

MRS. LEAH FEINBERG

OU Israel Faculty

בס"ד

Yearning for Yerushalayim

Why, if Yechezkel serves as the Navi of the Exile, do so many of his early prophecies focus on Yerushalayim? The elders of the diaspora gather in his home to hear his prophecies of the catastrophic events in Yerushalayim and are subjected to horrific descriptions of the desecration of the Beit HaMikdash and the withdrawal of the Shechinah. Yechezkel suffers through the demanding conditions of the symbolic acts imposed upon him by Hashem to concretize the reality of the impending Churban in the minds of his audience. We expect Yechezkel to urge the exiles to establish roots and strengthen their community in the diaspora, building upon the guidance provided by Yirmiyahu in his letter to the exiles and assuring them that the future of the Jewish people depended on them; yet the focus of both the Navi and the people remains on Yerushalayim.



Rav Abraham Isaac Kook zt"l

In Mizmor 137 of Tehillim, the psalmist expresses the despair of the people in Bavel when asked by their captors to sing songs of Tzion on foreign soil. Malbim maintains that this mizmor speaks of the time of the Persian conquest, by which time the Jews had become comfortably settled in Bavel. Seventy years after the prophecies of Yechezkel, the devastated exiles had been transformed. They owned prosperous farms and vineyards and were lauded as skilled goldsmiths and craftsmen. Despite their material success, they still cried in remembrance of Yerushalayim. They remembered the holy atmosphere that pervaded the city, the sanctity of the Beit HaMikdash and the Temple Service and the awareness of the Shechinah, Hashem's constant Presence, in their midst. In the diaspora, said the exiles, how can we sing the songs that were inspired by prophecy, by daily miracles, by the divine revelation



in the Beit HaMikdash? How can we sing the songs of divine service, infused with the glory of the Torah, in a strange land? It's impossible to forget the spiritual wealth of Yerushalayim, of which we are currently deprived! Material prosperity cannot fill the spiritual void created by the Churban and exile.

In Orot Eretz Yisrael, Rav Kook zt"l teaches that the more one feels the spirit of impurity of the lands outside Israel, the greater the indication of his inner perception of the holiness of the Land of Israel; this inner sense will not leave us even while in the diaspora. In fact, the opposite is true - the strangeness, the sense of foreignness and alienation, that one feels in Chutz La'aretz strengthens one's spiritual desire for the Land of Israel and its holiness even more. When individuals who feel this spiritual connection join together to form a community, as did the Jews in Bavel surrounding Yechezkel, the hope for salvation is palpable and the process of redemption is hastened.

The community to whom Yechezkel prophesied established a paradigm for us, the exiles of the Second Temple. They created a paradigm of memory that refuses to be erased, engendering within us a sense of longing, of yearning for a Mikdash we were never privileged to see but that figures largely in our collective imagination. No matter where we are geographically, we feel a common sense of displacement and loss. The Jewish soul aches longingly for its home.

This longing is the point of the exile. In the Torah portion we read on Tisha B'Av, Moshe Rabbeinu informs us that when we sin and are exiled from the land, we will seek Hashem in the diaspora. When we do so sincerely and wholeheartedly, we will succeed in finding Him. Later in the sefer, in Parashat HaTeshuvah, Moshe Rabbeinu returns to that theme and teaches that once we return to Hashem, He will gather us from all the lands to which we have been dispersed and return us to our homeland, the homeland with which we have identified throughout centuries of galut. My daughter shared with me that when she first learned the section of Orot cited above, describing the longing of the Jewish soul for Tzion, she felt so validated that she practically shouted to her chavruta, "That's it, that's exactly how I felt before we made aliyah!" May we merit to be infused with the same passionate longing, prompting us to seek Hashem, and may we find validation in the ingathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Mikdash, speedily in our days. ■

