



The Place Where It All Began

The story of *Am Yisrael* throughout the Tanach is a story of a connection between a People and its Land. From the searching phase of our ancestor Avraham, through the promise to *Am Yisrael* and their longing in Egypt, the conquest of the Land by Yehoshua, the struggle of the Judges, the establishment of kings and the exiles of Assyria and Babylon. A long-suffering nation who always yearned for their Land.

“עַל הַר צִיּוֹן... שְׂוֹעֲלִים הִלְכוּ בוֹ” “Because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate; jackals prowl over it” (Eicha 5:18).

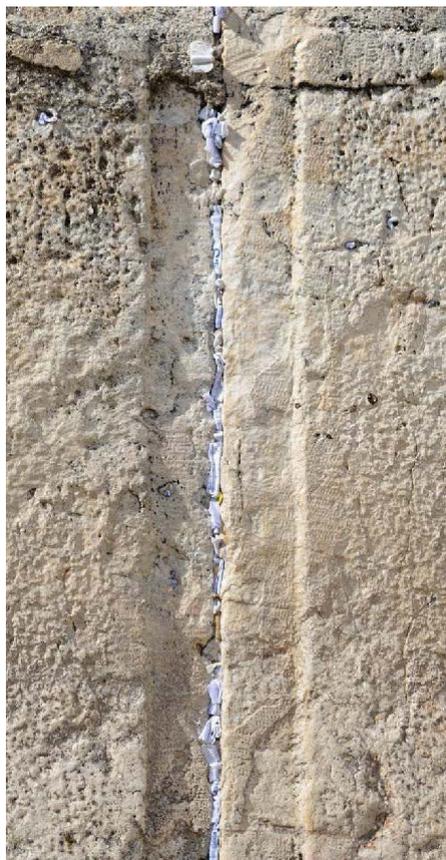
Judaism is the only religion which contains commandments dependent upon a place; namely, the Land of Israel. It's a testimony to our *emunah*, to our Torah. It is not just a private Torah, a personal manual of morality between man and his fellow or man and his Creator.

The Torah contains another layer, *bein adam laMakom* – between man and the place, the Land. It's a Torah which builds a nation, a nation which builds a Land, and a Land which builds an individual.

The *chut ha'meshulash*, the “threefold cord, not readily broken” spoken of in Kohelet, is like a rope woven from three threads. This strong rope is placed at the foundation of our people, and when one thread is untied, the whole rope may come loose.

One date is particularly prominent regarding the connection between *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*: Tisha B'Av, the date of the sin of the spies. The date upon which, some 400 years later, the first *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed, and some 900 years later, the second. 60 years after that, again on Tisha B'Av, the city of Beitar fell into the hands of the Romans and the Jews were exiled. 1,000 years later, on the same date, the Jews of England were expelled, and 200 years afterward the expulsion of Spanish Jewry was decreed.

And 500 years after that, the expulsion from Gush Katif was declared to take



place on the same date. Tisha B'Av is the day when we discover, time and again, the deep connection between our nation and *Eretz Yisrael*.

Tisha B'Av is a day we mourn a place – walls that fell, a house destroyed. It is no coincidence that *Am Yisrael*, who brought the belief in the metaphysical to the world, is bound in its destiny and belief to the Land.

Chazal understood the secret of this connection, and carved it into the national memory throughout the generations. Although we mourn a physical place, what was created as a result of our national mourning was brotherhood, a partnership of destiny. *Chazal* replaced the “thread” of *Eretz Yisrael* with longing for Israel. The *mitzvot hateluyot baAretz*, the commandments dependent on the

Land, were replaced with prayer, fasting and *minhagim*, for example, that every Jew in the world turns his or her heart in the direction of Yerushalayim three times a day, and prays *vetechezna eineinu*, may our eyes behold G-d's return to Tzion.

On the face of it, it seems Tisha B'Av is a day we mourn the destruction of a place. A day we remember the terrible tragedies which befell our nation, and weep once more. But Judaism doesn't believe in sadness as a way of life.

It is more similar to Yom HaZikaron, which is not a day of bereavement but of gravitas. It is a day we gather together around our deepest values and bow our heads at the heavy price these values demand of us. Wherever we are in the world, it is a day we unite and make room for loss.

One of G-d's many names is *HaMakom*. The Place. *Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu, al da'at HaMakom*, and *bein adam laMakom*. It's not just an abstract idea.

Tisha B'Av is the date when *Am Yisrael*, wherever they are in the world, stops for one day and remembers the Root, the Source, the Place from where it all began. We are one nation, we received one Torah and we have one Land.

הָשִׁיבֵנו ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה, “Return us, O L-rd, to Yourself, and let us come back; renew our days as of old!” (Eicha 5:21).

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