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# The Steadfast Queen

Once, a king chose a wife, giving her a *ketubah* filled with gifts, love and the promise of a wonderful future together. Soon after their wedding, however, the king was compelled to travel to the farthest end of the world, beyond the sea. A long time passed with not even a word from the king. Nonetheless, she tenaciously held onto the belief that he would one day return. She would dress in her beautiful garments and spend hours sitting on the balcony or the front porch, gazing into the distance, whispering his name.

נִכְנְסוּ שְׁכֵנוֹתֶיהָ אֶצְלָהּ וְהָיוּ מְקַיִּטוֹת אוֹתָהּ... שׁוּב אֵינִי חוֹזֵר עֲלֶיךָ, וְהִזְתָּה בּוֹכָה וּמְתַאֲנֶחֶת.

The queen's friends and her confidants belittled and taunted her: "How long will you hold onto your false hopes? Can't you see that he has abandoned you?"

When she felt sharply alone or distressed, she would retreat to her private inner chamber, and cry and writhe in bitterness. She would then take out the *ketubah* that her husband the king had given her at their wedding, clutch it to her heart, kiss it, and read and reread his promises. When she embraced that scroll, she somehow felt that she was embracing him. Her faith was thus nourished and she gained strength, consolation and hope.

One day, without warning, the king returned to the palace and found his long-suffering, loyal wife waiting for him there on the porch! They fell upon each other's necks and wept together for a long time. אָמַר לָהּ, בְּתִי אָנִי... "My darling," cried the king finally, "I am so amazed! How did you do it? How did you wait for me all these years?"

She gazed at him silently and then spoke from the depth of her heart: אֲדוּנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֱלֹמָא, כְּתוּבָה מְרֻבָּה שָׁכַחְתָּ, "My master, the king... if not for the *ketubah* you wrote and gave me, I would have lost hope long ago. Those who surrounded me tried to convince me to leave, to give up, that you were no longer in love with me... They taunted me and said I was no longer wanted here. But each time I took out our *ketubah*, I just knew that you would return."

The Medrash (*Eichah Rabbah*, 3:7) continues:

מָשַׁל לְמָה הַדָּבָר דּוֹמָה?

What is this parable about?

With broken hearts and indescribably suffering, we have borne the degradation and humiliation of the nations of the world harassing us, mocking our faith:

אֱלֹקֵיכֶם הִסְתִּיר פָּנָיו מִכֶּם וְסָלַק שְׁכִינְתּוֹ מִכֶּם, עוֹד אֵינִי חוֹזֵר עֲלֵיכֶם,

"Your God has hidden His Face from you and has removed His Presence from you; He is never going to return to you."

...And yet, לְמַחֵר כְּשִׁיבּוֹא קֵץ הַגָּאֻלָּה,

Tomorrow, when the end of the exile has come,

אומר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל, בני! אני תמה מכם  
היאך המתנתם לי כל אותן השנים!

HaKadosh Baruch Hu will reveal Himself and say to us, "My children! I am so amazed by you! How in the world have you stayed by me, waiting all these years, these millenia?"  
והן אומרים לפניו, רבותו של עולם אלוהי תורתך שנתת  
לנו...

לולי תורתך שעשעתי אז אבדתני בעניי. על כן אוזיל לו,  
ומיחדים שמו.

We will say to our beloved King from the depths of our heart, "Master of the world, if it were not for your Torah! 'If Your teaching were not my delight, I would have perished in my affliction' (*Tehillim* 119:92). Therefore we always had hope and we always unified Your Name."

While we attune ourselves to the painful reality of exile during these days of *Bein haM-eitzarim*, let us hold on tight to our *kesubah*, and strengthen our faith that Hashem, our loving King remains committed to us, and we to Him. May we return to each other, and reveal our never-ending embrace, our eternal *yichud* — *bimheira*, soon and in our days.

למה לנצח תשכחתי תעזבני לארך ימים:

Why have You forgotten us utterly,  
Forsaken us for all time?

השיבנו ה' אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם:

Take us back to You Hashem...

And let us return; renew our days as of old!  
(*Eicha*, 5:20-21) ■

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