

# The Rav on Kinot: Tziyon Halo Tish'ali

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The kinot conclude with a group of ten piyutim known as the Tziyon (Zion) kinot. All of them (with one exception) begin with the word Tziyon and have a characteristic literary style and form. They are all concerned with one topic, the fact that Israel was selected as the Chosen Land. The first of the Tziyon kinot is “צִיּוֹן הָלֹא תִשָּׁאֲלֵי” by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, and the others are by paytanim who imitated his style and form, with varying degrees of success. The kina composed by the Maharam of Rothenburg, “שָׂאֲלֵי שְׂרוּפָה בְּאֵשׁ” is also considered a part of the Tziyon kinot because of its style and form, although its subject is the burning of the Talmud and destruction of the Torah rather than the destruction of the land of Israel.

The meaning of the word Tziyon is somewhat unclear. As a literary matter, it may refer to any or all of the land of Israel, Jerusalem, the Beit HaMikdash, or the Holy of Holies. The precise definition of Tziyon is a signpost on a road, as in “Set up tziyunim (signposts)” (Jeremiah 31:20).

Tziyon, however, has another definition. It means a tall mountain or bold rock, and it has the connotation of something which is difficult to conquer. Initially, even before King David’s conquest of Jerusalem, Tziyon was the name of the region of the Jebusites. It had this name because it was well-fortified, strategically located and difficult to conquer. When the prophets and the author of Psalms referred to Tziyon and Jerusalem, their intent was to emphasize to the enemies of the Jews all over the world that Zion is difficult to overcome. In addition, Tziyon in the prophetic books began to take on the connotation of some spiritual, transcendental beauty or something out of the ordinary. The prophets speak about Tziyon not only in terms of a mighty city but also in terms of uniqueness.

This kina, “צִיּוֹן הָלֹא תִשָּׁאֲלֵי,” reflects the principle in Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s important philosophical work, the Kuzari, that the land of Israel is unique not only in a metaphysical sense, but in a natural sense, as well. The air is clearer and charged with ruah hakodesh, the divine spirit. Nature is more beautiful and magnificent in Tziyon than elsewhere. The rain, the soil, the stones, are all physically different in the land of Israel. When the Torah describes the land of Israel as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deuteronomy 26:9), the intent is that there is a unique quality in the nature of the land itself.

Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi was in love with the land of Israel. While there were many pilgrims who traveled to Israel, none expressed their love for Israel as passionately as he. Maimonides, for example, mentions

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the land of Israel only once in his Guide for the Perplexed in a discussion of Israel as the promised land (II:29). Rabbeinu Bahya's Duties of the Heart does not mention the land of Israel at all. Although Nahmanides was a lover of Zion, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi was perhaps the most "Zionist" of the Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. Nahmanides expressed his love for Israel in halakhic terms which are familiar to us. Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, however, expressed his passion somewhat differently.

Rabbi Yehuda lived a comfortable existence in Muslim Spain, where he was well-connected with the caliphate government and was held in high regard. He yearned, however, to go to the land of Israel, which in that era was an arduous and dangerous undertaking. Legend has it (first recorded in Rabbi Gedalia ibn Yahya's Shalshet HaKabbala [1586, Venice edition], page 92) that when Rabbi Yehuda finally arrived in the land of Israel, he prostrated himself on the ground, and at that moment a Bedouin horseman rode past and killed him.

The Tziyon kinot highlight an important aspect of Tisha B'Av. There are two elements to the observance of Tisha B'Av and the recitation of the kinot. One is to remember Tziyon in its state of destruction. The second is to remember Tziyon in its magnificence prior to the destruction. Up to this point, the book of Lamentations and the kinot have focused on the first element, on the bloodshed and destruction and the exile and persecution of the Ĥurban. With this kina, the focus shifts to remembering Jerusalem before the Ĥurban. The verse in Lamentations states, "Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and her anguish all her treasures that she had from the days of old" (1:7). The kinot have already remembered the affliction and anguish of the Ĥurban, and now they turn to the beautiful life of Jerusalem before the destruction. The Tziyon kinot all describe in glorious terms the beauty and holiness of Jerusalem and the wisdom of her people. This second element is necessary because in order to appreciate the magnitude of the Ĥurban and what was lost, we have to be familiar with the beauty of the Beit HaMikdash and Jerusalem before the disaster occurred.

This second element of the kinot is reflected in halakha as well. Rabbi Yoĥanan ben Zakkai instituted that "the lulav should be taken in the provinces all seven days as a remembrance of the Mikdash" (Sukka 41a). Rabbi Yoĥanan ben Zakkai's goal was to cultivate the emotion of joy and happiness, and to remember the beauty of the Beit HaMikdash. This demonstrates that certain types of zikhron haMikdash, remembrance of the Temple, arouse simĥa and not avelut, joy and not mourning. Rabbi Yoĥanan ben Zakkai's goal was to perpetuate an experience zekher leMikdash, not zekher leĤurban.

צִיּוֹן, הֲלֹא תִשְׁאַלֵי לְשִׁלּוּם אֲסִירֶיךָ. *Zion, surely you will inquire after the well-being of your imprisoned ones.* The paytan asks whether Zion is concerned with the well-being of her captives. It is noteworthy that they are described as the captives of Zion, not as the captives of the Romans or Babylonians. Indeed, the Jewish people are prisoners of the land. They love the land, are loyal to the land, and never want to be separated from the land. They are asirayikh, your captives. You, the land, have imprisoned them. No matter how difficult it will be for them, they will always try to return to you.

Perhaps with a touch of irony, the paytan directs his question to the land: "Are you interested in the welfare of your captives? They are concerned with you. Are you concerned with them?"

דֵּן רִשִׁי שְׁלוֹמְךָ. *Those who seek your well-being.* The Jews constantly inquire about Zion and send greetings to Zion at every opportunity.

מִמֶּנּוּ וּמִצָּפוֹן וּמִמְּוֶזְרָח וּמִמְּצָפוֹן וּמִמְּזָרְחַת. *From west, east, north, and south.* The paytan has greetings for Zion from all directions.

שְׁלוֹם רְחוֹק וְקָרוֹב *The well-being of the distant and the close.* One way of interpreting this phrase is that Zion should be concerned with the well-being of those near and far. From another perspective, this phrase can be viewed as the paytan declaring that there are greetings to Zion from those who are very distant, and also from those who are very close, emotionally, to Zion.

שְׂאֵי מְכַל עֲבָרֶיךָ *Promote... from every direction.* Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi is saying, in effect, that the Jewish people will never desert Zion. Even though they are asurim, exiles taken away against their will, they are still dorshei shlomekh, they still send Zion greetings day after day. No matter how dispersed Jews are around the globe, they are committed to finding their way back to Zion. The paytan is emphasizing the eternal bond between the Jewish people and Zion. He describes the beautiful relationship between the people and the land. The land inquires about the people and sends regards to them, and the people send their regards to the land. It is comparable to the bond between a mother and her child who, because of grave circumstances, are separated from each other. They have not seen each other for a very long time, but they continue to cry for, and convey their fervent feelings to each other.

The Jewish people have remained loyal to Zion for nineteen hundred years and have not betrayed or deserted her. One could ask whether Zion, for her part, has been loyal to the Jewish people. The answer provided by the Midrash is clearly affirmative. On the verse, “And I will make the land desolate, and your enemies that dwell in it will be astonished” (Leviticus 26:32), the Midrash (Sifra Behukkotai 2:65) says, “This is a noble trait of the land of Israel, that it grants from its fruits only to its children.” The Midrash understands the second half of the verse, “and your enemies that dwell in it will be astonished (veshamemu),” to mean that the enemies who exile the Jews and take their place in the land of Israel will reside in a desolate land (shemama). They will starve because the land will not give of itself to them. In effect, it was a promise that the land would keep all of its bounty for the Jewish people.

Our enemies drove us out of Jerusalem and destroyed the site of the Beit HaMikdash, but no other nation succeeded in colonizing the land. The land was occupied by many powers: Rome, Byzantium, the Muslims, the Crusaders, and then the Muslims again. But no one developed the land of Israel agriculturally, industrially or scientifically. Shortly before World War I, Germany established settlements in Israel, and some were successful, but England defeated Germany and assumed dominion of the land of Israel, and the German effort failed. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, entire continents were colonized and settled by the British, yet these same British could not colonize the land of Israel. Contrast this to the Jewish yishuv! See what the Jews have accomplished in Israel in such a short period of time! There is a sense of loyalty on the part of the land; she will never betray her people; she will never offer anything of herself to strangers or conquerors. The fact that “Mount Zion ... is desolate” is proof that the sanctity with which the land was endowed by Joshua and Ezra is still in effect; it was sanctified on a temporary basis, and it was sanctified eternally for the future.

Thus, Zion has kept faith with Israel, as Israel has kept faith with Zion.

וְשְׁלוֹם אֲסִיר תְּאַוָּה *As well as the well-being of those bound by longing.* There is a different version of the text which reads “asir tikva, bound by hope,” which I believe is the correct version. “Ta’ava” means that the person has a desire to return to the land. “Asir tikva,” however, means that one can never surrender. No

matter how bleak the situation and no matter how long the exile, one cannot give up hope. The prisoner of hope has faith that Zion will be rebuilt and that God will finally redeem Israel.

Implicit in this phrase is the idea that Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi himself is the *asir tikva* who is inquiring after the welfare of the land of Israel. The intent is that the paytan is speaking about himself and is saying to Zion, “Accept my own greetings. I am sending you greetings from a prisoner of hope, and my hope is that I will return to you.”

נוֹתֵן דְּמַעְיוֹ כְּטַל הֶרְמוֹן *Shedding tears like the dew on Mount Hermon*. The image of the dew of Mount Hermon is an allusion to the verse: “Like the dew of Hermon, that comes down upon the mountains of Zion” (Psalms 133:3). Just as the dew of Hermon reaches Zion, the paytan is shedding tears on the hills of Zion.

לִבִּי לְבֵית אֵל *My heart is to Bethel*. On one specific level, this phrase expresses the emotion that the paytan’s heart’s desire is the House of God, the place where God meets man. The paytan yearns for the Beit HaMikdash.

On a more general and conceptual level, this phrase is the commencement of the kina’s explanation of why the land of Israel is unique and why the paytan is so attached to it. The ideas presented in this kina are a quintessence of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s philosophy which is developed in greater detail in the Kuzari. One of those ideas is that prophecy in the land of Israel is a natural condition (Kuzari II:12–14). In Israel, prophecy is a stream that descends from heaven in the same manner that rain and dew descend. The quality of the atmosphere in the land of Israel is imbued with prophecy and *ruah hakodesh*, the holy spirit. In fact, in Israel, prophecy can be received by anyone who desires it. The only reason that no prophets exist today is because there is no worthy recipient. The people are thirsty and want the rain, but they do not have the vessel to draw water from the stream, and therefore remain thirsty. But when the worthy person will come, he will have the proper vessels and will fill them immediately with *ruah hakodesh*.

וּלְפָנֵי אֵל מְאֹד יִהְיֶה *And yearns excessively for Peniel*. This is an allusion to the verse, “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: ‘for I have seen God face to face, and my life has been saved’” (Genesis 32:31). Again the paytan refers to a meeting place between God and man.

There is another version of this text which reads, “וּלְפָנֵי אֵל מְאֹד יִהְיֶה, *and before God, I am in great longing*.” This version of the text conveys that Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s longing for Zion is not for the land but for the Shekhina, the Divine Presence which dwells in the land. He explains in the Kuzari (II:22–24) that the Shekhina has never departed from the land of Israel and is still present. This entire kina is devoted to the motif that the Shekhina is still present in the land. The paytan is longing for God and knows he will find Him in the land of Israel.

וּלְמַחְנַיִם *And for Maḥanayim*. This is an allusion to the place which Jacob named Maḥanayim because that is where he met the angels of God (Genesis 32:3).

Maḥanayim should be understood as the place where God, either Himself or through His angels, has a rendezvous with man. In fact, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s view is that the entire land of Israel should be referred to as Maḥanayim. According to Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, God’s angels are always present in the

land of Israel. The only reason that we do not meet them is because, apparently, we do not want to meet them. Had we wanted to, we would have met them.

לְךָ שָׁם הַשְׁכִּינָה שְׁכֵנָה לְךָ *There the Divine Presence resides close by.* Here the paytan declares explicitly what he has been hinting at, that in the land of Israel, the Shekhina is one's neighbor. The Shekhina resides there even now.<sup>1</sup>

וַתִּפְתַּח לְמוֹל שַׁעְרֵי שָׁמַיִם וְשַׁעְרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *And there your Creator opened up the gates of heaven opposite your gates.* From one perspective, the meaning of this phrase is that the gates of heaven are open to Zion. Any influence which emerges from the gates of heaven, descends to Zion. This is similar to the concept that there are special windows in heaven that are open only to the land of Israel, as reflected in the verse, “the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon [the land], from the beginning of the year to the end of the year” (Deuteronomy 11:12).

From another perspective, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's intent with this phrase is to reflect the halakhic aspect of prayer (Berakhot 3a; I Kings 8:48), that one who prays must pray via the land of Israel; that the gates of prayer are open only in Israel. This refers to the aggada (Midrash Tehillim 91:7; Rashi on Genesis 28:17) that prayers do not rise directly to the heavens from where one prays. Rather, they travel first to the Temple Mount and rise from there to heaven. The שַׁעְרֵי שָׁמַיִם, the gates of Heaven, are open only opposite שַׁעְרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, the gates of the Beit HaMikdash.

Alternatively, this phrase reflects Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's philosophy and his understanding of the land of Israel. For him, hashra'at Shekhina is part of the climate of the land of Israel. Just as it is natural to arise in the morning and see the sun shining or hear the rain falling, so, too, it is natural in the land of Israel to arise in the morning and find the Shekhina. Thus, in Israel, when one opens the astronomical gates and sees the sun, one also automatically opens the metaphysical gates of heaven, the sha'arei Shekhina through which God speaks to the Jew if he is willing to respond and enter into a dialogue with Him.

No one emphasizes this quality of the land of Israel in quite the same manner as Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi. For him, giluy Shekhina is not just a transcendental event. The Shekhina is part of the person's environment, just as the sunlight is part of a person's environment. For Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, the fact that God spoke with a prophet at a particular location has the effect that that place absorbs holiness or achieves a certain metaphysical quality. These locations are still endowed with this potential of hashra'at Shekhina for anyone who finds them. This is a quality that only the land of Israel possesses. In this regard, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi is reminiscent of the students of the Ba'al Shem Tov.

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<sup>1</sup> Depending upon how broadly one interprets this phrase of the kina, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's statement may be in conflict with the position of Maimonides. As previously noted, Maimonides' view (Mishneh Torah, Hil. Beit HaBehira 6:16–17) is that the initial sanctification of the land of Israel by Joshua was annulled by Nebuchadnezzar's conquest. The reason is that the initial sanctification was based on conquest, which was terminated by Nebuchadnezzar's superior forces. But the sanctification which was bestowed upon the Temple by King Solomon was not terminated, and continues to exist because the status of kedushat haMikdash, the sanctity of the Temple, is completely independent of conquest. Rather, it stems from the presence of the Shekhina, and the Shekhina is never annulled. If Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's statement that “the Shekhina is your neighbor” refers to the Beit HaMikdash as being close to the Shekhina, his statement is consistent with Maimonides' view. If, however, his intent is that all of the land of Israel is endowed with the holiness of the Shekhina, then there is an element of contradiction between his position and that of Maimonides.

רַךְ *And the glory of God alone was your light.* The idea that the Shekhina radiates light is found in the verses, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has shone upon you. Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick clouds the nations; but upon you the Lord will shine, and His glory will be seen upon you” (Isaiah 60:1–2).

וְאִין שְׁמֵשׁ וְסִהַר וְכּוֹכְבִים מְאִירֵיךְ *And not the sun, the moon, or starlight.* One does not need the sun, the moon or the stars, nor the sha’arei shahak. All that one needs are the gates of the Shekhina, which, according to Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, are available every morning.

אֶבְחַר לְנַפְשִׁי לְהִשְׁתַּפֵּךְ, בְּמִקְוֹם אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים שִׁפּוּכָהּ, עַל בְּתֵירֵיךְ *I choose to pour out my soul at that place where God’s spirit is poured upon your chosen ones.* Prayer in the land of Israel is different from prayer in any other location. The paytan wants his soul to extend to those places that God chose for the purpose of saturating His chosen ones with the divine spirit, and those places are only in the land of Israel.

This is again an expression of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s philosophy that hashra’at Shekhina and prophecy in Israel are similar to natural phenomena. They are shefukha, they simply pour forth like the rain. Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi emphasizes the principle that the Shekhina resides only in the land of Israel (Kuzari II:14), and there is no prophecy outside Israel.<sup>2</sup>

אַתָּה בֵּית מְלוֹכָהּ, וְאַתָּה כְּסֵא יְהוָה *You are the royal palace and God’s throne.* This is an allusion to the dictum of our sages that God’s throne of glory and the celestial Beit HaMikdash correspond to the Beit HaMikdash located on earth.

A more literal interpretation for the concept that Zion is considered to be the “royal palace and God’s throne” is based on verses in the High Holy Day Amida: “And then You, Lord, will reign over all Your works, on Mount Zion, resting place of Your glory, and in Jerusalem, Your holy city, as it is written in Your sacred writings: The Lord shall reign forever. He is your God, O Zion, from generation to generation. Halleluya!”

מִי יִתְנַבֵּן מִשׁוּטֵט, בְּמִקְוֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִגְלוּ אֵלָּהִים לְחֹזְוֵיךְ וְצִירֵיךְ *Would that I could wander among the places where God was revealed to your seers and envoys.* Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi yearned for the experience of exploring the places in the land of Israel where a prophet spoke with God. As noted above, he considered every location where God revealed Himself to a prophet to be endowed with holiness. This is a novel concept from a halakhic point of view.

מִי יַעֲשֶׂה לִּי כַּנְפִים *Who can make wings for me.* Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi clearly wrote this kina while still in Spain before he traveled to Israel.

אָנִיד לְבִתְרֵי לְבָבִי בֵּין בְּתֵירֵיךְ *And move my ruptured heart to your ruptured hills.* The paytan’s heart is already in Israel, as he wrote in one of his most well-known poems, “My heart is in the east, and I am in the most distant west.” Spiritually, he is already in Israel. If he travels, he will be going to find his heart.

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<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that Maimonides’ approach is quite different from that of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi. For Maimonides, if one wants to achieve the stage of experiencing hashra’at Shekhina, one must do considerably more than open a window. Maimonides’ view is that attaining such a stage depends upon intellectual achievement and prowess (Mishneh Torah, Hil. Yesodei HaTorah 7:1).

With the phrase *bitrei levavi*, the paytan expresses the link between the ruptured “pieces” of his heart and that of the “pieces” of the *Beit bein HaBetarim*, the “Covenant between the Pieces.” In effect, he means that his heart was united with the heart of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, into one common heart, and he is striving to reach the place which actually witnessed the Covenant. “One heart” means that the Jew’s desire is to be in the land of Israel, and that the Jewish people cannot separate themselves from the land.

*אָפּוּל לְאַפֵּי עָלַי אֶרְצֶךָ* *I will fall to my face upon your land.* If God will grant his request and provide him with wings, then the very moment he arrives, he will remember the heart which he and God jointly consecrated, and he will go directly to the place where so many years ago, Abraham and God joined in the covenant.

*וְאַרְצָה אֶבְנֶיךָ מְאֹד* *And treasure your stones.* Even the stones of the land of Israel are endowed with desirable qualities. There is a reference in the Gemara that it was Rabbi Abba’s custom to kiss the stones of Acre (*Yalkut Shimoni II:855, s.v. ki ratzu*).

As soon as the paytan arrives in the land of Israel, he will embrace the rocks. His intent is that his love of Israel will be so deep and beautiful that the stones themselves will become living beings which will help restore the old love between him and God.

*וְאַחֲזוּנָה אֶת עַפְרָיִךְ* *And cherish your soil.* The progression of these few lines of the kina is noteworthy. The paytan started with the heart, then moved on to stones, and now lauds the earth. He will cherish not only the stones of Israel, but even the earth itself. He declares his love for the earth because the patriarchs are buried in the earth of the land of Israel.

*וְאַשְׁתּוּמֵם בְּהֶבְרוֹן* *And be transfixed in Hebron.* He will be completely confused by the magnetic attraction he feels for Hebron.

The paytan here introduces the principle that the sanctity of the land of Israel arises also from the fact that the graves of our ancestors are there. This principle is enunciated in the book of Nehemiah. The land of Israel and Jerusalem were desolate, and Nehemiah came before the king of Persia to request permission to go to Jerusalem. When the king asked him why he appeared dejected, Nehemiah responded, “Why should my countenance not be sad, when the city, the place of my forefathers’ graves, lies in ruins?” (*Nehemiah 2:3*).

*הַר הָעֵבְרִים וְהַר הָהָר* *Mount Abarim and Mount Hor.* These two mountains are the final resting places of Moses and Aaron. The paytan cherishes not only the gravesite of Hebron, but all of the graves found in Israel.

*חַיֵּי נְשָׁמוֹת אֲוִיר אֶרְצֶךָ* *Your souls come alive [from] the air of your land.* The air of your land, Israel, is not only ordinary air which benefits the body, but rather is of a spiritual nature which benefits the soul.

The idea that the air in the land of Israel sustains the soul is developed by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in great detail in the *Kuzari*. Just as the body requires oxygen, the soul, as well, requires a delicate and fine spiritual air. In the land of Israel, when one breathes, one inhales not only physical oxygen, but also a substance which is spiritually potent and invigorating; the very air is different from the air outside of Israel. The atmosphere in Israel is infused with *ruah hakodesh*, a quality which is not present elsewhere. This concept is consistent with Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s philosophy noted above, that *giluy Shekhina* is a

continuous process in Israel. Just as one who walks in the rain will inevitably get wet, and one who walks in the sunshine will inevitably feel warm, so, too, one who lives in the land of Israel will inevitably feel and absorb the ruah hakodesh and be saturated with the glory of God. All one needs to do is open oneself to the abundant glory that is like the dew that descends from heaven.

וּמִמָּר דְרוֹר אֲבָקַת עֲפָרָךְ *And from the flowing myrrh of the dust of your soil.* Myrrh was a costly spice used in Spain, imported from India. The earth of Israel is sweeter and more delightful than the finest spices of the Orient. Another interpretation is that the earth of Israel is redolent with the beautiful fragrance of spices which arouses feelings of longing for God.

וּנְפֶת צוּף נְהַרֶיךָ *And the dripping honey of your rivers.* The rivers of Israel taste different from the rivers of any other land, another example of God's special providence over the land of Israel.

יֵנַעַם לְנַפְשִׁי, הֲלֹךְ עָרֵם וְיָחַר, עָלֵי חֲרֻבוֹת שְׂמֵמָה *It would be pleasant for me to walk naked and barefoot upon the desolate ruins.* He would far prefer to walk barefoot in the land of Israel near the desolate graves and ruins, than to walk in Spain in the finest shoes.

אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ דְבַרֶיךָ *That were once your shrines.* These lines are the quintessential expression of the idea that to be present in the land of Israel is to be overladen with pervasive memories of the past. But for Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, they are not memories, they are a reality. The cumulative message of these images is, once again, the essence of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's philosophy that it is impossible to be in Israel and not be permeated with ruah hakodesh.

כִּי יִסְחָבוּ הַכְּלָבִים אֶת כְּפִירֶיךָ *Dogs dragging your young lions.* It is not natural for the lowly dog to conquer the regal lion and drag away its remains. Similarly, the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash was an unnatural phenomenon.

כַּעֲוֹד אֲרָאָה בְּפִי עוֹרָבִים פְּגָרֵי נְשָׂרֶיךָ *When I still see, in the mouths of ravens, the corpses of your eaglets.* Similar in concept to the previous phrase, it is unnatural for the raven to kill the eagle.

וּבְךָ נִקְשְׁרוּ נַפְשׁוֹת חֲבֵרֶיךָ *And bound to you were the souls of your comrades.* The paytan is conveying regards to Zion on behalf of its friends. If one tells a person that someone has inquired after him, that makes the person feel better. So too, Zion should feel gratified. There is no separation between the people and Zion. All the people are bound up with Zion and are totally devoted to her. They continually ask after Zion and inquire as to her welfare.

הֵם הַשִּׂמְחִים לְשִׁלְוֹתֶךָ, וְהַכּוֹאֲבִים עַל שׂוּמְמוֹתֶיךָ *Those are the ones who rejoice in your tranquility, and who are anguished by your ruin.* Zion should not think that she has lost all her friends. "On the contrary," the paytan tells Zion, "you have good friends. They enthusiastically rejoice when you feel better, and when you are lonely and sick, they suffer with you." Every Jew is concerned with the destiny of Israel, and every Jew shares the pain of a crisis in Israel.

וּבוֹכִים עַל שְׂבָרֶיךָ *And who weep for your tragedy.* The paytan continues addressing Zion: "When you feel hurt, the people cry out with you. In spite of your weakness and your sickness, you are still our leader and we need your leadership."

From a psychological point of view, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi is saying to Zion precisely what one should say to a friend who is ill or who is in difficult circumstances, in order to make him feel better. "It is lonely



without you. When are you coming back? Never mind that I am healthy and you are ill, that I am younger and you are older. No matter how prosperous we may be, we cannot go on without you. Get up!”

ומִשְׁתַּחֲוִים אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ אֵלַי נִכְחַ שְׁעָרֶיךָ *And bow, each one of them from his place, toward your gates.* This phrase reflects the halakhic dictum that when praying, one should face in the direction of Jerusalem (Berakhot 30a).

Why should one face Jerusalem when praying? Because it demonstrates that one who prays has not forgotten Jerusalem. In effect, it is as though Zion is an elderly mother with many children dispersed in distant locations, and the paytan is telling her, “Remember one thing. No matter how far from you they may be, they are still your children.”

שִׁנְעָר וּפְתָרוֹס הַיַּעֲרֹכוֹךְ בְּגִדְלָם, וְאִם הֶבְלָם יִדְמוּ לְתַמְיָךְ וְאוֹרֶיךָ *Shinar and Pathros; can their greatness compare to yours? Can the two greatest civilizations of antiquity, Mesopotamia and Egypt, compare to Zion?*

אֵל מִי יִדְמוּ מִשִּׁיחֶיךָ, וְאֵל מִי נְבִיאֶיךָ *To whom can they compare your anointed one? And to whom, your prophets?* In this phrase, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi has in mind Christianity and Islam and declares that they cannot compare with our saintly sages and great leaders.

יִשָּׁנָה וַיִּחַלֶּף כָּלֵל, כָּל־מַמְלָכוֹת הָאֱלִיל *They will fade and totally vanish, these pagan kingdoms.* Zion is identified with faith in God, and all the enemies of Israel with idolatry.