martin Buber's philosophical outlook – that the way to reach God is through a true meeting with the 'eternal you' (Buber 1923).

Directing one's prayers to the site of the Temple became a substitute for the priestly rite and its social order in the reality following the Temple's destruction, as evinced by the following story in the Palestinian Talmud:

So it is written: 'For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples' (Is 56:7). Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: It is the Sanctuary inside the Temple that all must face. This is true when it is built but

why [face it] when it is destroyed? Rabbi Abun said: ‘built to *talpiot*’ (Cant 4:4). The elevation [*tel*] towards which all mouths [*piyot*] turn during the grace [after a meal], during the recitation of the *Shema* and during the prayer: in the grace – ‘who builds Jerusalem’, during the prayer – ‘the God of David and who builds Jerusalem’, [and] during the recitation of the *Shema* – ‘who spreads a shelter of peace over us, over all His people Israel and over Jerusalem’. (PT Ber 4, 5, 8c-d, English version by E.L.)

The mention of Jerusalem and the hopes for rebuilding the Temple became the symbolic Temple worship. Jerusalem is ‘built to *talpiot*’ even when it lay in ruins; it is an elevation towards which all mouths turn. Remembering the Temple in the daily prayers, which are recited three times each day, transform it into an even greater presence than during the existence of the tangible building.

Iconography and Jewish Art

The seven-branched Menorah is the most ancient Jewish symbol. The Menorah is first mentioned in the Bible as part of the Tabernacle vessels (Ex 25:31–40) and the gold Menorah was lit daily in the Temple by the priests. The Arch of Titus portrays the Menorah being led away, along with other plunder from the Temple. For centuries the motif of the Menorah decorated sacred and secular objects in Jewish households, indicating their belonging to the Jewish people. The Menorah was chosen as the emblem of the state of Israel thereby symbolising the link between the modern state and the former Jewish reality in the land of Israel during the Second Temple period (Frade 2009: 237–265).

Mosaics and representations of the Menorah and other Temple vessels appeared in ancient synagogue iconography starting from the first centuries C.E., for example, in Dura Europos, a synagogue from the third century in today’s Syria. For generations, representations of the Temple façade or the Temple Mount adorned prayer-books, Passover Haggadahs, liturgical books, marriage contracts, Sukkah decorations, sacred objects, Hallah covers, knives for cutting Hallah, wine cups, amulets for women giving birth and their babies, and so on. Jerusalemite artisans crafted Jewish objects with representations of the Temple, which continued until recent times. These objects served a practical purpose – to arouse feelings of yearning and empathy among Jews in the Diaspora so that they would send donations to the poor Jewish populace of Jerusalem, which safeguards the holy sites.

On the eastern wall of many Jewish homes a *Mizrah* (East) plaque was hung, which designated the direction of prayer – towards the land of Israel and Jerusalem. In addition to the plaque, there was often a painting, embroidery or etching which reminded one of the Temple.

Locating a New 'Jerusalem' and Building New 'Temples'

Despite the yearnings for Zion and Jerusalem, Jews developed a sense of identification and belonging to the places where they lived. Yet the explicit theological transition away from the focus on the Temple and the sacrificial rite only began with the nascent Reform movement in Europe and subsequently in the U.S. This is expressed in the Reform movement's first Declaration of Principles in 1885:

We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state. (The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1885 Pittsburgh Conference, retrieved 19 June 2013 from: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/declaration-principles/>)

The Reform Movement's relinquishment of Jerusalem's centrality as part of its renunciation of Jewish nationalism explains why, even today, in many places its houses of worship are called 'Temples'. This term demonstrates that the members of these Temples view their own country as their home and did not desire to return to the land of Israel and rebuild the Temple. Even though Reform Jews have drastically changed their views regarding Zion both as the historical and the contemporary centre of the Jewish people, they have not altered their objection to the rebuilding of the Temple.

Thus, we have seen how various Jewish practices transform the Temple into an active presence during significant moments: in Jewish life cycle events, in the yearly cycle and in daily life. Nonetheless the question remains: is the objective of all these practices a preservation of a dialogue with the Temple until it can be rebuilt? Or, have the references to the Temple and its representation in Jewish art become an object for its own sake, replacing the hopes for the Temple's rebuilding? The classical Reformers voiced explicit objections toward the aspiration to rebuild the Temple, while more traditional Jewish groups merely implied their disapproval. Still, I venture to propose that many traditional Jews who retain the liturgical petitions to rebuild the Temple do not really hope to implement this plea.

Some Thoughts on the Temple's Consciousness in the Modern State of Israel

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the fact that Jews are living in a sovereign Jewish state, with Jerusalem as its capital, represents a novel

situation. It appears that the Jewish people have not yet internalised the implications of their return to the ancestral homeland. The yearnings that had characterised the Jewish people for generations became an established reality. Along with this reality, many Jews became convinced that a Third Temple would not and should not be built. This conviction was based on two factors: (1) an institution such as the Temple does not conform to the present-day reality and religious sentiments; (2) the site of the Temple is not vacant, there now stands a sacred Moslem edifice. Yet the Temple as a concept is still a symbolic presence – the emblem of the state of Israel contains the seven-branched Menorah from the Temple. Likewise, it plays a role in holiday celebrations – during Shavuot many kibbutzim have a First Fruits ceremony reminiscent of the first fruits brought to the Temple, and during Hanukkah, pre-school children present dramas based on Judah Maccabee's purification of the Temple. Finally, there are innumerable visits to the Western Wall where state, military and private ceremonies are held.

Yet for some people this is insufficient. The nostalgic desire of previous generations has become an actual undertaking for various groups who wish to rebuild the Temple (Inbari 2009). These groups endeavour to raise the public's awareness of the various components of the Temple. They strive to restore the sacrificial objects, such as the priestly vessels and garments. 'The Temple Mount Faithful', headed by Gershon Salomon, a Jerusalem lawyer, represents one of the most prominent such groups. Time and again its members attempt to enter the Temple Mount and pray in public, which was prohibited by the status quo that was determined following the Six Day War in 1967 (Ariel 2010: 12–13; Inbari 2010: 79–96). Simultaneously, far from the public eye, even more extreme groups began to organise in the 1980s. Their members study the laws connected with the Temple rite and publish articles calling for preparations for the offering of actual sacrifices in the Temple that would be built on the Temple Mount (Ariel 2010).

The museum of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem, as well as its website, display the priestly garments, the Temple vessels, the sacrificial rite and study tools on related matters. The site also contains a letter from Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagen, commonly known as the *Chafetz Chaim*, from 1931, in which he calls for the establishment of 'Priestly Quarters' and resources for study of the laws of sacrifices, since he believed his period to be the beginning of a messianic age (<http://www.temple.org.il/show.asp?id=32927>).

What was viewed in the past as an almost imaginary messianic hope is now on the actual agenda of groups such as these, some of which are funded by Christian fundamentalist organisations (Inbari 2010: 79–96). Many watch these activities with concern. Despite the fact that they are viewed as fringe groups, nevertheless, they could attempt some action to bring about the

rebuilding of the Temple, for instance, by destroying the Muslim holy site on the Temple Mount (for which the consequences are clear).

Conclusion

This article commenced by comparing the distress caused by the absence of a Temple, which was simultaneously present in Jewish life throughout history, with the phantom pain of a person who lost a limb. I will conclude with a description of a healing method offered to those who suffer from excruciating phantom pains, which painkillers cannot alleviate. The method, termed mirror therapy, involves placing a mirror opposite the missing limb and thereby strengthening the healthy limb in the reflection and lessening the pain of the missing limb (Chan 2007: 2206–2207; Moseley 2006: 2129–2134). This method can be compared to the ways in which the Jewish people coped with, and recovered from, the loss of the Temple throughout history. Instead of the Temple itself, its reflections were created in public and private Jewish life. For some, these solutions served for the interim period until the Temple would be rebuilt. For others, however, they offered a sustainable response in a reality that could not include a concrete Temple.

The sages did not perceive the destruction of the Temple to be the end of the special relationship between God and the Jewish people. They found other expressions for this relationship – the study of Torah, acts of loving kindness, family life, repentance and prayer. Moreover, certain midrashim view the destruction of the Temple as an expression of God’s anger at the building and not to His people. Therefore, the Temple’s destruction actually represents an act of God’s kindness towards the Jewish people (Lam Rab 4, 11). As David Stern writes: ‘The Temple is portrayed . . . as merely a makeshift, temporary construction, intentionally built in this way so that God could destroy it in order to spare the people of Israel from the utter destruction they deserved for their transgressions’ (David Stern in Bokser 1983b: 262–263).

Jacob Neusner goes further and writes about the destruction of the Temple: ‘It remains to ask whether the Temple’s greatest service to the people of Israel was not its destruction, then its definitive prohibition to the Jews’ (Neusner 1979: 121). He then cites Morton Smith’s hypothesis: ‘I should want to go so far as to argue that if the Temple had not been destroyed, it would have to be neglected. For it represented a locative type of religious activity no longer perceived as effective’ (ibid.).

Paradoxically, the Temple’s influence increased following its destruction and its absence is present in the tapestry of Jewish life. In the past, only those who made pilgrimage and entered its gates experienced the Temple. Yet only after its destruction can every Jew symbolically visit the Temple on a regular

basis, by studying its laws, praying in its direction, observing the festivals of the Jewish calendar and celebrating life cycle events. The Temple's symbols are part of the life of every Israeli who holds an Israeli identity card and passport, which bears the motif of the Menorah.

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