

## **A Breakaway Mikdash in Egypt? Chazal's take on בית חוניו, the Temple of Onias - Zevahim perek 14/Menachot perek 13**

The mishnah which opens the fourteenth perek of Zevahim is crystal clear: when there is a Temple in Jerusalem, *bamot* (private altars) are forbidden. Moreover, even after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, *bamot* are still forbidden. So how is it that there was a Jewish Temple in Egypt called the Temple of Onias even as the Second Temple stood? In this shiur, we will examine how Chazal assess it.

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### **1. דברים יב:ח-ט**

לא תעשון כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֲנַחֲנוּ עֹשִׂים כֹּה הַיּוֹם אִישׁ כָּל־הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו:

You shall not act at all as we now act here, each of us as we please,

כִּי לֹא־בָאתֶם עַד־עַתָּה אֶל־הַמְנוּחָה וְאֶל־הַנִּחְלָה אֲשֶׁר־יְיָ־הוֹה אֶל־יְהוָה נָתַן לָךְ:

because you have not yet come to the allotted haven that your God the Lord is giving you.

### **2. משנה זבחים יד:ד-ח**

עַד שֶׁלֹּא הָיוּ הַמִּשְׁכָּן, הָיוּ הַבָּמֹת מִתְּרוֹת, וְעִבּוּדָה בְּבָכוֹרוֹת. מִשְׁהוּקֵם הַמִּשְׁכָּן, נִאָּסְרוּ הַבָּמֹת, וְעִבּוּדָה בְּכֹהֲנִים. קֹדֶשִׁי קֹדָשִׁים, נֹאכְלִים לְפָנִים מִן הַקִּלְעִים. קֹדָשִׁים קָלִים, בְּכָל מַחֲנֶה יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Until the Tabernacle was established, private altars were permitted and the sacrificial service was performed by the firstborn. And from the time that the Tabernacle was established, private altars were prohibited and the sacrificial service was performed by the priests. Offerings of the most sacred order were then eaten within the curtains surrounding the courtyard of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and offerings of lesser sanctity were eaten throughout the camp of Israel.

בָּאוּ לְגִלְגָל, וְהִתְרוּ הַבָּמֹת. קֹדֶשִׁי קֹדָשִׁים, נֹאכְלִים לְפָנִים מִן הַקִּלְעִים. קֹדָשִׁים קָלִים, בְּכָל מְקוֹם:

When the Jewish people arrived at Gilgal private altars were permitted, offerings of the most sacred order were then eaten within the curtains, and offerings of lesser sanctity were eaten anywhere.

בָּאוּ לְשִׁילָה, נִאָּסְרוּ הַבָּמֹת. לֹא הָיָה שָׁם תִּקְרָה, אֲלָא בֵּית שֶׁל אַבְנִים מִלְּמַטָּן וִירִיעוֹת מִלְּמַעְלָן, וְהָיָה הַיְּתֵה מְנוּחָה. קֹדֶשִׁי קֹדָשִׁים נֹאכְלִים לְפָנִים מִן הַקִּלְעִים, קֹדָשִׁים קָלִים וּמַעֲשֵׂר שְׁנִי, בְּכָל הָרֹאֶה:

When they arrived at Shiloh, private altars were prohibited. And there was no roof of wood or stone there, i.e., in the Tabernacle in Shiloh; rather there was only a building of stone below and the curtains of the roof of the Tabernacle were spread above it. And the period that the Tabernacle was in Shiloh was characterized in the Torah as "rest" in the verse: "For you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God has given you" (Deuteronomy 12:9). Offerings of the most sacred order were then eaten within the curtains in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting, and offerings of lesser sanctity and second tithe were eaten in any place that overlooks Shiloh.

בָּאוּ לְנוֹב וּלְגִבְעוֹן, הִתְּרוּ הַבָּמוֹת. קִדְּשֵׁי קִדְּשִׁים נֶאֱכָלִים לְפָנִים מִן הַקִּלְעִים. קִדְּשִׁים קָלִים, בְּכָל עָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
When Shiloh was destroyed (see I Samuel 4:18), the Jewish people arrived with the Tabernacle at Nov, and later at Gibeon, and private altars were permitted. Offerings of the most sacred order were then eaten within the curtains in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting, and offerings of lesser sanctity were eaten in all the cities of Eretz Yisrael.

בָּאוּ לִירוּשָׁלַיִם, נֶאֱסְרוּ הַבָּמוֹת, וְלֹא הָיָה לָהֶם עוֹד הִתֵּר, וְהָיָה הִיתָה נִחְלָה. קִדְּשֵׁי קִדְּשִׁים, נֶאֱכָלִים לְפָנִים מִן הַקִּלְעִים, וְהָיָה הִתָּה נִחְלָה:  
When the Jewish people arrived at Jerusalem and built the Temple during the reign of Solomon, private altars were prohibited, and private altars did not have a subsequent period when they were permitted. And the Temple in Jerusalem was characterized as “inheritance” in the verse: “For you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God has given you.” Offerings of the most sacred order were then eaten within the curtains, i.e., in the Temple courtyard, and offerings of lesser sanctity and second tithe were eaten within the walls of the city, whose legal status was that of the Israelite camp in the wilderness.

### 3. זבחים קיט.

בָּאוּ לְנוֹב וּלְגִבְעוֹן [וכו']. מִנָּא הֵנִי מִיְלִי? דְּתֵנוּ רַבָּנִן: “כִּי לֹא בָאתֶם עַד עֵתָה אֶל הַמְנוּחָה וְאֶל הַנִּחְלָה”; “אֶל הַמְנוּחָה” – ז' שִׁילָה, “נִחְלָה” – ז' יְרוּשָׁלַיִם. לָמָּה חִלְקִין? כְּדִי לִיתֵן הִיתֵר בֵּין זָה לְזָה.

§ The mishna teaches that when Shiloh was destroyed and they arrived at Nov and Gibeon, private altars were permitted and offerings of lesser sanctity could be eaten in any city in Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara asks: From where are these matters derived? they are derived as the Sages taught: The Jewish people were told that when they enter Eretz Yisrael they would be permitted to sacrifice on private altars, “for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance” (Deuteronomy 12:9), during which time those altars would be prohibited.

“To the rest”; this is a reference to Shiloh. “The inheritance”; this is a reference to Jerusalem. One may ask: Why does the verse divide them into two terms, i.e., “rest” and “inheritance”? It is in order to give permission to sacrifice on private altars during the period between this one and that one. Therefore, it was permitted to sacrifice on private altars during the period of Nov and Gibeon.

### 4. מטיב שיר, פירוש הנצי"ב לשיר השירים ו:ה

וכן בשלמה המלך כתיב (מלכים א' ג, ג) “ויאהב שלמה את ה' ללכת בחוקות דוד אביו, רק בבמות הוא מזבח ומקטיר”, ופירש רש"י; בגנותו דיבר הכתוב ששה בנין הבית ארבע שנים. ולכאורה קשה, אמאי פירש הכתוב את גנות שלמה במה שזבח בבמות שהיה בהיתר אז ולא פירש את עיקר הגנות שנתעצל בבנין הבית?, אלא ודאי לא מעצלות הגיע לשלמה זה העוון ששה בבנין הבית, אלא מחמת שידע כי אחרי היבנות הבית יהיו אסורים להקריב בבמות, ותתמעט מחמת זה אהבת ה' בישראל, דהקרבה לפני ה' מביאה לידי אהבה ודביקות כפי שכתבנו לעיל (א, ד), ובשעה שהיה היתר במות נוח היה למי שרוצה להידבק באהבת ה' להקריב בבמה בכל מקום שרוצה, מה שאין כן לאחר בנין הבית אי אפשר להקריב

עד שיגיע הרגל ועולה לירושלים, משום הכי השהה את בנין הבית ארבע שנים, וזו היתה גנותו של שלמה, שכל כך היה שקוע באהבת ה' עד שמחמת זה התרשל בבנין הבית כדי להיות זובח ומקטיר בבמות.

Regarding King Shlomo it says: "And Shlomo loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father; only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places (*bamot*).\" And Rashi explains: "Scripture speaks to his disgrace, that he put off building the Temple for four years.\" At first glance, this is difficult: Why does Scripture speak to Shlomo's disgrace in that he offered sacrifices on *bamot*, which were then permitted, and not state explicitly the primary disgrace, that he was slothful about building the Temple? Rather, without a doubt, it was not owing to laziness that Shlomo reached this sin of delaying the building of the Temple, but rather because he knew that after the building of the Temple it would be forbidden to sacrifice at the *bamot*, and therefore there would be a decrease of the love of God in Israel, for sacrificing before God leads to love of and cleaving to Him... When *bamot* were permitted, it was easy for someone who wished to lovingly cleave to God to offer sacrifices on a *bama* anywhere he desired. This was not the case after the building of the Temple, when it was no longer possible [to offer sacrifices] until a pilgrimage festival arrived and he went up to Jerusalem. It is for this reason that [Shlomo] pushed off building the Temple for four years. This is Shlomo's disgrace – that he was so deeply immersed in the love of God that he was negligent about the building of the Temple in order to offer sacrifices at the *bamot*.

### **A Jewish Temple in Egypt: the Temple of Onias**

#### **5. Dr. Malka Z. Simkovich, *Letters from Home: The Creation of Diaspora in Jewish Antiquity*, 71-72**

Beginning in the late seventh or early sixth century BCE, Egyptian rulers hired Judean mercenaries to aid them in their military campaigns, which generated a series of Judean migrations to Egypt. More Judeans arrived in the late sixth century or early fifth century BCE, when Persian leaders employed Judean mercenaries and stationed them in Egypt. As I noted in chapter 2, some of these Judeans might have settled on the island of Yeb and built a temple there to their God. In the Hellenistic era, Judean Jewish authorities were probably most interested in Judean Jews who relocated to the Egyptian city of Leontopolis with Onias IV in the second century BCE. According to Josephus, Onias fled to Egypt and established a Judean temple there shortly after the Syrian Greeks installed Onias's pro- Seleucid opponent Alcimus as high priest in 162 BCE. Since their scriptures prohibited Israelites from settling in Egypt (Deut 17:16; Jer 44), Judean authorities might have felt that Onias's relocation to Egypt was a public embarrassment. The problem was not simply that a Jewish temple had been erected in Egypt. Numerous other Judean temples may have existed in Egypt at this time as well (Josephus, Ant. 13.65–67).

The problem was Onias himself. As an heir to the high priesthood whose family boasted prestigious Zadokite lineage, Onias had likely been educated by an elite circle of Judean leaders. In Egypt, however, Onias forged ties with Ptolemy VI Philometor (r. 186–145 BCE) and his sister- wife Cleopatra. He may have even been active in Ptolemy VI's campaign to regain control of Judea in the Sixth Syrian War (170–168 BCE) in the hopes of being reinstated as high priest of the Jerusalem Temple. Onias's initiative to build the temple at Leontopolis probably occurred after Ptolemy failed to win this war. The temple's construction in a region later known as "Onias's Land" may have suggested to Judean Jews that this new temple was not a physical homage to the temple in Jerusalem but instead a symbol of Egyptian Jewish independence from Judea.

## 6. דברי הימים א' ו:לה-לו

לה ואלה בני אהרן אלעזר בנו פינחס בנו אבישוע בנו: לו בקי בנו עזי בנו זרחיה בנו: לז מריות בנו אמריה בנו אחיטוב בנו: לח צדוק בנו אחימעץ בנו: {ס}

These are the sons of Aaron: his son Eleazar, his son Phinehas, his son Abishua, his son Bukki, his son Uzzi, his son Zerahiah, his son Meraioth, his son Amariah, his son Ahitub, his son Zadok, his son Ahima'az.

## 7. משנה מנחות יג:

הרי עלי עולה, יקריבנה במקדש. ואם הקריבה בבית חוניו, לא יצא. שאקריבנה בבית חוניו, יקריבנה במקדש. ואם הקריבה בבית חוניו, יצא. רבי שמעון אומר, אין זו עולה. הריני נזיר, וגלח במקדש. ואם גלח בבית חוניו, לא יצא. שאגלח בבית חוניו, וגלח במקדש. ואם גלח בבית חוניו, יצא. רבי שמעון אומר, אין זה נזיר. הכהנים ששמשו בבית חוניו, לא ישמשו במקדש בירושלים, ואין צריך לומר לדבר אחר, שנאמר (מלכים ב כג), אך לא יעלו כהני הבמות אל מזבח ה' בירושלים כי אם אכלו מצות בתוך אחיהם, הרי הם כבעלי מומין, חולקין ואוכלין, אבל לא מקריבין:

One who says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering, must sacrifice it in the Temple in Jerusalem. And if he sacrificed it in the temple of Onias in Egypt, he has not fulfilled his obligation. One who says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering that I will sacrifice in the temple of Onias, must sacrifice it in the Temple in Jerusalem, but if he sacrificed it in the temple of Onias, he has fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Shimon says that if one says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering that I will sacrifice in the temple of Onias, it is not consecrated as a burnt offering; such a statement does not consecrate the animal at all. If one says: I am hereby a nazirite, then when his term of naziriteship is completed he must shave the hair of his head and bring the requisite offerings in the Temple in Jerusalem; and if he shaved in the temple of Onias, he has not fulfilled his obligation. If one says: I am hereby a nazirite provided that I will shave in the temple of Onias, he must shave in the Temple in Jerusalem; but if he shaved in the temple of Onias, he has fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Shimon says that one who says: I am hereby a nazirite provided that I will shave in the temple of Onias, is not a

nazirite at all, as his vow does not take effect. The priests who served in the temple of Onias may not serve in the Temple in Jerusalem; and needless to say, if they served for something else, a euphemism for idolatry, they are disqualified from service in the Temple. As it is stated: “Nevertheless the priests of the private altars did not come up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they did eat *matza* among their brethren” (II Kings 23:9). The halakhic status of these priests is like that of blemished priests in that they receive a share in the distribution of the meat of the offerings and partake of that meat, but they do not sacrifice offerings or perform any of the sacrificial rites.

## 8. מנחות קט.

יֵצֵא? הָא מְקַטֵּל קִטְלָה!

The mishna teaches that one who says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering that I will sacrifice in the temple of Onias, and sacrifices it in the temple of Onias, has fulfilled his obligation. The Gemara asks: How has he fulfilled his obligation? By sacrificing it in the temple of Onias, hasn't he merely killed it without sacrificing it properly?

אָמַר רַב הַמְנוּנָא: נַעֲשֶׂה כְּאֹמֵר “הֲרִי עָלֵי עוֹלָה, עַל מִנְתָּ שְׁלֵא אֶתְחַיֵּב בְּאַחֲרֵי־וֹתָהּ”.

Rav Hamnuna says: The mishna does not mean that he has fulfilled his vow to bring an offering. Rather, he is rendered like one who says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering on the condition that I will not be responsible for it if I kill it beforehand. When the mishna says that he has fulfilled his obligation it simply means that if the animal he consecrated is no longer alive, he does not have to bring another animal in its place.

אָמַר לִיה רַבָּא: אֵלֶּא מַעֲתָהּ, סִיפָא דְקִתְנִי הֲרִינִי נְזִיר שְׁאֵגֵלַח בְּבֵית חוֹנִין – יִגְלַח בְּמִקְדָּשׁ, וְאִם גִּילַח בְּבֵית חוֹנִין – יֵצֵא, הֲכִי נִמִּי דְנַעֲשֶׂה כְּאֹמֵר “הֲרִינִי נְזִיר עַל מִנְתָּ שְׁלֵא אֶתְחַיֵּב בְּאַחֲרֵי־וֹת קִרְבָּנוֹתֵינוּ”? נְזִיר כְּמָה דְלֵא מִיִּתִּי קִרְבָּנוֹתֵינוּ – לֹא מִתְכַּשֵּׁר!

Rava said to Rav Hamnuna: If that is so, what about the latter clause of the mishna, which teaches that if one says: I am hereby a nazirite provided that I will shave in the temple of Onias, he must shave in the Temple in Jerusalem, but if he shaved in the temple of Onias, he has fulfilled his obligation? In this case do you also maintain that he is rendered like one who says: I am hereby a nazirite on the condition that I will not be responsible for bringing its offerings if I kill them beforehand? Such a condition cannot exempt a nazirite from bringing his offerings, because as long as he does not bring his offerings, he is not fit to conclude his term of naziriteship and is still bound by all of the restrictions of a nazirite.

אֵלֶּא אָמַר רַבָּא: אָדָם זֶה לְדוֹרוֹן נִתְפָּלִין, אָמַר: אִי סָגִיא בְּבֵית חוֹנִין – טְרוֹחָא, טָפִי – לֹא מְצִינָא לְאַיְצְטוּרִי.

Rather, Rava said there is a different explanation: The animal was never consecrated at all, as this person intended merely to bring the animal as a gift [*doron*], but not to consecrate it as an offering. He presumably lives closer to the temple of Onias than to the Temple in Jerusalem, and must have said to himself: If it is sufficient to sacrifice this animal in the temple of Onias, I am prepared to exert myself and bring it. But if it is necessary to do more than that, i.e., to bring it to Jerusalem, I am not able to afflict myself. The mishna teaches that although the person never intended to bring the offering to Jerusalem, ideally, he should sacrifice the animal properly, in

the Temple in Jerusalem. If he did not bring it there, but sacrificed it in the temple of Onias, he has fulfilled his obligation, and is not required to bring any other offering in its place.

נָזִיר נָמִי, הָאֵי גִבְרָא לְצִעּוּרֵי נִפְשִׁיהּ קָא מִיכְנִין, אָמַר: אִי סָגִיא בְּבֵית חוֹנִין – טָרְחָנָא, טָפִי לֹא מְצִינָא לְאַיְצְטִעוּרִי.

This is the explanation of the latter clause of the mishna as well: If one said that he would be a nazirite provided that he will shave in the temple of Onias, this man did not intend to accept upon himself the halakhic status of naziriteship. Rather, he merely intends to practice abstinence by not drinking wine, along with observing the other restrictions of a nazirite.

Therefore, he said to himself: If it is sufficient to shave in the temple of Onias, I am prepared to exert myself and do so. But if it is necessary to do more than that, i.e., to go to Jerusalem to shave and bring the required offerings, I am not able to afflict myself. The mishna teaches that ideally, he should go to the Temple in Jerusalem to shave and bring all his offerings. If he shaved and brought his offerings in the temple of Onias, he has fulfilled his vow and has no further obligation.

וְרַב הַמְנוּנָא אָמַר לֵה: נָזִיר – כְּדִקְאֻמְרָתִי, עוֹלָה – עַל מִנְתָּ שְׁלֹא אֶתְחַיֵּיב בְּאַחֲרֵיכֶּהָ קְאָמַר.

And Rav Hamnuna could have said to you in response to Rava's challenge: With regard to the case of one who vowed to become a nazirite on the condition that he would shave and bring his offerings in the temple of Onias, the interpretation of the mishna is as you said. But with regard to one who vows to bring a burnt offering in the temple of Onias, his intent is as I explained, and it is as if he says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering on the condition that I will not be responsible for it if I kill it beforehand.

וְאַף רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן סָבֵר לֵה לֵהָא דְרַב הַמְנוּנָא, דְאָמַר רַבָּה בַר בַּר חֲנָה אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: "הָרִי עָלַי עוֹלָה שְׁאִקְרִיבְנָה בְּבֵית חוֹנִין", וְהִקְרִיבָהּ בְּאַרְץ יִשְׂרָאֵל – יָצָא, וְעָנֹשׁ כָּרֶת.

And Rabbi Yoḥanan also holds in accordance with that which Rav Hamnuna said, as Rabba bar Ḥana said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said that if one says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering on the condition that I will sacrifice it in the temple of Onias, and he sacrificed it in Eretz Yisrael but not in the Temple, he has fulfilled his obligation, but his actions are also punishable by excision from the World-to-Come [*karef*] because he slaughtered an offering outside of the Temple. This is in accordance with the opinion of Rav Hamnuna that the animal is consecrated.

תְּנִינָא נָמִי הָכִי: הָרִי עָלַי עוֹלָה שְׁאִקְרִיבְנָה בְּמִדְבָּר, וְהִקְרִיבָהּ בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן – יָצָא, וְעָנֹשׁ כָּרֶת.

This explanation of Rav Hamnuna and Rabbi Yoḥanan is also taught in a *baraita*: If one says: It is incumbent upon me to bring a burnt offering on the condition that I will sacrifice it in the wilderness of Sinai, thinking that the wilderness of Sinai still has sanctity since the Tabernacle had been located there, and he sacrificed it on the east bank of the Jordan, he has fulfilled his obligation, but his actions are also punishable by *karef* because he slaughtered an offering outside of the Temple.

### Chazal's Backstory of the Temple of Onias - Is it Idolatry or Not?

9. מנחות קט: (see also ירושלמי יומא ו:ג, דף מג עמוד ג-ד)

וְאִין צָרִיךְ לומר דְּבַר אַחַר [וכו']. מִדְקָאמַר: אִין צָרִיךְ לומר דְּבַר אַחַר, מִקְלָל דְּבֵית חוֹנִין לֹא עֲבוּדָה זָרָה הוּא.

§ The mishna teaches: And needless to say, if priests served for something else, a euphemism for idolatry, they are disqualified from service in the Temple. The Gemara comments: From the fact that it says: Needless to say, if they served for something else, by inference, the temple of Onias is not a temple of idol worship, but rather a temple devoted to the worship of God.

תָּנִיא כַּמָּאן דְּאָמַר בֵּית חוֹנִי' לֹא עֲבֹדָה זָרָה הוּא, דְּתַנִּיא: אוֹתָהּ שָׁנָה שְׁמַת שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק, אָמַר לָהּ: שָׁנָה זוֹ הוּא מֵת, אָמְרוּ לוֹ: מִנֵּין אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ?

It is taught in a *baraita* like the one who says that the temple of Onias is not a temple of idol worship. As it is taught: During the year in which Shimon HaTzaddik died, he said to his associates: This year, he will die, euphemistically referring to himself. They said to him: From where do you know?

אָמַר לָהֶן: כָּל יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים נִזְדַּמֵּן לִי זָקֵן אֶחָד לְבוּשׁ לְבָנִים, וְנִתְעַטֵּף לְבָנִים, וְנִכְנָס עָמִי וַיֵּצֵא עָמִי. שָׁנָה זוֹ נִזְדַּמֵּן לִי זָקֵן אֶחָד לְבוּשׁ שְׁחֹרִים, וְנִתְעַטֵּף שְׁחֹרִים, וְנִכְנָס עָמִי וְלֹא יֵצֵא עָמִי.

Shimon HaTzaddik said to them: In previous years, every Yom Kippur, upon entering the Holy of Holies, I had a prophetic vision in which I would be met by an old man who was dressed in white, and his head was wrapped in white, and he would enter the Holy of Holies with me, and he would leave with me. But this year, I was met by an old man who was dressed in black, and his head was wrapped in black, and he entered the Holy of Holies with me, but he did not leave with me. Shimon HaTzaddik understood this to be a sign that his death was impending.

לְאַחַר הָרֶגֶל, חָלָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וּמָת, וְנִמְנְעוּ אַחֲיוֹ הַכֹּהֲנִים מִלְּבָרֵךְ בְּשֵׁם.

Indeed, after the pilgrimage festival of *Sukkot*, he was ill for seven days and died. And his fellow priests refrained from reciting the Priestly Benediction with the ineffable name of God.

בְּשַׁעַת פְּטִירָתוֹ, אָמַר לָהֶם: חוֹנִי' בְּנִי יִשְׁמַשׁ תַּחְתָּי. נִתְקַנָּא בּוֹ שְׁמַעֵי אַחֲיוֹ, שֶׁהָיָה גָדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ שְׁתֵּי שָׁנִים וּמִחֻצָּה. אָמַר לוֹ: בֹּא וְאַלְמַדְךָ סֹדֵר עֲבֹדָה. הִלְבִּישׁוּ בְּאוֹנְקְלִי, וְחָגְרוּ בְּצִילְצוֹל, (הַעֲמִידוּ) [וְהַעֲמִידוּ] אֶצֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ. אָמַר לָהֶם לְאַחֲיוֹ הַכֹּהֲנִים: רְאוּ מָה נָדָר זֶה וְקִיִּים לְאַהֲבָתוֹ: "אוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם שֶׁאֲשַׁתְּמַשׁ בְּכֹהֲנָה גְדוֹלָה אֶלְבוּשׁ בְּאוֹנְקְלִי שְׁלִיכִי וְאַחֲגוּר בְּצִילְצוֹל שְׁלִיכִי".

At the time of his death, he said to the Sages: Onias, my son, will serve as High Priest in my stead. Shimi, Onias' brother, became jealous of him, as Shimi was two and a half years older than Onias. Shimi said to Onias treacherously: Come and I will teach you the order of the service of the High Priest. Shimi dressed Onias in a tunic [*be'unkel*] and girded him with a ribbon [*betziltzu*] as a belt, i.e., not in the vestments of the High Priest, and stood him next to the altar. Shimi said to his fellow priests: Look what this man vowed and fulfilled for his beloved, that he had said to her: On the day that I serve in the High Priesthood I will wear your tunic and gird your ribbon.

בִּקְשׁוּ אַחֲיוֹ הַכֹּהֲנִים לְהַרְגוֹ, רֵץ מִפְּנֵיהֶם, וְרָצוּ אַחֲרָיו. הֵלַךְ לְאַלְכַּסַּנְדְּרִיא שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם, וּבָנָה שֵׁם מִזְבֵּחַ, וְהִעֲלָה עָלָיו לֶשׁוֹם עֲבֹדָה זָרָה. וְכִשְׁשָׁמְעוּ חֲכָמִים בְּדִבְרֵי, אָמְרוּ: מָה זֶה שְׁלֹא יֵרֵד לָהּ – כָּהֵן, הַיּוֹרֵד לָהּ – עַל אַחַת כְּמָה וְכְמָה. דְּבַרֵּי רַבִּי מֵאִיר.

The fellow priests of Onias wanted to kill him because he had disgraced the Temple service with his garments. Onias ran away from them and they ran after him. He went to Alexandria in Egypt and built an altar there, and sacrificed offerings upon it for the sake of idol worship. When the Sages heard of the matter they said: If this person who never entered the position of high priest could create such an idolatrous altar when the position was "taken away" from him, how much more so might someone who had been high priest do so if the position is taken away from him - quoth R. Meir.

אמר לו רבי יהודה: לא כך היה מעשה, אלא לא קיבל עליו חזיון, שהיה שמעי אחיו גדול ממנו שתי שנים ומחצה, ואף על פי כן נתקנא בו חזיון בשמעי אחיו. אמר לו: בא ואלמדך סדר עבודה, והלבישו באונקלי, וחגרו בצילצול, והעמידו אצל המזבח. אמר להם לאחיו הכהנים: ראו מה נדר זה וקיים לאהובתו "אותו היום שישתמש בכהונה גדולה אלבוש באונקלי שליכי ואחגור בצילצול שליכי".

Rabbi Yehuda said to him: The incident was not like this. Rather, Onias did not accept the position of High Priest because his brother Shimi was two and a half years older than him, so Shimi was appointed as High Priest. And even so, even though Onias himself offered the position to Shimi, Onias was jealous of his brother Shimi. Onias said to Shimi: Come and I will teach you the order of the service of the High Priest. And Onias dressed Shimi in a tunic and girded him in a ribbon and stood him next to the altar. Onias said to his fellow priests: Look what this man, Shimi, vowed and fulfilled for his beloved, that he had said to her: On the day that I serve in the High Priesthood I will wear your tunic and gird your ribbon.

בקשו אחיו הכהנים להרגו, סח להם כל המאורע, בקשו להרוג את חזיון, רץ מפניהם, ורצו אחריו, רץ לבית המלה, ורצו אחריו, כל הרואה אותו אומר: זה הוא, זה הוא, הלה לאלקסנדריא של מצרים, ובנה שם מזבח, והעלה עליו לשם שמים, שנאמר: "(והיה) ביום ההוא יהיה מזבח לה' בתוך ארץ מצרים ומצבה אצל גבולה לה'".

His fellow priests wanted to kill Shimi. Shimi then told them the entire incident, that he had been tricked by his brother Onias, so the priests wanted to kill Onias. Onias ran away from them, and they ran after him. Onias ran to the palace of the king, and they ran after him. Anyone who saw him would say: This is him, this is him, and he was not able to escape unnoticed. Onias went to Alexandria in Egypt and built an altar there, and sacrificed offerings upon it for the sake of Heaven. As it is stated: "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at its border, to the Lord" (Isaiah 19:19). According to Rabbi Yehuda, the temple of Onias was dedicated to the worship of God.

וכששמעו חכמים בדבר, אמרו: ומה זה שברח ממנה כך, המבקש לירד לה – על אחת כמה וכמה.

And when the Sages heard of the matter they said: If this one, Onias, who fled from the position of High Priest and offered it to his brother, still was overcome with such jealousy to the point where he tried to have Shimi killed, all the more so will one who wants to enter a prestigious position be jealous of the one who already has that position.



## The Temple of Onias after Churban Bayit Sheni (Second Temple Destruction)

### 10. משנה מגילה א:יא

אין בין שילה לירושלים אלא שבשילה אוכלים קדשים קלים ומעשר שני בכל הרוֹאֶה, ובירושלים לפנים מן החומה. וְכָאן וְכָאן קִדְשֵׁי קִדְשִׁים נֶאֱכָלִים לְפָנִים מִן הַקְלָעִים. קִדְשֵׁי שִׁילָה יֵשׁ אַחֲרֶיהָ הַיֵּתֶר, וְקִדְשֵׁי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אֵין אַחֲרֶיהָ הַיֵּתֶר:

The difference between the Tabernacle in Shilo and the Temple in Jerusalem is only that in Shiloh one eats offerings of lesser sanctity, e.g., individual peace-offerings, thanks-offerings, and the Paschal lamb, and also the second tithe, in any place that overlooks Shiloh, as Shiloh was not a walled city and any place within its Shabbat boundary was regarded as part of the city. And in Jerusalem one eats those consecrated items only within the walls. And here, in Shiloh, and there, in Jerusalem, offerings of the most sacred order are eaten only within the hangings. The Tabernacle courtyard in Shiloh was surrounded by hangings and the Temple courtyard in Jerusalem was surrounded by a wall. There is another difference: With regard to the sanctity of Shiloh, after the Tabernacle was destroyed, there is permission to sacrifice offerings on improvised altars. But with regard to the sanctity of Jerusalem, after the Temple was destroyed, there is no permission to sacrifice offerings on improvised altars, as the prohibition remains intact.

### 11. בבלי מגילה י.

אמר רבי יצחק: שמעתי שמקריבין בבית חוניו בזמן הזה. קסבר: בית חוניו לאו בית עבודה זרה היא, וקא סבר: קדושה ראשונה — קידשה לשעתה ולא קידשה לעתיד לבוא.

GEMARA: Rabbi Yitzhak said: I heard that one sacrifices offerings in the temple of Onias in Egypt at the present time. The Gemara cites the basis for the statement of Rabbi Yitzhak. He maintains that the temple of Onias is not a house of idol worship but rather a temple devoted to the service of God, and he maintains that the initial consecration sanctified Jerusalem for its time and did not sanctify Jerusalem forever. Therefore, after the destruction of the Temple, the sanctity of Jerusalem lapsed and the sacrifice of offerings elsewhere was no longer prohibited. For these reasons it was permitted to sacrifice offerings in the temple of Onias after the Temple was destroyed.

דְּכָתִיב: "כִּי לֹא בָאתֶם עַד עֵתָה אֶל הַמְנוּחָה וְאֶל הַנְּחֻלָּה". "מְנוּחָה" — זו שִׁילָה, "נְחֻלָּה" — זו יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, מִקֵּי־שׁ נְחֻלָּה לַמְנוּחָה: מָה "מְנוּחָה" יֵשׁ אַחֲרֶיהָ הַיֵּתֶר, אִם "נְחֻלָּה" יֵשׁ אַחֲרֶיהָ הַיֵּתֶר.

The Gemara cites the source of this *halakha*. It is as it is written: "For you are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance" (Deuteronomy 12:9), which is interpreted: "Rest," this is Shiloh; "inheritance," this is Jerusalem. The verse juxtaposes and likens inheritance to rest: Just as in the place of rest, Shiloh, after its destruction there is permission to sacrifice offerings on improvised altars, so too in the place of inheritance, Jerusalem, after its destruction there is permission to sacrifice offerings on improvised altars.

