Zion in the Sources: Yearning for Zion

כותב המאמר: Briana Simon

Have you ever wondered where the world 'Zion' actually comes from? This article explores Zion in the Bible, aggadot, customs and laws, ancient and modern poetry, and through the Zionist movement itself.

Foreword

Yearning for Zion is the root of what it means to be a Jew.
"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee" (Genesis 12:1) this is the Divine command to our Father Abraham; this is where the connection between being a Jew, and being a person whose homeland is the land of Israel, begins. For Jews all over the globe, the Land of Israel is the spiritual homeland. For those of us who live in the State of Israel, the land of Israel is our spiritual and physical home.

After 2000 years of exile, we have arrived in our homeland a homeland which was not handed to us on a silver platter. Another people also loves this land, and fate has brought them to live here for hundreds of years. For decades we have extended a hand in peace and partnership.

It is our hope that love for the Land of Israel will bring to all those who live within it, and those who love from afar, a life of peace, fraternity and prosperity. Indeed, may it be that "From Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of G-d from Jerusalem." Amen!

Introduction

The compelling magnetism which Zion as the land of Israel, as Jerusalem, or as the site of the Holy Temple has for the people of Israel, called so though they are scattered all over the world, is as puzzling as it is strong. What is it that draws Europeans and Ethiopians, Australians and Yemenites, rich and poor, to the same Wall in the same city in the Middle East? It is our common history and our common heritage which leads to our common yearning.

Our longing for Zion has been expressed in many different ways over the centuries since the First Temple was destroyed. The Hassidic Rabbi Yerahmiel of Koznitz, who thought constantly of the Land of Israel, used to say, "The Torah forbids jealousy, and, thank G-d, I envy no person, except for those Jews who travel to Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel)." Rabbi Nachman of Breslau maintained, "Wherever I travel, my destination is always Eretz Yisrael."

In our collective Jewish memory, we hold Zion, and all that it stands for, dear. Nahum Sokolow, in his book "The History of Zionism 1600-1918," wrote: "The Jews never forgot their old nationality. They never forgot that they were a nation apart, distinct in morality, in learning, in literature, in social arrangements and in agriculture; a civilized nation at a time when Western civilization was still unknown. For two thousand years after the loss of political independence, they believed with passionate intensity in their future as a nation in Palestine." Leon Feuer, in "Why a Jewish State," expands on this idea: "...the Jews retained a powerful national sentiment and never abandoned the hope of the restoration of their national existence in Palestine. This hope has held a consistently central place in Jewish thinking and aspiration throughout the ages. No one can be acquainted with Jewish literature without realizing how profound it was...

The prayerbook devotedly expressed the pleas for Zion restored and the Temple rebuilt. "The acclamation of the Passover Haggadah, 'Next year in Jerusalem,' was far more than a pious wish. It was a life-sustaining vision."

The Biblical base for this strong attachment is The Promise, given by G-d to the Patriarch Abraham: "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Genesis 12:7). Theologian Martin Buber comments: "The eternal meaning of the Promise of this land is grounded in the mutual relation between emunah (faith) and emunah (belief), between G-d's faithfulness and the people's trust." Our belief that we would be able to return one day to Zion, as promised in our sacred texts, was inseparable from Jewish memory: "I will gather your seed from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north "give up" and to the south "keep not back." Bring my sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 43:5-6).

Jewish prayers perpetuated Jewish memory. Abba Eban writes: "The effect of these myriad repetitions day by day over the centuries was to infuse Jewish life with a peculiar nostalgia, strong enough to prevent any sentiment of finality or permanence in any other land. But it was not only a matter of prayer and hope. The physical link was never broken. A thin but crucial line

of continuity had been maintained by small Jewish communities and academies in Jerusalem, Safed, Jaffa, and Hebron. Palestine never became the birthplace of any other nation. Every one of its conquerors had his original home elsewhere. Thus the idea of Palestine as the Jewish land had never been obscured or superseded" ("Heritage: Civilization and the Jews").

Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin writes:
"Wherever they were, Jews dreamed of some day returning and reestablishing their independence, of restoring their national existence. They dreamed of it and prayed for it; never for a day was the Holy Land out of their thoughts... While not all Jews were involved in the organized struggle to achieve these aims, every devout, believing Jew was in faith a Zionist, since the aspiration to return to Zion is built into the very fabric of traditional Jewish faith...

"The historic Jewish Messianic vision was expressed by Isaiah in his prophecy in terms of Zion and Jerusalem, namely that 'out of Zion shall go forth the Torah and the word of G-d from Jerusalem'(Isaiah 2:3). To eliminate such aspirations would be tantamount to emasculating the religious faith of Israel. The passage from the Book of Psalms sums up the religious and historic attitude toward Jerusalem, the historical capital of Eretz Yisrael, and all it symbolized: 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; If I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy' (Psalms 137:5-6)...

"Of how many nations of the world today can it be said that they speak the same language, profess the same faith, and inhabit the same area that they did over 3,000 years ago? It may therefore be understood why the Jewish people are so emotionally attached to the Land of Israel. It is a land possessed not only by right of conquest and settlement, but also as a fulfillment of history, faith, and law." ("To Be a Jew")

'After Titus razed Jerusalem, the Jews father, son, great-grandson persisted in looking toward Zion as a traveler looks toward home. The rolling centuries never crushed this quixotic dream of a scattered fragment of a nation that it might someday return to the soil G-d had appointed for it. 'Next year in Jerusalem' was the motto that kept the dispersed people in hope. I can remember hearing that refrain at the Passover table in my childhood, and wondering at the empty dreaminess of it. I have lived to see the state come to pass, all the same" (Herman Wouk, "This is My G-d").

In this Bible Day booklet, we will explore the different contexts in which the term Zion is used (Chapter I); examine some of the Biblical texts in which it appears (Chapter II); and trace references to Zion in post-Biblical writings (Chapter III), prayers (Chapter IV), customs and laws(Chapter V). We will discuss the commandments which can only be fulfilled in the Land of Israel (Chapter VI) and proceed to an encapsulated survey of poetry with Zion as the motif (Chapter VII). Finally, we will mention briefly some latter day visions of the ideal Zion (Chapter VIII).

Zion: Different Contexts

Origin

The origin of the word Zion is uncertain. It may have originally meant a rock; a stronghold; a dry place; or running water. The name Zion was first used for the Jebusite fortress ("the stronghold of Zion"), on the southeast of Jerusalem, below the Ophel (part of the eastern fortifications of Jerusalem) and the Temple Mount. The Jebusite tower could be seen for a considerable distance; perhaps this is why the word "Zion" shares the same root as the modem Hebrew word for sign or landmark. When King David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites, he chose to live in "the stronghold of Zion," calling it "the City of David." (II Sam. 5:7; I Kings 8: 1). In the course of time, "Zion" came to refer not only to the hill but to the Temple, to Jerusalem and indeed, to the whole of the Holy Land. In poetry Zion was used for the whole of Jerusalem, and "daughter (or virgin) of Zion" referred to the city and its inhabitants. Zion was often used as a figure of speech to denote Judea or the people of Judea. Sometimes Zion referred simply to the Temple Mount, and it was this use that became the regular one by the Maccabean period, when the Temple Mount was called "Mountain of Zion."

Zion came to be identified as the spiritual center of Judaism, as in the verse: "For out of Zion shall go forth Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3). It had a special meaning as far back as after the destruction of the First Temple in expressing the yearning of the Jewish people for its homeland. Thus "Zion" is found in the Psalms, "By the rivers of Babylon,/There we sat down, yea, we wept, /When we remembered Zion" (Ps. 137:1); in the prayer, "And let our eyes behold Thy return in mercy to Zion;" in the poem, "Zion, will you not ask if peace be with your captives / Who seek your welfare, who are the remnant of your flocks?" (Judah Halevi); and frequently elsewhere in religious and secular literature.

It is believed that Zion is the very center of the world, the place where the Shekhinah (Divine Presence) dwells and from where the world is sustained by the power of G-d. Perhaps it is for this reason that Jerusalem has such deep spiritual significance for Christianity and Islam as well.

Zion as Israel

Zion eventually evolved into a national concept, one named after a place rather than a people. The name of the former stronghold of the Jebusites which David made his residence, which was applied by poets and prophets to the whole city of Jerusalem, to the sanctuary, and to the holy mountain on which it stood, acquired deep spiritual significance. Martin Buber, the renowned philosopher and theologian, noted: "Quite early on the name was construed as that of a holy place. Zion is 'the city of the great King' (Psalms 48:3), that is of G-d as the King of Israel. The name has retained this sacred character ever since. In their prayers and songs the mourning and yearning of the people in exile were bound up with it, the holiness of the land was concentrated in it, and in the Kabbala (mystical writings), Zion was equated with an emanation of G-d Himself. When the Jewish people adopted this name for their national concept, all these associations were contained in it..." ("On Zion/The History of an Idea").

Zion in the Bible

Though the word "Zion" appears approximately 150 times in the Bible, it does not appear at all in the Five Books of Moses, but is first mentioned in Second Samuel during the reign of King David. It is found primarily in the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micha and Zechariah, and in the Books of Psalms and Lamentations.

In Psalms, Zion figures particularly in a group of Psalms designated "Zion Songs," glorifying G-d's city: "Fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth; Even mount Zion, the uttermost parts of the north, The city of the great King." (Ps. 48:3)

"Walk about Zion, and go round about her; Count the towers thereof" (Ps. 48: 13)

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, G-d hath shined forth. " (Ps. 50:2)

It appears in psalms dealing with national misfortune, notably those concerning the captivity: "By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept, When we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst thereof we hanged up our harps. For there they that led us captive asked of us words of song, And our tormentors asked of us mirth: 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion,'" (Ps. 137:1-3)

Finally, it appears in psalms which invoke blessing: "The Lord bless thee out of Zion; And see thou the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life; And see thy children's children. Peace be upon Israel!" (Psalms 128:5-6)

In the Book of Lamentations, traditionally ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah, the writer laments the destruction of the Temple, and the way of life it symbolized: "And He hath stripped His tabernacle, as if it were a garden, He hath destroyed His place of assembly; The Lord hath caused to be forgotten in Zion Appointed s'eason and sabbath, And hath rejected in the indignation of His anger The king and the priest,"(Lamentations 2:6)
"For this our heart is faint, For these things our eyes are dim; For the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, The foxes walk upon it." (Lamentations 5:17-18)

Prophets Establish the Precedent

It is in the writings of the prophets that the gradual development of Zion portrayed as the heart of the redeemed world yet to come takes place. The connection between the people of Israel, their unique mission, and their land was strengthened and deepened after the destruction of the First Temple, during the Babylonian exile, and with the building of the Second Temple. Rather than concentrating exclusively on beliefs and ethical conduct, the prophets were concerned as well with the survival of the Jews as a nation, on their own soil. Thus, the vision of Zion surfaces repeatedly throughout their revelations.

"Within their ample world outlook the prophets found room for man, nation and humanity...They agonized over their people's misfortunes. They wept over the destruction of their country. They ached for their ruined city of Jerusalem, 'the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth'" (Ps. 48:1-2). They prayed for its restoration. They comforted their people in their exile. Their world outlook was inextricably bound up with the political rehabilitation of Israel and the upbuilding of Zion and its recognized role of leadership among the nations of the earth" (Martin Buber, "On Zion/The History of an Idea").

When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 586 BCE, he exiled both the king and the high priest to Babylon. He gave the prophet Jeremiah the choice of either joining those in exile or remaining "with the poor of the people who had nothing," who were permitted to remain in the land of Judah (Jer. 39:10,40:4). The prophet chose to remain in Jerusalem, providing the remnant of the beaten nation with the leadership and encouragement required to sustain their feeling of unity as a people, in spite of the fact that they were no longer sovereign. Jeremiah, who until the conquest had been a prophet of doom, now became a prophet of hope. He began to implant within those who remained the knowledge that the exile would not last forever - on the contrary, the bond of the people of Israel to the land of Israel was eternal, and could not be undermined by their being expelled from it.

To those in exile, Jeremiah sent an encouraging message. Speaking in G-d's name, he counseled them to settle down in the land of their dispersion, saying "Build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them, take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters,. and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply ye there, and be not diminished" (Jer. 29:5-6). In no way did this advice imply that their present location was permanent, or that there was no hope of their return to Zion. The opposite was the case: in establishing themselves as a cohesive community, they would avoid assimilating in their country of exile, and preserve their distinct national affiliation through the maintenance of their own institutions. In this way, they would be prepared for their eventual return to their own land: "For thus saith the Lord: After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will remember you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jer. 29: 1 0). Jeremiah conveyed an additional message to the exiles four years later, with a vivid account of the calamity which would inevitably occur in Babylon and which would herald the return to Zion. "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; they shall go on their way weeping, and shall seek the Lord their G-d. They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces hitherward: 'Come ye, and join yourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten' (Jer. 50:4-5).

There was a prophet in Babylon also: Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest. He lived in Tel Aviv in Babylonia together with the majority of his compatriots, and prophesied soon after Jeremiah. Like him, Ezekiel had been a prophet of doom before the destruction of the Temple, and became a harbinger of hope and encouragement afterwards. He prophesied both a material and a spiritual re-establishment of the nation in its land, with renewed building and planting and plentiful harvests. Ezekiel prophesied that the miraculous nature of Israel's restoration would hallow G-d' s name in the eyes of the nations of the world: "Thus, I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself (vehitgadalti vehitkadashti) and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 38:23). The words vehitgadalti vehitkadashti (I will magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself), immortalized in the sacred Kaddish prayer, "have become the classic expression of hope for the final and ultimate redemption of Israel" (Mendell Lewittes, "Religious Foundations of the Jewish State").

Chapters 40-66 of the prophet Isaiah are also addressed to the Jews in exile, giving a message of encouragement, support and hope. He summons the Jewish exiles to shake off their despondency, and to prepare for the redemption to come. In earlier chapters of Isaiah, Zion is also mentioned in ringing, poetic terms:
"For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of mount Zion they that shall escape, the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this." (Second Kings 19:31 Isaiah's prophecy)

"And many peoples [nations] shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, [And] To the house of the G-d of Jacob; And He will teach us of His ways, And we will walk in His paths;' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:3) [Micah 4:2]

"And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written unto life in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 4:3)

"For; O people that dwellest in Zion at Jerusalem, Thou shalt weep no more; He will surely be gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry, When He shall hear, He will answer thee." (Isaiah 30: 19)

"I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, And My salvation shall not tarry; And I will place salvation in Zion For Israel My glory." (Isaiah 46:13)

"How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of the messenger of good tidings, That announceth peace, the harbinger of good tidings, That announceth salvation; That saith unto Zion, 'Thy G-d reigneth !'" (Isaiah 52:7)

"And a redeemer will come to Zion, And unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, Saith the Lord."(Isaiah 59:20)

So moving are Isaiah's words that seven chapters have been chosen as the prophetic readings (haftarot) of consolation for the seven weeks following the Ninth of Av, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temples and of Jerusalem.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who preached during the return of the Babylonian exiles around 520 BCE, during the reign of Darius I, king of Persia, laid the foundations for the restoration of a dynamic Jewish presence in Israel in their own era, and in our age as well.

Haggai's prophecies dealt mainly with the construction of the Temple, and with the great events which the nation would experience in the future as a result of it. He encouraged the authorities and the people not to postpone the construction of the Temple, but to begin immediately. He claimed that all the mishaps poverty, famine and drought which befell the nation, were caused by the delay in this work. The people listened to Haggai's words despite their fears (1:13, 2:5), and began work on the 24th of Elul.

Although the new Temple seemed small and poor "and as nothing in your eyes" (2:3), Haggai encouraged them by saying that the size of the building would not determine its value for future generations. He proclaimed that with the renewal of the Temple construction, G-d's covenant with His people would be renewed, as in the days of the exodus from Egypt. The prophet also had a messianic vision of the time to come: G-d would shake all the universe and the wealth of all the nations will come to the Temple; and its glory would be greater than the glory of the First Temple.

Zechariah, in all probability a younger contemporary of Haggai and probably a priest (Neh. 2:4, 16), prophesied concerning contemporary events and foretold material prosperity, the ingathering of the exiles, liberation from the foreign yoke, and the expansion of Jerusalem. Zechariah also was instrumental in encouraging the people to conclude the rebuilding of the Temple, and his prophesies include eight visions aimed at inspiring the people to this end. The book also predicts the coming of a kingly messiah and the end of the Diaspora. Zechariah esteems the Temple service, and at the same time considers the observance of the precepts of righteousness, truth and peace most important. Jerusalem is G-d's chosen city and He is jealous for its honor. The future of the non-Jewish nations is also connected with the city, for they will eventually be joined to G-d, worshipping Him as does Israel. "Again, proclaim, saying: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." (Zechariah 1: 17)

Though the Second Temple, too, eventually fell, these prophets had prepared the Jewish people for a unique history, one experienced by no other nation: a history of nationhood without sovereignty, of nationhood in dispersion. Two basic commitments kept the Jewish people alive: the maintenance of their separate and distinct character through the observance of their faith and cultural heritage through the centuries; and the maintenance from generation to generation of their belief in G-d's vow that they would be redeemed; specifically, that they would return to the land of their fathers: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, And come with singing unto Zion..." (Isaiah 51:11).

From the Aggadot

The aggadot (moral and ethical principles presented by the sages in an artistic or poetic form) include many passages which reflect the Jewish people's longing to return to Zion. Some are statements about the spiritual advantages of living in Israel:

Said Rav Yose bar Halafta to his son Rav Yishmael: If you wish to see the Divine Presence in this world--involve yourself in Torah in the Land of Israel [Shocher Tov 105].

Interpreting the verse, "And spirit to them that walk therein" (Isaiah 42:5), Rav Yirmia bar Abba quoted Rav Yohanan: whoever walks four amot (cubits) in the Land of Israel is promised a share in the world to come.

Other comments involve additional non-material benefits:

The air of the Land of Israel makes one wise. [Baba Batra 150:8]

There are aggadot which extol I the agricultural produce in Israel: "...the wine from a single vine fills six hundred casks a year; one peach feeds four men; and a fox can build its lair in the upper part of a turnip..."the grains of wheat were like kidneys, the grains of barley like olives."

Some aggadot indicate a preference for people living in the land of Israel over those living abroad:

Said the Holy One, Blessed be He: A small group in the land of Israel is more beloved by Me than the Great Sanhedrin outside of Israel. [Yerushalmi, Nedarim 80:6, 5:8]

Even if there are righteous and wise people outside the land of Israel and shepherds and cowherds in the land of Israel, the leap year is not calculated except by shepherds and cowherds; and even if there are prophets outside the land of Israel and laymen in the land of Israel, the leap year is not calculated except by laymen in the land of Israel [Pirkei d'Rav Eliezer 8].

The eminent suitability of the Land of Israel for the Jewish People is described impressively in the following homily:

Rav Shimon ben Yochai commented on the passage "He stood, and measured the earth" (Habakuk 3:6): The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the peoples and did not find a people who were worthy of receiving the Torah except Israel; and the Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the generations and did not find a generation that was worthy of receiving the Torah except the generation in the desert; The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the mountains and did not find a mountain suitable for giving the Torah upon it except Sinai; The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the cities and did not find a city that was worthy of having the Sanctuary built within it except Jerusalem; The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the countries and did not find a country that was worthy of the people of Israel except the Land of Israel [Vayikra Raba 13; Yalkut Shimoni on Habakuk 3].

Among the most poignant aggadot are those in the form of monologues by Knesset Yisrael (the People of Israel as a collective entity) addressed to G-d which describe the difference between life in Israel before and after the Temple' s destruction:

Knesset Yisrael said before Him: Master of the world! My soul is desolate when I pass by Your House and it is destroyed...A still voice within it says: 'In the place where the seed of Abraham brought sacrifices before You, and the priests stood on the dais, and the levites played on harps will foxes dance there?' [Lamentations Raba 4].

One touching commentary involves an extensive play on the words in Psalm 42, verse 5: "These things I remember; and pour out my soul within me, How I passed on with the throng, and led them to the house of G-d, With the voice of joy and praise, a multitude keeping holyday." (Psalms 42:5) Knesset Yisrael says to the Holy One, Blessed be He: In the past I would go up to Jerusalem basach (in procession), and the roads would be in good repair before me, and now [I go up] basach (hedged in) [fulfilling the prophecy,"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns" (Hosea 2:6);] in the past I would go up and trees would shade my path, and now I am exposed to the sun; in the past I would go up in the shadow of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and now [I go up] in the shadow of mortal kings [Lamentations Raba 4].

Rav Brachya said: Knesset Yisrael says before the Holy One, Blessed be He: In the past I would go up with baskets of first fruits on my head, and now "adadem" I ascend and descend in silence; in the past I would ascend with songs and hymns before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and now I ascend crying and descend crying; in the past I would ascend "a multitude keeping holyday"...and now I ascend stealthily and descend stealthily [Lamentations Raba 4].

But in the end, Zion is the source of all good:

Rabbi Levi said: All blessings, consolations and bounties which the Holy One, Blessed be He, brings upon Israel, emanate from Zion. Torah from Zion, as it says: "For out of Zion the Torah shall go forth" (Isaiah 2:3). Blessing from Zion, as it says: "The Lord bless thee out of Zion" (Psalms 134:3). Revelation from Zion, as it says: "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, G-d appeared" (Ps. 50:2). Support from Zion, as it says:"Send forth thy help from the sanctuary, and support thee out of Zion" (Ps. 20:3). Life from Zion, as it says: "Like the dew of Hermon, that comes down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forever" (Ps. 133:3). Greatness from Zion, as it says: "The Lord is great in Zion" (Ps. 99:2). Salvation from Zion, as it says: "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!"(Ps. 14:7).

Prayers

Nowhere is the Jews' yearning for Zion expressed more consistently and fervently than in the prayer book. Throughout the centuries of exile and to this day, devout Jews have continued to pray for the return to Zion, for the restoration of Jerusalem to its former glory, and for the rebuilding of the Temple. In prayer, the Jewish worshipper is instructed to face east, towards the Land of Israel. In the morning service, Jews say, "Bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land."

Worshippers repeatedly recite, "Blessed are You, O Lord, Who builds Jerusalem," and "Blessed are You, O Lord, Who returns His presence to Zion." The grace after meals includes a blessing which ends with a prayer for the rebuilding of "Jerusalem, the Holy City, speedily and in our days."

The Amidah (Silent Prayer)

In the Amidah, also known as the Eighteen Benedictions, which is the core of morning, afternoon and evening prayers, there are several blessings relating to the religious and national requirements and desires of Israel: a prayer for the ingathering of the exiles; a request for the institution of G-d's sovereignty and for "the rule of justice and righteousness through upright leaders;" and prayers for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Zion.

In the blessing after the reading of the Haftorah (prophetic reading) on Sabbaths and holidays, we find: "Be compassionate toward Zion, for it is the fountain of our life, and do Thou grant deliverance speedily, yea, in our own time, to the Holy City that has long been grieved in spirit. Praised be Thou, O Lord, who renewest the joy of Zion at the return of her children" ("The Prayer Book," translated and arranged by Ben Zion Bokser).

In the Sabbath Liturgy

At the beginning of the Friday night prayer service welcoming the Sabbath, the famous hymn "Lecha dodi"(Come, my beloved) is sung. It, too, contains references to the rebuilding of Zion:

City of holiness, filled are the years;
Up from thine overthrow! Forth from thy fears!

Long hast thou dwelt in the valley of tears;
Now shall G-d's tenderness shepherd thy ways.

'Be not ashamed,' saith the Lord, 'nor distressed;
Fear not and doubt not. The people oppressed,
Zion, My city, in thee shall find rest
Thee, that anew on thy ruins I raise.'

Zemirot (Sabbath table songs)

Zemirot are the songs traditionally sung at home during Sabbath meals. Though based by and large on themes directly related to the day of rest, they often include a plea for G-d's return to Zion as an event which would make the singers' Sabbath joy complete. For example, in the song Tsur Mishelo (Rock from Whose [Bounty]), the final verse entreats:

May the Temple be rebuilt; the City of Zion replenished.
There we shall sing a new song, with joyous singing ascend.
May the Merciful, the Sanctified, be blessed and exalted
Over a full cup of wine worthy of G-d's blessing.

Ya Ribon Olam (O Master of the World) ends:
To Your Sanctuary return, and to the Holy of Holies,
The place where spirits and souls will rejoice and utter songs and praises
In Jerusalem, city of beauty.

The Sabbath hymn Baruch El Elyon (Blessed be G-d Most High), begins:
Blessed be G-d Most High Who gIves repose, To our soul relief
from dismay and woe; May He seek out Zion, the outcast city...

The Grace after Meals

The Grace after Meals includes three passages dealing with the land of Israel. The first, instituted by Joshua, deals with the whole country. The second, instituted by King David, is a prayer for Jerusalem; and the third, established by King Solomon, is for the Temple.

The Torah injunction to bless G-d "for the good land that He has given you" as part of Grace after Meals has led to a ruling by our sages that 'anyone who does not mention the "desirable, good and spacious land" when giving thanks does not satisfy the requirement of saying the Grace' (Berachot 48b). This implies that an additional purpose of the Grace after Meals was to instill in those saying it a deep love for the land of Israel, and to bring them to understand that, as food is necessary for the existence and growth of each person, so the Land of Israel is necessary for the existence and growth of the Jewish People. The Land of Israel can provide both material and spiritual nourishment for all Jews.

Although it is certainly true that the Jewish people and the Jewish religion managed to survive for many centuries without the land, it is no less true that they were sustained by the deep belief that they would someday return. The Jewish people never relinquished their claim to the land, and although it was settled by others, it somehow never yielded its best to them. Only when the Jews returned did the desert bloom. "And if for many centuries most Jews did not live in Eretz Yisrael, it lived within them: in every prayer, in every holiday, in every ceremony, day in and day out. It remained for them 'our land,' for which they never ceased to offer daily thanksgiving to G-d..." (H. Donin, "To Pray as a Jew").

Customs and Laws

Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the individual Jew's longing for Zion has been expressed in certain customs and laws, many of them serving to inject a measure of sadness into an otherwise joyful occasion-for with Zion destroyed, how can any member of the Jewish people feel complete happiness? For those who would say that the establishment of the State of Israel has changed the situation, the reply would be a qualified "yes"- though we are once again sovereign in our own country, with Jerusalem as its capital, Jerusalem's final status is still in dispute; and in any case, the Temple has yet to be rebuilt. Therefore, these customs are still observed.

Mourning for Jerusalem and the Sanctuary

When the Second Temple was destroyed and the Jews exiled in 70 CE, the Jewish people were deeply affected. Some people observed private fast days; others foreswore meat or wine. Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Simeon bar

Yohai: 'It is forbidden to a man to fill his mouth with laughter in these days.' Homes were left unadorned; singing and the playing of musical instruments was frowned upon.

As the Sages searched for a suitable way to commemorate the Destruction, Rabbi Joshua offered words of moderation to his disciples: 'My sons, come and listen to me. It is impossible not to mourn at all, since the blow has fallen; and it is impossible to mourn excessively, since one does not impose on the public more than most of them can bear. However thus said the Sages: When a man plasters his house, he leaves a small space [unplastered]; when a man makes preparations for a festive meal, he leaves something out; when a woman adorns herself with all her jewelry, she leaves something off, as it is said: "If I forget thee, Jerusalem...may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth..." And all those who mourn for Jerusalem merit seeing her joy, as it is said, "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem... rejoice for joy with her, All ye that mourn for her'" (Isaiah 66: 1 0) [Baba Batra 60; Ayn Yakov].

Fast Days

All together, the Sages instituted four fast days to commemorate the destruction of the First and Second Temples:

1. The l0th of Teveth (December-January) commemorates laying siege to Jerusalem, leading to the destruction.

2. The 17th of Tammuz (June-July) commemorates the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem, preceding the destruction.

3. The 9th of Av (July-August) commemorates the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the Second Temple in 70 CE.

4. The Fast of Gedaliah (the day after Rosh Hashana), on which Gedaliah, the provisional governor of the remaining Jews of Jerusalem, was assassinated in 585 BCE.

During the three week period between the 17th of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av, additional customs of mourning are observed: no haircuts are taken, no weddings are celebrated, and no new clothing is purchased. From the 1st of Av through the 9th, as mourning intensifies, additional strictures are observed.

Additional Customs

Other customs developed which signified the prominent place of Zion in Jewish life, even as the exile continued. All over the world, Jews turn toward Jerusalem when they pray, and synagogues are built so that when the congregants face the Holy Ark, they will be facing Jerusalem. In the marriage ceremony, the bridegroom seeks to "elevate Jerusalem to the forefront of our joy" by breaking a glass under the wedding canopy. In addition, the passage from Psalms, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning," is often recited or sung. At the conclusion of the Passover seder and at the end of Yom Kippur, every Jew declares, "Next year in Jerusalem." At times of mourning, the bereaved are consoled with mention of the Land of Israel: "May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

The Rabbis determined that even the prayer for rain, wherever it was said, had to take conditions in Israel into account: 'Even if men of eastern lands and those banished [to the islands of the sea] require moisture during the Tammuz (summer) season, they must not pray for rain except when the Land of Israel needs it, too. For if one were to permit them to pray whenever they need precipitation, even during the summer, they might believe that they are living in a country of their own. But they ought to look upon themselves as living in a hostelry [temporary shelter], while their heart turns to the land of Israel. Prayers for rain must come, therefore, in their stated time' (Abba Eban, "My People").

Over the centuries, Jewish law took into account, and gave high priority to, the deep desire of individual Jews to visit Jerusalem and to live there, though it was not often practically possible to realize these hopes and dreams. When a marriage was arranged, Rabbi Levi Yitshak of Berditchev would write: "The wedding will take place on such and-such a date in Jerusalem. However, if by then the redemption has still not come, it will take place in Berditchev."

Mitzvot (Commandments) which can kept only in Israel

The most important justification in Jewish law for wishing to return to Zion is the fact that there are many commandments which can be fulfilled only in the Land of Israel. Moreover, in the view of some of our sages, the main purpose of keeping any of the commandments outside of Israel is so that, when the Jew observing them returns to Israel, he will not be "out of practice" or unfamiliar with them. What is undisputed is that there are many mitzvot which can only be observed in the Holy Land. These include obligations which hold only when the Temple exists, such as most of the sacrifices; as well as commandments still kept today, such as the observance of the sabbatical year and tithing produce. Four such areas of

obligation will be expanded upon in this chapter, as will the question of whether or not living in the land of Israel is itself a commandment.

Establishing cities of refuge: (Numbers 35:13, Deut. 19:9) Upon their settlement in the Land, the Children of Israel were instructed to single out six cities from among the cities of the Levites, to be designated as cities of refuge for those individuals who had killed someone by accident. (It should be noted that not all accidents were involved, but those which were caused by carelessness and might have been prevented). The roads to each of these cities were required to be straight, unobstructed, and in good repair, with clearly marked signs at the crossroads; thus there would be nothing to prevent such a person from fleeing from pursuers, usually relatives of the victim, intent on taking revenge. The ethical implications of the duty to establish cities of refuge include the necessity to protect the unintentional murderer from being murdered in turn; and on the other hand, to prevent him from continuing to live out his life as if nothing had happened, though his carelessness had caused someone's death. Moses designated three such cities in his lifetime in the area settled by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh east of the Jordan River, and others were set apart by Joshua west of the Jordan after the conquest.

The Sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee (Ex. 23:10, Lev. 25:2-7) In the Sabbatical year, each Jewish landowner was required not only to abstain from working his land, but to renounce ownership of all that the land produced in the seventh year, the year of shmitta (remission). Anyone who wished could partake of the produce: "but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat,' and what they leave the beast of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with your vineyard, and with your olive yard." (Exodus 23: 11). This commandment forced both the renewal of the land, and the renewed recognition of its erstwhile owners that the land which produces fruit for them each year does not do so out of its own power, but that there is a Lord over it and over its owners. According to Rabbi Aharon Halevy, another benefit of this commandment is that it aids a person to acquire the trait of vatranut (concession), because there is no one who is more generous than he who gives with no hope of receiving a reward. It also increases his faith in G-d, who must provide for him and his family while his land lies fallow.

Similar to the sabbatical year is the jubilee year, which occurred once every fifty years (Unlike the sabbatical year, the jubilee year has not yet been re-established). During this fiftieth year, all the laws regarding the sabbatical year applied. Additionally, in the jubilee year all lands reverted back to their original owners, slaves were liberated, and debts remitted.

Hakhel (Assembly): This is a commandment to assemble the people during Sukkot at the conclusion of the sabbatical year, and to read to them from the Torah. All of the people of Israel, men, women and children, were to come together at the end of the sabbatical year on the holiday of Sukkot, on the second day of the holiday, and to have read to them a portion of the Torah, from the book of Deuteronomy: "And Moses commanded them, saying: 'At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy G-d in the place which He shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn...'" [Deut. 31: 10-13]. When there is a king in Israel, it is his duty to read on this occasion. The basis of this commandment is that the mainstay of the people of Israel is the Torah; therefore it is suitable for all of them -men, women and children -to come together at one time to hear its words. This inspiring event will hopefully create within all of them a longing to learn Torah. In recent years, an attempt has been made to commemorate this assembly, and on Sukkot at the close of the last sabbatical year (September 1994/ Tishri 5755), many Jews came to the Western Wall to hear the reading of the designated passages from the Torah.

The Bringing of the First Fruits

'I have been brought by Him into this fruitful land and now I bring Him of its fruits....' One of the most moving ceremonies to take place in the Temple was the bringing of the first fruits, as recounted in Deuteronomy 26: 1-11. Each inhabitant of Israel who farmed his own land was obligated to bring the first of its produce to the Temple in a basket, present it to the officiating priest, and offer a prayer thanking G-d for having given him the land. This is the first instance where "G-d is glorified for His gift of a land to the worshipper." The prayer recited on this occasion is a yearly, obligatory prayer--one of two in the Bible-- and begins with a history lesson: "A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down to Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. And we cried unto the Lord, the G-d of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. And He hath brought US into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me" (Deuteronomy 26:5 -10). If this declaration has a familiar ring, it is probably because it has been incorporated into the text of the traditional Passover Haggadah.

A description of how the offering of the first fruits was celebrated has come down to us from early Talmudic times. The people from the surrounding country came to Jerusalem with the first fruits, those living close at hand with fresh fruits, those far away with dried. In the early mourning the procession entered the city, headed by pipers, then the sacrificial bull with gilded horns, and behind it the men, bearing baskets filled with fruits and garlanded with grapes, each according to his wealth, golden

baskets, silver baskets, and baskets woven from stripped willow twigs. The artisans of Jerusalem came out to greet them, greeting those from each place in turn: 'Brothers, men from the place of such and such a name, may you come in peace!' But when they stood by the temple hill the king himself took his basket on his shoulders and entered in with them. In the forecourt the Levites sang the verse from the Psalms: 'I will exalt Thee, G-d, for Thou hast drawn me up' (Ps. 30:2). The verb described the lifting of the bucket from the well. In the context of the action and the prayer that follows, which gives thanks for the deliverance from Egypt, the quotation came to mean: 'Israel gives thanks to G-d for raising it from the well of Egypt into the daylight and freedom of its own land.' (Bikkurim III)

Martin Buber comments: "The report of the Mishna sounds as though the intention was to preserve something lost and past for the memory of future generations. What emerges from the Mishna is the living unity --from the small peasant to the artisan right up to the king --of a people experiencing and glorifying the blessings of nature as the blessings of history. Thus we appreciate the full meaning of the passage on the offering of the first fruits, the unique document of a unique relationship between a people and a land."

It is interesting to note that many kibbutzim have adapted this ancient ritual to their Shavuot celebrations, holding processions in which the participants (especially the children) dress in white, and, with wreaths of flowers on their heads, parade with baskets of kibbutz produce.

Is settling the Land of Israel a mitzvah?

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: When ye pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images, and demolish all their high places. And ye shall drive out the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein; for unto you have I given the land to possess it." (Numbers 33:50-53)

Nahmanides [Rabbinical scholar Moses ben Nahman, known also as the Ramban (1194-1270)] interprets the last verse in the passage above as follows: "In my opinion, this constitutes a positive command of the Torah wherein He commanded them to settle in the land, and inherit it; for He gave it them; and they should not reject the heritage of the Lord! Should it enter their mind, for instance, to go and conquer the land of Shinar (Babylon) or Assyria or any other country and settle therein, then they would have transgressed a commandment of the Lord...".

Nahmanides discusses the obligation to settle Eretz Yisrael in more detail in his comments on the Sefer Ha-mitzvot (Book of Divine Precepts) of Maimonides [physician and renowned Rabbinical scholar Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204)] where he explains the cases in which he differs from Maimonides in his method of numbering the 613 precepts of Judaism. Here, Nahmanides objects to Maimonides not counting the duty of settling Eretz Yisrael as a separate commandment. Maimonides devotes a considerable amount of discussion in many of his works to the supreme and essential importance of Eretz Yisrael in Judaism, but does not designate its settlement as one of the 613 precepts referred to in the Torah.

In the words of Nahmanides: "We have been commanded in the Torah to take possession of the land which the Lord, Blessed be He, granted to our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and not to leave it in the hands of others or allow it to remain desolate...A proof that this is a special mitzvah can be adduced from the Almighty's order to the spies, 'Go up and possess it, as the Lord hath spoken to you, fear not and be not dismayed' (Deut. I :21)...And when they refused to go up, it is written, 'And you rebelled against the word of the Lord...' (Deut.I:26). This indicates that we are dealing with a specific precept and not merely a promise. I consider that the hyperbolic statements of our Sages regarding the greatness of the mitzvah of residing in the Holy Land proceeded from their concern to carry out this explicit command of the Torah...

"The mitzvah applies for all time, even during the exile, as is evident from many places in the Talmud. For example: "It happened that Rabbi Judah ben Batira and R. Matya ben Harash and R. Hanina the nephew of R. Joshua and R. Yohanan were journeying to the Diaspora. On reaching Palatium (a place outside Eretz Yisrael) they recalled Eretz Yisrael and their eyes filled with tears and they rent their garments and applied to themselves the following verse: 'Thou shalt possess them and dwell in their land' (Deut. 11 :31), whereupon they retraced their steps and went back home, saying: Residence in Eretz Yisrael is equal in weight to all the mitzvot in the Torah" (Sifrei). In another place we find: "At all times should a man reside in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city inhabited mostly by heathens. Let him not reside outside the Land, even in a city mostly inhabited by Jews" [Ketubot 1l0b] ("Al HaTorah").

Contemporary Torah scholar Nehama Leibowitz (1905 -1997) notes that it is easier to appreciate the force of these rabbinic statements if we bear in mind that there can be no complete observance, in all spheres of life, of the precepts of the Torah except in the Land of Israel. That is why King David is held to have implied that his expulsion from the Holy Land by Saul was tantamount to telling him to go and worship idols (I Samuel 26: 19), since the Torah cannot be observed in its entirety except in a society wholly governed by its precepts and not in an alien framework ruled by other ideals. "Admittedly there are personal religious obligations that can be observed anywhere, even by a Jewish Robinson Crusoe on his desert isle, but the

Torah, as a whole, implies a complete social order, a judiciary, national, economic and political life. That can only be achieved in the Holy Land and not outside it."

According to Jewish tradition, it is the Almighty who designates national boundaries. ("Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir?") [Amos 9:7]. He assigned Israel its place in the world, as He did for other peoples: How, then, does Israel's relationship to its homeland differ from that of other nations to theirs? The difference lies in the fact that Israel is aware that this land was granted it by the Almighty. It is not just a matter of history for the Jewish people, but includes a moral commitment, the responsibility of maintaining a particular way of life in that land. According to Nahmanides, the Israelites were specifically commanded to take possession of Eretz Yisrael and live there to fulfill their religious mission.

Perhaps, says Leibowitz, this is the implication of the statement in the Midrash concerning the Almighty's words to Jacob, ordering the Patriarch to return to his homeland after twenty years of exile and servitude in Laban's house:

'"Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (Genesis 31 :3) -Your father is waiting for you, your mother is waiting for you -I Myself am waiting for you' (Genesis Raba 77).

Poetic Yearnings

There is no more poignant expression of the people of Israel's yearning for Zion than their poetry. Since the destruction of the First Temple, the Jews both in exile and in the land of Israel under foreign rule have applied their considerable talents to the subject. The approaches to composing poetry about Zion are as varied as the personalities of the poets, their countries of residence and the political climate of the times in which they wrote.

Early Poetic Themes

Perhaps the earliest songs of Zion, following the biblical Psalms, were the kinot (dirges) written to commemorate the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Many of these poems, also known as Zionads, have been incorporated into the prayer service for the Ninth of Av. They address Zion, often personified as a woman, and voice fervent longing, reverence and love for the site of the ruined sanctuary. One lament describes the outcry of the signs of the Zodiac upon the destruction of the Temple: "The host of heaven sounded a dirge...Aries (the Ram) wept bitterly... Taurus (the Bull) howled on high...Gemini (the Twins) were seen to split asunder..."

Eleazar Ben Kallir (c. 570- c. 630) of Tiberias, the preeminent liturgical poet of the Gaonic era, portrayed Israel as an abandoned wife and G-d as the husband to whom she appeals.

G-d reassures her that her prayers will be answered:
"My dark one, I shall never desert you;
I shall reach out again and take you to myself.
Your complaint has come to an end:
My perfect one, I shall not forsake you or forget you."

Another poem, written between the 9th and 11th centuries, depicts Zion as a mother whose children, chased away by watchmen, view her longingly from afar.

Spanish poet and philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol (c.1020 -c.1057), one of the greatest of the medieva l Hebrew poets, wrote, among many other types of poetry, national verse in which he deplored the situation of the Jewish people in their exile and expressed his longing for redemption and the advent of the Messiah. Gabirol' s national poetry emerged from a combination of the traditional longing for deliverance and the particular fate of Spanish Jewry. Political events, the fate of his patron Jekuthiel, and the murder of an anonymous Jewish statesman by Christians in the forests along the border must have reinforced Gabirol's awareness of the dangers of exile. In his poems "Geullot" (Redemptions) and "Ahavot" (Loves) the people of Israel speak to their G-d as a woman to her lover, telling of her sorrows, while her lover comforts her with promises of her deliverance.

Isaac ibn Ghiyyat [Ghayyat] (1038-1089), halachic authority, commentator, poet, and head of the yeshiva of Lucena, his home town, wrote allegories of Israel as a forsaken bride, entreating G-d, as her beloved, for a return to favor. His reply:

"O you who call out in distress, why should you fear?
You will again be carried on eagles' wings.
I shall again call you 'My youthful bride'."

Philosophy, Poetry and Aliyah: Judah Halevi

The literary output of Judah Halevi (c.1085 -1141) represents the high point of Spanish Jewish cultural creativity. A physician, poet and philosopher, Halevi was an early theorist of Zionism and Jewish nationalism, though he lived some 750 years before the word "Zionist" came into use. The political conditions of his time led him to the conclusion that many future Zionist theorists would ultimately reach: that life in the Diaspora, even at its most comfortable, was not only insecure but also destructive of Jewish spiritual creativity.

Halevi is probably best known for his "Shirei Zion" ("Songs of Zion," or Zionides), approximately 35 in number. In them, he transformed a motif of medieva l spiritual works -the sense of alienation from this world- into a proto-Zionist theme. Instead of longing for an other-worldly existence, Halevi's poems see Israel as the only place where a Jew can feel rooted. While the poems lament the barrenness of the land of Israel, they praise its spiritual splendor. Life in Spain, by contrast, may seem more luxurious, but in fact it is a life of bondage to empty temptations. The poems argue that there is no physical security for Jews in other lands they call home. Furthennore, only in Israel can the Jewish people realize their spiritual potential.

The originality of these "Songs of Zion" is evident in the very topic, which was at that period an uncommon one, but even more so in their varied and beautiful artistry. Several categories of these poems can be differentiated, although they were written over several decades, and contain recurring motifs and similar tones.

(1) The poems of longing for Eretz Yisrael express the inner tension between love and pain, between the dream and the reality, and the effort required to bridge the West and East.

(2) It was in his poetic disputations that his doctrine on Eretz Yisrael was developed. Thus in the 12th century he was able, as a result of reasoning and clear political understanding, to argue that there is no secure place for the Jewish people except Eretz Yisrael. As for its being desolate, it was also given that way to the forefathers.

(3) Some of the poems of the voyage were actually written aboard ship; others are imaginary descriptions composed before the journey, while still others were written after it. Prior to his voyage, Judah Halevi lived it in his imagination and poetry, overcoming deep fears in this way; he even taught himself to anticipate happily and excitedly the dangers of the future. The poems begin with a description of the world, but subsequent descriptions diminish in perspective: the stormy Mediterranean Sea, the weak ship at its mercy, and finally the poet himself in prayer.

In his numerous works, Judah Halevi employed many voices, sometimes writing from the point of view of Israel, sometimes from that of G-d. In some of his verses, Israel complains to G-d, or laughs at the rivals who would presume to take her place in G-d's affections. In other poems, notably the renowned "My Heart is in the East," he spoke in his own name:
"My heart is in the East and I am at the edge of the West.
Then how can I taste what I eat, how can I enjoy it?
How can I fulfill my vows and pledges while Zion is in the domain of Edom, and I am in the bonds of Arabia? *
It would be easy for me to leave behind all the good things of Spain; It would be glorious to see the dust of the ruined Shrine."
[Note: * Edam symbolized the Christian Crusaders, who held the Land of Israel at this time; Arabia symbolized the Moslems, who ruled Spain.]

The most famous of Judah Halevi's Poems of Zion: "Ziyyan ha-lo tishali" ("Zion, will you not ask if peace be with your captives") is chanted each year in congregations around the world as part of the service for the 9th of Av. In it, the poet laments the destruction of Jerusalem but looks forward to its restoration in the future:
"Zion, will you not ask if peace be with your captives
Who seek your welfare, who are the remnant of your flocks? From west and east, north and south, from every side,
Accept the greetings of those near and far,
and the blessings of this captive of desire,
who sheds his tears like the dew of Hermon
and longs to have them fall upon your hills.
I am like a jackal when I weep for your affliction;
but when I dream of your exiles' return, I am a harp for your songs... If only I could roam through those places
where G-d was revealed to your prophets and heralds!
Who will give me wings, so that I may wander far away?
I would carry the pieces of my broken heart over your rugged mountains..."

Numerous imitations and translations of this poem have appeared. By virtue of its inclusion (according to the Ashkenazi rite) in the kinot for the Ninth of Av, many generations have lamented the destruction of the Temple and dreamt their dream of redemption in the words of this poem. All aspects of the poem focus on Zion. The holy qualities of the land are specified at length with a lyric feeling which imaginatively transplants the poet to places of former revelation, prophecy, monarchy, and to the graves of the forefathers. In a unique poetic outcry, he expresses his grief at its destruction, and expresses the happiness of his hope in the quiet lines which end the poem, where he blesses those who will be fortunate enough to see the real

redemption in the dawn. More than 800 years later, a popular song written to celebrate Jerusalem in 1967, on the eve of the Six-Day War, used some of Halevi's words as its refrain: "I am a harp for your songs."

Decision to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael- Judah Halevi's passionate love of Zion drove him finally to abandon his home, his family, and his friends, and to set out via Egypt for Jerusalem. His decision to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael, a gradual one, reflected the highest aspiration of his life. It resulted from a complex of circumstances: intense and realistic political thought; disillusionment with the possibility of secure Jewish existence in the Diaspora; intense longing for a positive, redeeming act; and the preva lent messianic climate, which so affected him that he once dreamt that the redemption would come in the year 1130 CE. The decision was strengthened by his religious philosophy, developed at length in his book the Kuzari and in many of his poems. Throughout the philosophical and poetic work of Judah Halevi, as in his life, one can sense the intellectual effort to make other Jews conscious of his outlook. In his philosophical work as well as in his poetry, Judah Halevi spoke out harshly against those who deceived themselves by speaking of Zion and by praying for its redemption while their hearts were closed to it and their actions far removed from it.

Great difficulties lay before him. The long journey by both sea and desert was perilous. He knew that he would encounter very difficult living conditions in Eretz Yisrael, which was under Crusader rule at that time.

Moreover, Judah Halevi had to counter the arguments of his friends who tried to deter him; he had to overcome his attachment to his only daughter and son-in-law, to his students, his many friends and admirers; and he had to give up his high social status and the honor which he had attained in his native land. He struggled deeply with his intimate attachment to Spain, the land of "his fathers' graves:" At one time he had even looked upon Spain with pride and thankfulness, as a homeland for the Jews. On the other hand, Judah Halevi was encouraged to make the journey by his friend Halfon ha-Levi, whom he met in Spain in 1139.

On the 24th of Elul (Sept. 8,1140) Judah Halevi arrived in Alexandria. Several months later he went to Cairo where he stayed with Halfon ha-Levi. The scenery, pleasures, the admiration and honor generally accorded him everywhere, and the friendships he enjoyed all served to prolong his stopover in Egypt so that he began to fear that he would die before reaching his destination. Finally, however, Judah Halevi boarded a ship at Alexandria, bound for Eretz Yisrael; but its departure was delayed by inclement weather. From the elegies written in Egypt and from the Genizah letters which mention his death, it could be concluded that he died about six months after reaching Egypt and that he was also buried there. What was denied him in life, however, the famous legend, first mentioned in Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah, and later by Heinrich Heine in his Hebraeische Melodien, has supplied. It relates that he managed to reach the city of Jerusalem, but, as he kissed its stones, a passing Arab horseman trampled on him just as he was reciting his elegy, "Ziyyon ha-lo tishali."

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The Circle Widens

As the exile continued, poetic yearnings connected descriptions of the sufferings of the Jews in the Diaspora with a wish to return to the glory of Israel in Temple times. Ephraim of Bonn (b. 1132), in his "Lament for the Massacre at Blois," pleaded for the restoration of the fortunes of the Jewish people, a return to Jerusalem and to the Temple sacrifices. Other poets praised Israel for remaining faithful despite all their tribulations. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 led to a new flourishing of the Hebrew Spanish styles of poetry in such widely dispersed Jewish communities as those in Turkey, Greece, North Africa, Eretz Yisrael and Holland, during a period which extended from the 16th to the 18th centuries.

Judah Aryeh Modena (1571-1648), child prodigy, Italian rabbi, scholar and writer, in his "Song for the Minor Day of Atonement," voiced a plea for redemption. "And through Your great love, my King, You will arise and have mercy on our holy Zion. You will restore Your glory to Your dwelling, and there we shall present the burnt-offerings of the new month. O G-d, pray send the bearer of our royal honor, for it is there, in Zion, that our hearts yearn to shine."

Shalem Shabazi (1619 -after 1680), the greatest of the Yemenite Jewish poets, lamented the exile of Yemenite Jewry to Mawza, near the eastern shore of the Red Sea, in 1679-1680 in his poems. Living in a period of persecutions and messianic anticipations for Yemenite Jewry, Shabazi gave faithful poetic expression to the suffering and yearning of his generation, whose national poet he became. His poetry deals primarily with the religious themes of exile and redemption, the Jewish people and G-d, wisdom and ethics, Torah, and the life to come. Many of his poems deal with the glorious past of the Jews in their own land, from which the author drew faith and hope for renewed greatness in the future. In his ode "The Seal," the poet describes himself as bound in love to Israel though "my feet are sinking in the depths of the exile."

Yearning is not Enough

Living during the height of the controversy over false messiah Shabbetai Tzvi, Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1747), the kabbalist, writer of ethical works and Hebrew poet, felt that it was necessary to work toward the redemption. "The healing of

the Divine presence" (tikkun ha-Shekhina) was the aim of Luzzatto's "Society of the Seekers of G-d," who studied the Zohar day and night in shifts in order to bring about the redemption. Suspected by some of the rabbinical authorities of the time of being aligned with Shabbetai Tzvi, Luzzatto was driven from Padua, where he grew up, to Amsterdam, and ultimately reached Israel.

There are those who consider Luzzatto the father of modern Hebrew literature due to his complete mastery of the language, his expressive style ("vivid, direct, and fully modern") and the ideas he addressed. His Palestinian poem, "Shir al Hamei Tverya" (Song of the Tiberias Springs), contains a graphic description of the desolation reigning everywhere at that time, and a minerological description of the springs of Tiberias. Luzzatto drew a parallel between the healing mineral waters of Tiberias, emerging from the soil after having overcome many obstacles, and the people of Israel who will likewise emerge victorious from their trials.

Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934), Hebrew author, father of modern Hebrew poetry, and poet-prophet of Jewish nationalism, inspired Zionists and revolutionaries in Russia, pioneers in Palestine, and thousands of schoolchildren who studied his poetry wherever modern Hebrew was taught. His influence was immense. Born near Zhitomir in the Ukraine, Bialik spent time in Volozhin (Lithuania), Odessa, Kiev, Warsaw and Berlin before settling in Tel Aviv in 1924.

His first published poem, "El HaTzippor" (To the Bird), was a song longing for Zion. In 1894 he wrote "Al Saf Beit Hamidrash " (On the Threshold of the House of Study), which predicts the ultimate triumph of Israel's spirit.

In the hymn "Birkat Am" (The Blessing of the People, 1894), which is permeated by intricate allusions to Temple ritual, the poet metamorphosed the builders of Eretz Yisrael into priests and Temple builders. Other poems indicate his preoccupation with the implications of the First Zionist Congress. In "Ha-Matmid"(The Talmud Student, 1894-5), Bialik traced the inner struggles of the dedicated student who represses his natural inclinations and sacrifices life, movement, change, nature and family for the ascetic study of Torah. This was an ideal figure who captured the imagination of the reader, since he embodied the moral qualities that build societies and preserve cultures.

Bialik despised Jewish apathy and many of his poems criticized his fellow Diaspora Jews for their humble acceptance of the negative aspects of their existence. Most notable was "In the City of Slaughter," written after the 1903 pogrom in Kishinev, in which he both expressed his sorrow and attacked the cowardly, parasitical survivors. This poem was a major stimulus to the Jewish self-defense movement. "Megillat Ha-Esh" (The Scroll of Fire, 1905), his most enigmatic and experimental work, fused elements drawn from Jewish legend (aggadah) and Jewish mysticism. Its overt theme is the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem, and the exile which followed. The destruction of the Temple appears to represent the destruction of the poet's soul on one level and that of the religious faith of an entire generation on the other.

After "Megillat Ha-Esh," Bialik fell into a period of silence, writing few poems and becoming occupied with manifold activities, including public lectures, essays, criticism, translating, and editing. He devoted his abundant vigor, vision and charm to the preservation and advancement of Jewish culture, participating in four Zionist Congresses, and the Congress for Hebrew Language and Culture in 1913. His cultural missions took him to the United States and to London. From 1928 on, ill health forced him to spend his summers in Europe and these trips also became occasions for the promotion of Jewish culture. He was active in the work of the Hebrew University, served as president of the Hebrew Writers Union and of the Hebrew Language Council, and initiated the popular Oneg Shabbat, a Sabbath study project. He was often sent abroad as an emissary of the Zionist organization. His death of a heart attack in Vienna, at the height of his fame, was seen as a national tragedy.

Bialik, who more than any other Hebrew poet since Judah Halevi, had a thorough command of Hebrew and the ability to use the many resources of the language, forged a new poetic idiom which enabled Hebrew poetry to free itself from the overwhelming biblical influence and yet, at the same time, retain its link with "the language of the race." Bialik's dominant theme was the crisis of faith which confronted his generation as it broke with the sheltered and confined medieva l Jewish religious culture of its childhood and sought desperately to hold on to a Jewish way of life and thought in the new secularized world in which it found itself. Despite his moments of despair, Bialik did not completely abandon the hope of reconciling modernism with tradition within the context of a new national Jewish culture. Searching out new and further vistas yet rooted in the rich Jewish heritage, Bialik was both the product and the dominant motivator of the cultural revolution of his age, embodying its very essence to carve out of the past the foundation on which the people might build with dignity in the future. In answering the silent cry of a people needing articulation in a new era, he has gained its permanent recognition. As a poet his genius and spirit have left an indelible imprint on modern Hebrew literature.

Coming Home

The poetry under discussion in the following section was written by poets who yearned and returned. Though modern Zionism had come into existence when these poets wrote, the Jews were just beginning to make their presence felt in the land of Israel. During their lifetimes, the gradual buildup of a Jewish presence in Palestine began: the establishment of Jewish settlements, Jewish agriculture, roads, schools and other institutions; the revival of the Hebrew language and the

development of a national, modern Jewish culture. Born in Europe, they came to settle in pre-state Israel in the 1920s. Some of them changed the way they wrote when they reached Israel, either by switching from the East European Ashkenazi pronunciation to the Sephardic pronunciation used in modern Israeli spoken Hebrew; or by addressing subjects other than those they had written about in Europe, treating instead those of paramount importance to the inhabitants of the Yishuv, the Jewish community in pre-state Israel.

Yaakov Fichman (1880-1958), born in Bessarabia, was a follower of Bialik's school of thought. After his immigration to Palestine in 1925, Fichman became increasingly absorbed with the Palestinian landscape. He was a member of a transitional generation whose attitude toward the new landscape is basically secular; he did not view it through the Biblical-Zionist romanticism of some of his other contemporaries. In this he was a forerunner of the changes in Hebrew poetry, some of which he witnessed in his own lifetime. He expressed fascination with and reverence for Jerusalem, and anticipated its reconstruction.

Yehuda Karni (1884-1949), born in Pinsk, Poland, settled in Palestine in 1921. He was one of the first Hebrew poets to abandon the Ashkenazi accentuation and shift to the new Sephardi accent. Particularly distinctive is his volume "Shirei Yerushalayim" (Songs of Jerusalem, 1948). Jerusalem in this volume looms as the eternal symbol of the people and its destiny.

Although he encountered a city in apparently hopeless stagnation and decay, he sensed the deeper, historical levels of consciousness of eternal Jerusalem. At the same time, he captured the concrete beauty of the Jerusalem landscape: "To be one of the stones of my city is all my desire. Were my bones knitted in with the wall, how glad I would be." (Wedge Me into the Fissure)

David Shimoni (1886-1956), born in White Russia, came to Israel in 1909 for one year, and settled in the country in 1921. He belonged to the circle of leading Hebrew poets who were under the influence of Bialik and were the chief spokesmen of Hebrew literature for more than a generation. While in Europe Shimoni wrote nostalgic poems about the landscape of Eretz Yisrael, but he is known primarily through his Sefer ha-Idylliot (The Book of Idylls), which were avidly read by two generations of pioneers and are still an integral part of the Israel school curriculum. Written in Palestine, it deals chiefly with the idyllic character of the Palestinian landscape and the life of the pioneers of the various Aliyot, against a background of swamp and desert, memories of the past and present day ideologies. In later poems, the poet concerned himself more with public issues, contemporary problems, and the needs of the people.

Rachel (pseudonym of Rachel Bluwstein, 1890-1931), born in northern Russia, began writing poetry in Russian at age 15. In 1909 she emigrated to Eretz Yisrael, abandoned her native Russian idiom and learned Hebrew. She wrote simple, sensitive lyrics charged with delicate symbols and imbued with a love for the countryside and nature. Many of the poems, including the widely sung "Kinneret", have been put to music.

Poet and publicist Uri Zvi Greenberg (1897-1981), born in Galicia, settled in Palestine in 1924. His poetry is filled with pathos and keen sensitivity, with richness of language and forceful expressions; for, according to the poet, the main function of poetry is not merely aesthetic, but rather to stir the nation to battle for its liberty. His poems deal with such themes as the significance of life and death, Israel as the Chosen People, national pride and a vision of the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. In contrast to most modern Hebrew writers, who were committed to a secularist-humanist Zionism, Greenberg asserted a religious and mystical view of Zionism as the Jewish historical destiny.

Yitzhak Lamdan (1900-1950) born in the Ukraine, immigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1920. He spent his first years as a halutz (pioneer), building roads and working on farms. His poetry, imbued with a pioneering spirit that grew out of his experience, aroused great interest since it reflected the hopes and despair of the Third A1iyah and the struggles and conflicts of the individual halutz. Expressionist in nature, his poetry is wholly devoted to the fate of the Jewish people at its decisive hour.

Avraham Shlonsky (1900-1973), Hebrew poet, editor, and translator, was born in the Ukraine and settled in Palestine in 1921. Shlonsky holds a central position in the development of modem Hebrew poetry and modem Israeli poetry in particular. The principal themes of his early verse are the harsh struggles of the Palestine pioneers, their arduous, monotonous toil, their loneliness and longing for the homes they left, set against their joy of creation, and the ennobling sorrows of self-sacrifice.

Levi Ben-Amitai (1901-) was born in White Russia, and moved to Palestine in 1920. His verse is devoted to the humble tiller of the soil, the Jewish farmer in his homeland, whose creative work the poet places on a level with the duties performed by the Priests and Levites in the Temple. The poet identified himself with the pure simple lives of the ancient Essenes, whose modern counterparts are the kibbutz members:
"Mother Sabbath! Do you hear the pounding of hearts
And the silence of lips this night on the Jordan?
They thirst for prayer. Spread your hands over this bread
And bless them.

Bless the faithful, the sowers of light in the fields of man
And put the world's joy into hearts longing for brotherhood.
More will yet come, all to sit together like brothers
At the Sabbath of rest..." (Sabbath in the Kibbutz)

Envisioning a Jewish State: Zionist Utopias

As Jews led their lives in the Diaspora, they held on to a vision of the Zion of old -- a vision of splendor in which Jewish kings reigned, the Temple was the center of Jewish life, and priests and prophets filled their respective functions in a free and sovereign Jewish state. The more difficult conditions were in the Diaspora, the more attractive this image of Zion past became. However, with the first stirrings of modem Zionism, there were those who envisaged other versions of the Zion of the future.

"Ein Zukunftsblick" ("A Look at the Future") by Edmund Eisler, written in 1882, describes both the Jewish exodus from Europe and the creation of the state of "Judah" in Eretz Yisrael, which has Hebrew as its official language. The fledgling state is attacked by its neighbors, but vanquishes them all. Eisler includes a nightmare vision of Germany. In the main, the book reflected the background of European anti-Semitism and the pogroms in Russia.

Herzl's "Der Judenstaat" (The Jewish State, 1896) is a classic example of a book in which both Zionist ideology and utopian visions are present. His "Altneuland" (Old-New Land, 1902) sought to indicate the way in which Herzl visualized the realization of Zionism: a Jewish state in which technology would be developed to the highest degree and in which the Jewish intelligentsia would find unlimited opportunities. The new culture, however, would be essentially a European culture, based on a medley of languages and devoid of distinctive Jewish character.

Another Zionist utopia, "Massa Le-Eretz Yisrael bi-Shenat Tat" ("'A Journey to the Land of Israel in the Year 5800 [2040]," 1893), by the Hebrew writer Elhanan Leib Levinsky, which preceded "Altneuland" by ten years, reflects the Zionist dream of East European Jewry, rooted in Hebrew culture. The Hebrew language and the fostering of Hebrew culture occupy a central place in the book, and Ahad Ha-Am's vision of Eretz Yisrael becoming the spiritual center of the Jewish people reaches fulfillment.

Edward Bellamy's book "Looking Backward, 1887-2000" (1888) had a profound influence on Zionist utopias. One example was a political -Zionist utopia by Max Austerberg-Verakoff, "Das Reich Judaea im Jahre 6000(2241)," published in 1893. The author envisaged a mass exodus of Jews from Europe, their settlement in Eretz Yisrael, and the founding there of a Jewish state with Hebrew as its official language. He discusses the attitude of the Jewish state toward the European power that had been guilty of persecuting the Jews (Russia) and the relations between the citizens of the Jewish state and the Jews who stayed behind in the Diaspora.

Another Zionist utopia inspired by Bellamy was "Looking Ahead" (1899) by Henry Pereira Mendes. He was one of the first American Jews to respond to Herzl's call, and his book expresses the essence of the Zionist vision: the Jewish state and Jerusalem, its capital, would be the center of world peace, and by the creation of the state, the nations of the world would redress the wrongs they had perpetrated against the Jews throughout the ages. There is also a description of the mass exodus of Jews to Eretz Yisrael; those who stay behind are enjoined to be loyal citizens of their countries, without losing awareness of the temporary nature of their residence outside of Eretz Yisrael.

Two utopias describe a Jewish state bearing the name "Israel." One, written by the Hebrew author Isaac Fernhof (1868 -1919), describes the ascent of the poor and downtrodden Jews to Eretz Yisrael, where they create an independent state to which they give the name the State of Israel. The book is called "Shenei Dimyonot" ("Two Ideas") one being the reality as experienced by the author, the other his vision of the Jewish state. The second utopia that refers to the Jewish state as the State of Israel was the work of the Hebrew Yiddish writer Hillel Zeitlin. Written in 1919 under the name "In der Medinas Yisroel in Yor 2000" ("In the State of Israel in the Year 2000"), it reflects the tremendous impact of the Balfour Declaration upon the Jewish masses. The author foresees the establishment of the state and its growth and development. During the British Mandatory period (1918-48), a number of utopias were published in Hebrew as "Yerushalayim ha-Benuyah" (Rebuilt Jerusalem) by Boris Schatz, in 1924. They often reflect the critical issues of that period: the struggle for Jewish labor and the opposition to the Mandatory regime. When the Jewish state is founded, the problems are solved and all unjust decrees abolished.

The Balfour Declaration also inspired "Komemiyut" ("Upright"), a comprehensive work written in Russia in 1920-21 by the Hebrew author Shalom Ben Avram. This utopia contains an astoundingly accurate vision of mass aliyah, the founding of the Jewish commonwealth, and the Jew at living with pride in the young and vibrant state.

Conclusion

Yearning for Zion is an ongoing process, both for those Jews who continue to live in the Diaspora, and for those Jews in Israel and abroad who aspire to a more perfect state.

In 1883, Emma Lazarus wrote of what she felt was needed in order to make renewed Zion a reality: "... What we need today, second only to the necessity of closer union and warmer patriotism, is the building up of our national, physical force. If the new Ezra rose to lead our people to a secure house of refuge, whence would he recruit the farmers, masons, carpenters, artisans, competent to perform the arduous, practical pioneer work of founding a new nation? We read of the Jews who attempted to rebuild the Temple using the trowel with one hand, while with the other they warded off the blows of the molesting enemy. Where are the warrior-mechanics today equal to either feat? Although our stock is naturally so vigorous that in Europe the Jews remain after incalculable suffering and privation of the healthiest of races, yet close confinement and sedentary occupations have undeniably stunted and debilitated us in comparison with our normal physical status. For nearly nineteen hundred years we have been living on an idea; our spirit has been abundantly fed, but our body has been starved, and has become emaciated past recognition, bearing no likeness to its former self.

"Let our first care today be the re-establishment of our physical strength, the reconstruction of our national organism, so that in future, where the respect due to us cannot be won by entreaty, it may be commanded, and where it cannot be commanded, it may be enforced." ("An Epistle to the Hebrews")

Emma Lazarus realized, almost prophetically, that a renewed Zion would have to be based upon people who could both build and fight in order to realize the ancient ideal which nourished their souls. In today's modem, flourishing Zion, we still require builders and fighters; and the new Jewish nation still aspires to provide the Jews of the world with the spiritual base, the spiritual nourishment, which will safeguard and strengthen their Jewish identity, their sense of community, and their sense of continuity. The bond between the people of Israel and Zion can and must be dynamic, interactive, constantly flowing and mutually beneficial.

Perhaps it is Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine from 1921-1935, who provides the most appropriate "last word" on the Jewish people's continuing, deep connection to its ancestral homeland:
"Eretz Yisrael is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people, it is no mere national possession, serving as a means of unifying our people and buttressing its material, or even its spiritual, survival. Eretz Yisrael is part of the very essence of our nationhood; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. Human reason, even at its most sublime, cannot begin to understand the unique holiness of Eretz Yisrael; it cannot stir the depths of love that are dormant within our people."