

YOM HAATZMA'UT



בית של קבע

A Permanent Home

■ Wanderings

For 2,000 years, the Jewish People wandered; their symbol was the walking stick. Throughout the world they sought a place to rest their feet, where they could develop and blossom in serenity and security. But this quest was never fulfilled, for *“there is no wisdom, no understanding and no counsel against G-d”* (Proverbs 21,30); it went contrary to G-d’s ancient decree, clearly and unambiguously engraved in the Torah:

וְהִפִּיצָהּ ה' בְּכָל הָעַמִּים מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ וְעַד קְצֵה הָאָרֶץ ...
וּבְגוֹיִם הָהֵם לֹא תִרְגָּע וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מְנוּחַ לְכַף רַגְלָהּ ...

*G-d will disperse you amongst all the nations,
from one end of the world to the other... and you will
not be calm nor find rest there for your feet.* (D'varim 28,64-65)

The list of tribulations and persecutions we suffered over the past millennium alone is a long one. The horrific Crusades, beginning in the late 1000's, led to a wave of hundreds of years of anti-Semitic bloodbaths. We suffered pogroms in Germany in the 1100's, and the expulsion of English Jewry in the 1200's. The next century saw the destruction of the

Jewish communities in France, and the deadly trials of the Inquisition in Spain that ended with the expulsion of every Jew in the country in 1492. Many of them ran to nearby Portugal, but from there as well they were persecuted and banished. Next were harsh decrees in Germany that led to mass emigration to Poland, setting the stage for the Chmelnitzki pogroms in the 1600's: ruthless mobs cruelly killed hundreds of thousands in Lithuania and Poland, and destroyed hundreds of Jewish towns. Later, anti-Semitism continued to spread far and wide, leading to the unspeakable Holocaust of 1940-1945 that wiped out a third of world Jewry at the hands of the Nazis.

Clearly, the Nation of Israel, so much better than any other nation, knows the critical need for a national home in which to dwell safely.

The only consolation for the Jewish nation was the fact that wherever they were banished and wherever they landed, they knew that Hashem was still with them, as this Gemara teaches:

R. Shimon ben Yochai said: Look and see how beloved is Israel before the Holy One, for in every place that they were exiled, the Divine Presence was with them... And even at their future Redemption, the Divine Presence will be with them, as is written, וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרוּחְךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצָה מְכַל הָעַמִּים 'Hashem your G-d will return with your exiles' (D'varim 30,3). It is not written that G-d will 'restore your exiles' but rather, 'He will *return with* your exiles.' This teaches us that the Holy One Himself will, as it were, return along with Israel from exile. (Megillah 29a)

And not only that, but Hashem also shares with us our pain and sorrow, as is written: עָמוּ אֲנֹכִי בְצָרָה, *I am with him [Israel] in tribulation* (Psalms 91,15), and בְּכָל צָרָתָם לֹא צָר, *In all their affliction He was afflicted.* (Isaiah 63,9)

■ Permanent Place

Yaakov Avinu was the first of the holy Patriarchs to yearn to build a permanent structure for the service of Hashem. On his way to Aram Naharayim during his escape from his brother Esav, he woke up in the morning after seeing a Divine revelation in his dream, and made a vow:

אִם יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי ... וְשָׁבְתִי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל בֵּית אָבִי...
וְהָאֵבֶן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַתִּי מִצְבָּה יִהְיֶה בֵּית אֱלֹהִים...

*If G-d will be with me...
and I return in peace to my father's house...
This rock that I have placed as a monument will be
a house of G-d.* (B'reshit 28,20-22)

In the merit of this request and wish, the Beit HaMikdash was called in Yaakov's name, as the Prophet Yeshayahu said:

וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ
לְכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל הַר ה' אֶל בַּיִת אֱ-לֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִרְנוּ מִדְרָכָיו וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַרְחֻתָיו...
*Many nations will go and say,
"Let us go and ascend to the mountain of G-d,
to the House of the G-d of Yaakov, and He will teach us
of His ways and we will walk in His paths..."* (Isaiah 2,3)

Our Sages, noting that the Holy Temple is here called in Yaakov's name, taught as follows:

R. Elazar asked: "*The G-d of Yaakov – and not the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak?!*" Rather, not like Avraham, who called the site of the Holy Sanctuary a 'mountain'.. and not like Yitzchak, who called it a 'field'... but rather like Yaakov, who called it a 'house.'" (Pesachim 88a)

Unlike a mountain and a field, a house is a permanent place for prayer and worship of G-d. When Yaakov wandered the fields of his exile as he herded the flocks of his uncle Lavan, he did not sleep, as we read in Parashat Vayetze:

הָיִיתִי בַיּוֹם אֲכָלְנִי חֹרֵב וְקָרַח בַּלַּיְלָה וְתִדַּד שְׁנֹנְתִי מֵעֵינָי.
*I was [in the field] by day when I was consumed by the
scorching heat, and at night by the frost,
and sleep was snatched from my eyes.* (B'reshit 31,40)

His lack of sleep was caused not only by his hard work for Lavan, but also because he was constantly imagining the shape and location of the special House to G-d in Beit El that he planned to build when he returned to Eretz Yisrael.

King David, too, also experienced this type of feeling. His great dream was to actually build the Beit HaMikdash. He wrote a special chapter in Psalms in which he expresses the same deep longings that Yaakov Avinu had:

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת זְכוֹר ה' לְדָוִד אֶת כָּל עֲנֻוֹתָיו.
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לֵה' נֶדֶר לְאַבִּיר יַעֲקֹב.

*A song of ascents. Remember, G-d, all David's afflictions,
how he swore to G-d and vowed to the mighty G-d of Yaakov:*

אִם אָבֹא בְּאֵהָל בֵּיתִי אִם אֶעֱלֶה עַל עַרְשׁוֹ יְצוּעֵי.
אִם אֶתֵּן שְׁנַת לְעֵינַי לְעַפְעַפֵּי תַנּוּמָה.
עַד אֶמְצָא מְקוֹם לֵה' מִשְׁכְּנֹת לְאַבִּיר יַעֲקֹב.

*"I will not come into the tent of my house,
nor go up into my bed,
nor give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids,
until I find a place for Hashem,
habitation for the mighty G-d of Yaakov." (Psalms 132,1-5)*

The expression *Avir Yaakov, mighty G-d of Yaakov*, which appears twice in these verses, literally means the "shield of Yaakov," for *avir* stems from the same root as *evrah*, meaning "wing," which a bird uses to protect her young. *Avir Yaakov* thus refers to Hashem Who shields and protects Yaakov. King David used this phrase in the above verses to show his deep solidarity with Yaakov Avinu.

Elsewhere, King David reveals to Natan the Prophet his great dream, similar to that of Yaakov:

רָאָה נָא, אֲנִכִּי יוֹשֵׁב בְּבַיִת אֲרָזִים וְאֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים יוֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹךְ הִרְיָעָה.

*See, I sit in a building of cedar,
while the Ark of G-d is placed with curtain. (Shmuel II 7,2)*

David laments the total lack of proportion between the permanence of man's dwelling and the transient nature of the placement of the Ark of the Covenant. That very night, Hashem instructed Natan to tell David not to build a permanent dwelling for Him. He explained that He was leaving this mission for David's son, Shlomo.

At the same time, however, Hashem promised David that though He does not need a permanent home at this time, he will receive the following, in the merit of his yearning to build a home for Hashem:

1. The People of Israel will be granted a home. They will be firmly planted in the Land of Israel, and all of Israel's enemies will fall before them. As is written:

וְעַתָּה כֹּה תֹאמַר לְעַבְדֵי לְדָוִד...
 וְשִׁמַּתִּי מְקוֹם לְעַמִּי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִטְעַתִּיו וְשָׁכַן תַּחֲתָיו וְלֹא יִרְגַז עוֹד
 וְלֹא יִסִּיפוּ בְנֵי עוֹלָה לְעַנּוֹתוֹ בְּאִשֶׁר בְּרֹאשׁוֹנָה.

And now say thus to my servant David:

*... I will designate a place for My nation Israel,
 and I will plant them there and they will reside there
 and will be troubled no more,
 and wicked men shall torture them no more... (verses 8-10)*

- David himself will be granted a permanent dynasty – a house of royalty that will never leave his descendants:

... וְהָגִיד לָךְ ה' כִּי בֵּית יַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ ה' ... וְהִקְיַמְתִּי אֶת זְרַעְךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ...
 וְכִנְנִיתִי אֶת כִּסֵּא מִמְלַכְתּוֹ עַד עוֹלָם.

Hashem tells you that He will make you a house...

I will establish your seed after you...

I will establish firmly the seat

of [your son's] dynasty forever. (verses 11-13)

We see here the convergence of the three elements:

- A permanent Beit Mikdash for prayer to G-d;
- the Land of Israel as the permanent home of the Jewish People;
- and the everlasting dynasty of the House of David to lead the nation.

This strong triple bond leads directly to this teaching:

R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon bar Yochai: He who sets a permanent place for his prayer, his enemies will fall before him, as is written [in the above-cited verse], “I will designate a place for My nation Israel, and I will plant them there and they will reside there... and wicked men shall torture them no more...” (B'rachot 7b)

At first blush, this appears to be very strange. How can R. Yochanan quote a verse that concerns the Nation of Israel and its homeland as if it applies to an individual and his personal place of prayer?

Furthermore: Why is setting a place for prayer so praiseworthy that it grants one a free pass from all his enemies? And does everyone who sets a place for prayer long for his enemies to fall at his feet?

Based on what we learned above, however, the explanation is clear: R. Yochanan taught that as long as Israel is not strongly settled in its land,

it will not be able to overcome its enemies, as per G-d's words to David above. When an individual sets himself a permanent place for prayer in the synagogue, it brings about a longing for a permanent place for Israel's national prayers – in the Beit HaMikdash! And this, in turn, will hasten the return of the Nation of Israel to its Land.

Here in the State of Israel, our national home in our national homeland, we no longer suffer arbitrary humiliations and attacks by anti-Semites who have no fear of retribution, as was the norm during much of our Exile.

On the other hand, R. Yochanan is also hinting that synagogues and Torah study halls in the Diaspora have a slight flavor of the sanctity of the Land of Israel. The Gemara makes precisely this point, based on the words of Yechezkel the Prophet:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהִים, כִּי הֲרַחַקְתִּים בְּגוֹיִם וְכִי הִפִּיצוּתִים בְּאַרְצוֹת
וְאֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לְמִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט בְּאַרְצוֹת אֲשֶׁר בָּאוּ שָׁם.

*So said Hashem: "Though I have cast them far among
the nations and dispersed them among the lands,
I will be for them a little sanctuary
in the countries in which they arrived."* (Yechezkel 11,16)

Says R. Yitzchak in the Talmud:

"A little sanctuary" – This refers to synagogues and Torah study halls
in Babylon. (Megillah 29a)

Synagogues outside Eretz Yisrael are a "little sanctuary," that is, a type of Beit Mikdash with a type of Eretz Yisrael sanctity. This is only temporary, of course, until the time arrives that Bnei Yisrael are permitted to ascend and build their land and state, as the above Talmudic passage continues:

R. Eliezer HaKappar said: "The synagogues and study halls in Bavel
will ultimately be reestablished in the Land of Israel."

My brother HaRav Chaim Sabato explained that this linkage is the basis and foundation for the following incident, brought in Tractate B'rachot (8a):

R. Yochanan was told that there are very elderly Jews in Babylon.
This greatly surprised him, because he said: "The Torah states,
'So that your lives and those of your sons will be lengthened
on the land that G-d swore to your fathers' (D'varim 11,21) – It promises
long life in Eretz Yisrael, not outside the Land!"

They explained to R. Yochanan that the elderly Jews in Babylon make sure to go to the synagogue for prayers morning and evening, whereupon he said, “That is what merited them their long life.”

R. Yochanan realized that though long life is promised in the merit of the Land of Israel, a similar merit can be gained outside the Land by making sure to pray regularly in the synagogue – because of the link between synagogues and Eretz Yisrael, as explained above.

Resh Lakish, a colleague of R. Yochanan, continued this line of thought, but in the opposite direction. Addressing himself to those who do not come to the synagogue, Resh Lakish taught:

“Whoever has a synagogue in his town but does not enter it, is called a ‘bad neighbor.’” (B'rachot 8a)

What source did Resh Lakish cite for this? Again, it is from the Land of Israel, based on the above equation between a synagogue and a small Beit HaMikdash. As the Prophet says:

כֹּה אָמַר ה', עַל כָּל שְׂכֵנֵי הָרָעִים הַנִּגְעִים בְּנַחֲלָה
אֲשֶׁר הִנְחַלְתִּי אֶת עַמִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל...

*So said Hashem, regarding all My **bad neighbors** who touch the inheritance that I left for My nation, for Israel. (Yirmiyahu 12,14)*

Who are these *bad neighbors*? They are the nations that border on the Land of Israel and refuse to recognize the Nation of Israel or its bonds with and rights to the Land.

In short: Lack of respect for the synagogue is akin to a lack of recognition and acknowledgement of the sanctity of the Land of Israel.

■ Our Return

Ever since our modern return to Eretz Yisrael, with G-d's help, and as we rebuild the Land's ruins, the Nation of Yisrael has continued to ascend and progress in every area. This includes the world of Torah and that of science and medicine, as well as the fields of economics, military strength and capabilities, agriculture, industry, road infrastructures, urban construction, and so much more. Our entire national development is constantly accompanied by this prophecy:

מִקִּים דְּבַר עֲבָדוֹ וְעֲצַת מְלֹאכָיו יִשְׁלִים
הָאֹמֵר לְיְרוּשָׁלַם תּוֹשֵׁב וְלְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה תִּבְנֶינָה וְחָרְבוֹתֶיהָ אֶקְוִמָם.
*...[Hashem] confirms the word of His servant,
and performs the counsel of His messengers;
He says about Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,'
and about the cities of Judea, 'It will be rebuilt,
and its ruins I will build up.'* (Yeshayahu 44,26)

In addition, Am Yisrael is destined to rise still higher and higher, and reveal its hidden treasures *“for renown and praise”* (Tzephania 3,20) before the entire world, as is written:

וְרָאוּ כָּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שֵׁם ה' נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ וְיִרְאוּ מִמֶּךָ.
*Then all the peoples of the earth will see that G-d's name is
called upon you, and they will stand in awe of you.* (D'varim 28,10)

And the Holy Temple will speedily be rebuilt for Hashem, and will be a source of prayer and prophecy, of the Divine light and service of G-d in song and melody, from which will be disseminated Torah and G-d's word, to us and to the entire world:

וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ
לְכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל הַר ה' אֶל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִרְגּוּ מִדְרָכָיו וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַרְחֹתָיו.
*Many nations will go and say,
“Let us go and ascend to the mountain of G-d,
to the House of the G-d of Yaakov,
and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths -*
כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תּוֹרָה וּדְבַר ה' מִירוּשָׁלַם.
*for from Tzion will go forth Torah,
and G-d's word from Yerushalayim.”* (Isaiah 2,3)

