

# Longing to Israel and immigration to Israel throughout the generations

Return to the land of Israel is a recurring theme in Jewish prayers recited every day, and holiday services on Passover and Yom Kippur traditionally conclude with the words "Next year in Jerusalem" – "Leshana habaaa beyerushalim habnuya"

## 1. Pre-Zionist Aliyah

Biblical

The Tanach relates that the patriarch Abraham came to the Land of Canaan with his family and followers in approximately 1800 BC. His grandson Jacob went down to Egypt with his family, and after several centuries there, the Israelites went back to Canaan under Moses and Joshua, entering it in about 1300 BC.

A few decades after the fall of the Kingdom of Judah and the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people, approximately 50,000 Jews returned to Zion following the Cyrus Declaration from 538 BC. The Jewish priestly scribe Ezra led the Jewish exiles living in Babylon to their home city of Jerusalem in 459 BC.

### **Promises made to Avraham Avinu the first immigrant about Eretz Israel.**

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| <p><b>א</b> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ<br/>וּמְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר<br/>אֲרָאָה.</p>   | <p><b>1</b> <u>Now the LORD said unto Abram: 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee.</u></p>   |
| <p><b>ב</b> וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ, לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, וְאֶבְרַכְךָ, וְאֶגְדַּלְךָ שְׁמִי;<br/>וְהָיִיתָ, בְּרָכָה.</p>  | <p><b>2</b> And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing.</p>  |
| <p><b>ג</b> וְאֶבְרַכְהָ, מִבְּרַכְיָךָ, וּמִקְלָלְךָ, אָאָר; וְנִבְרַכְוּ<br/>בְּךָ, כָּל-מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה.</p>  | <p><b>3</b> And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'</p>  |
| <p><b>ד</b> וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם, כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה, וַיֵּלֶךְ<br/>אִתּוֹ, לוֹט; וְאַבְרָם, בֶּן-חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים<br/>שָׁנָה, בָּצֵאתוֹ, מִחָרָן.</p>   | <p><b>4</b> <u>So Abram went, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him; and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.</u></p>  |
| <p><b>ה</b> וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-לוֹט בְּנֵ-<br/>אָחִיו, וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ, וְאֶת-הַנְּפֹשׁוֹת,<br/>אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן; וַיֵּצְאוּ, לְלֶקֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן,<br/>וַיָּבֹאוּ, אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן.</p> | <p><b>5</b> And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.</p> |
| <p><b>ו</b> וַיַּעֲבֵר אַבְרָם, בְּאֶרֶץ, עַד מְקוֹם שֵׁכֶם, עַד<br/>אֵלּוֹ מוֹרְהָ; וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי, אָז בְּאֶרֶץ.</p>   | <p><b>6</b> And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem, unto the terebinth of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.</p>  |
| <p><b>ז</b> וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה, אֶל-אַבְרָם, וַיֹּאמֶר, לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן<br/>אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת; וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ, לַיהוָה<br/>הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו.</p>  | <p><b>7</b> <u>And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said: 'Unto thy seed will I give this land'; and he built there an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.</u></p>  |

ח וַיֵּצֵא מִשָּׁם הַהָרָה, מִקְדָּם לְבַיַת-אֵל--וַיֵּט אֶת־הָאֵלָהּ; בַּיַּת-אֵל מִיָּמִין, וְהָעֵי מִקְדָּם, וַיִּבֶן-שָׂם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה, וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה. 8 And he removed from thence unto the mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

ט וַיֵּסַע אַבְרָם, הַלּוֹךְ וְנֹסֵעַ הַנֶּגְבָה. {P} 9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South. {P}

The Parasha begins with G-d instructing Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham) to leave his father's house and to go to the Land of Israel, making him the first Oleh Chadash (new immigrant) in Jewish history. The Torah states, And G-d said to Abram: Go for yourself (Lech-Lecha) in Heb.; literally, 'Go to yourself'] from your land, from your relatives and from your father's house to the land that I will show you (Chap. 12, verse 1).

The first mitzvah in the Torah that was given to the first Jew in history. This is a sign of its great importance

After receiving G-d's command, Abram and Sarai, his wife, pack their belongings and head off to the Holy Land. Abram goes to Elon Moreh, near Shechem (Nablus), thereby becoming the first Jewish settler in history. G-d appears to him there and **promises that 'to your offspring will I give this land'** (Chap. 12, verse 7 ) Abram travels further south until he reaches Beit-El, where he pitches his tent and builds an altar to G-d.

## 1. על נהרות בבל- By The Rivers of Babylon-

After the first Temple was destroyed, the Jews of Judah were sent into exile, as was the policy of the conquering army in antiquity. In Babylon they composed the words of psalms 126 and 137, both of which bemoan the exile and pray for speedy redemption.

"When the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion We see it as in a dream Our mouths shall be filled with laughter."

"By the rivers of Babylon There we sat and wept as we remembered Zion."

Zion, is Jerusalem. Zion is mount Zion, the Biblical name for mount Moriah, the Temple mount. **The Jews in exile remember Jerusalem and yearn to return.** Yet, something deeper than this troubles them,

"There on the poplars we hung our lyres, for our captors asked us for songs, ...sing us one of the songs of Zion How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

The Jews in Babylon have not only lost their gusto for music. They are raising a deep theological question which may seem to us, after thousands of years of exile, somewhat naive. "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Is it possible to communicate with God from anywhere other than Jerusalem? Is God's presence felt anywhere else? Can the service of God be maintained from Babylon? Is there such a thing as diaspora Jewry?

**The association between God and Jerusalem was so strong that this separation was inconceivable.**

(By: Alick Isaacs)

## 2. עזרא The return to Zion at the time of Ezra

### הסופר ושיבת ציון-

At the end of the sixth century B.C.E., the kingdom of Judah was dismantled by the Babylonian empire. Jerusalem and the Temple (the *Beit Hamikdash*) were destroyed, and thousands of Judahites were exiled to Mesopotamia. **Those who were exiled, however, did not see this as a final stage in Israel's history. They were aware that Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be an exile, but there would also be a return** (chapter 32, especially vv. 26-44).

- 26 Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying:  
כֹּן וַיְהִי, דְבַר-יְהוָה, אֶל-יִרְמְיָהוּ, לֵאמֹר.
- 28 Therefore thus saith the LORD: Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it;  
כֹּח לָכֵן, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה: הֲנִי נָתַן אֶת-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת בְּיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים, וּבְיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶצְצַר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל--וְלָקְדָהּ.
- 29 and the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set this city on fire, and burn it, with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered unto Baal, and poured out drink-offerings unto other gods, to provoke Me.  
כֹּט וּבָאוּ הַכַּשְׂדִּים, הַנִּלְחָמִים עַל-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת, וְהָצִיתוּ אֶת-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת בָּאֵשׁ, וְשָׂרְפוּהָ; וְאֵת הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר קָטְרוּ עַל-גִּגְוֹתֵיהֶם לַבַּעַל, וְהִסְכוּ נְסֻכִים לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים--לְמַעַן, הִכְעִסֵנִי.
- 36 And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say: It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence:  
לו וְעַתָּה, לָכֵן כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: אֶל-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת--אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים נָתַנָּה בְּיַד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל, בַּחֶרֶב וּבָרָעַב וּבִדְבַר.
- 37 Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries, whither I have driven them in Mine anger, and in My fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them back unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely;  
לו הֲנִי מִקְבֹּצֵם מִכָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת, אֲשֶׁר הִדַּחְתִּים שָׁם בְּאַפִּי וּבְחַמְתִּי וּבְקֶצֶף גָּדוֹל; וְהִשְׁבֹּתִים אֶל-הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה, וְשָׁבְתִים לְבַטָּח.
- 38 and they shall be My people, and I will be their God;  
לח וְהָיוּ לִי, לְעָם; וְאֲנִי, אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים.
- 39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever; for the good of them, and of their children after them;  
לט וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב אֶחָד, וְדֶרֶךְ אֶחָד, לִירְאָה אוֹתִי, כָּל-הַיָּמִים--לְטוֹב לָהֶם, וּלְבְנֵיהֶם אַחֲרֵיהֶם.
- 40 and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.  
מ וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם, בְּרִית עוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-אָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם, לְהִטִּיבֵי אוֹתָם; וְאֵת-יִרְאָתִי אֶתֵּן בְּלִבְכֶם, לְבִלְתִּי סוּר מֵעָלַי.
- 41 Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land in truth with My whole heart and with My whole soul. {S}  
מא וְשִׂשְׁתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם, לְהִטִּיב אוֹתָם; וְנִטְעַתִּים בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיָּת, בְּאֵמֶת--בְּכָל-לִבִּי, וּבְכָל-נַפְשִׁי. {ס}
- 42 For thus saith the LORD: Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them.  
מב כִּי-כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה, כַּאֲשֶׁר הִבְאֵתִי אֶל-הָעָם הַזֶּה, אֵת כָּל-הָרָעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת--כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מְבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם, אֵת-כָּל-הַטּוֹבָה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי, מְבַרֵּךְ עֲלֵיהֶם.

The opportunity for that return came about in 538 B.C.E. The Babylonian empire fell, and the Persian Empire gained control of Mesopotamia and most of the Middle East. One of the first rulers of the empire, Cyrus, sought to show tolerance to all of the communities in Mesopotamia. Cyrus issued a famous edict, narrated at the very beginning of the book of Ezra, allowing Jews who wished to return to "Jerusalem that is in Judah" and build a "House for the God of Heaven" to do so.

Only few participate in the return to Zion. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemia, they begin rebuilding the destroyed city of Jerusalem and ultimately rebuild the Temple.

There are many similarities between the return to Zion at the time of Ezra and today's return to Zion. Both were initiated by the Gentiles (Cyrus and the Balfour Declaration); both were carried out - to a large extent - by irreligious Jews

### 3. Longing to Israel - Liby bamizrach- Rabi Yehuda Halevi.

Little is known of his life and personal history, for he left no actual record of his life. He was born in Toledo about 1080 (1080)

**All through Rabbi Judah Halevi's poetry one feels the strong current of his great love for the Land of Israel.** Witnessing the suffering of his fellow Jews, his heart was heavy with sorrow and grief. If only the Jews would return to G-d and win His favor that He might return them to their homeland to dwell therein in peace and tranquility! **Many of his most beautiful- poems are expressions of his great love, and longing for the Holy Land. As the years went by, his desire to go to the Land of Israel grew, and finally Rabbi Judah decided to undertake the long journey which was difficult and full of peril.** Although many of his friends tried to dissuade him, it was of no avail.

R Judah took his rod and set off on his travels, the goal was his beloved Zion. He won the friendship and admiration of everyone he met. Everywhere he was welcomed by great scholars and distinguished statesmen. **But each moment he spent gaining new strength for his journey, made him impatient and eager to proceed on his way.** Finally he arrived in Cairo. Only one more step and he would be in the land of his dreams. All his life he had waited for this moment. There, where the spirit of G-d rested, he would spend the rest of his days, studying His law, praising His name. Though he enjoyed his stay in Egypt, he could scarcely await the moment of his departure.

**The Holy Land at last! There it lay before his own eyes. The gates of Jerusalem rose before him... Legend has it that seeing the desolation of his beloved land, Rabbi Judah Halevi was overcome with emotion and love. He walked barefoot, singing his Ode to Zion.** An Arab horseman, jealous of Rabbi Judah's love, which he knew he could never emulate, rode him down. And so, Rabbi Judah died, on the beloved soil of the land of our Patriarchs and Prophets, singing her praises with his last breath.

Rabbi Judah Halevi's poetry is timeless-still as beautiful and fresh today as it was hundreds of years ago when it was written. **Although he wrote of many things, his love for G-d, the Torah and the Land of Israel far outweighed his other interests.** His true piety was evident in everything he wrote. Many of his poems, written for the holidays and fasts, were included in the Mahzorim. His Odes to Zion, or Zionide, a series of moving dirges bewailing the fate of Zion, each one beginning with the word "Zion," form the concluding dirges of the "Kinoth" which we say on Tisha b'Av. (By [Nissan Mindel](#))

**One of the most famous poems is "Libby bamizrah"- " My heart is in the East" , was speaking then of his yearning for the Holy Land**

### **My heart is in the East**

My heart is in the East, yet I am in the utmost West  
How can I taste the food I eat, could it bring me any rest?  
The vows and oaths I've sworn, can I heed them as I must  
When Zion's bound with Christian rope and I with Arab chains?  
It seems as easy in my eyes to leave the charms of Spain,  
As precious as my eyes would find the ruined Temple's dust.

## **4. עליית - The Aliyot to the land of Israel:**

The concept of Aliyah (return) to the Holy Land was first developed in Jewish history during the Babylonian exile. During the Jewish diaspora, **Aliyah was developed as a national aspiration for the Jewish people**, although it was not usually fulfilled until the development of the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century.

**Throughout all these years that the Jewish people were living in the Diaspora, only very few Jewish people, families or very few small groups immigrated to Israel because of yearnings and the holiness of the land. As national groups in Europe started to awaken, and the strengthening of Anti-Semitism, the resolve to find a solution to the existence of the Jewish people in their own country has grown strong, and that is when, with the support of the Zionist movements, the Jewish immigration to Eretz Israel began.**

Large-scale immigration to Israel began in 1882. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, more than 3 million Jews from over 90 countries have 'made Aliyah' and arrived in Israel

**Before the State of Israel was founded, the immigration to Israel was divided into a number of stages. There were the first immigration, second, third, fourth, fifth and the 'Haapala' – illegal immigration to Israel from Europe of the survivors of the holocaust. The immigrants in each one of these immigrations came from different countries such as: Russia, Yemen, Romania, Poland, Germany, Eastern Europe, Iraq, United States, etc. During these years, the new immigrants have built moshavot (farming communities of private farms), Kibbutzim and settlements – different ways of settling in Eretz Israel.**

#### **Illegal immigration to Israel (1934 – 1948):**

During this period the British Mandate made it illegal to immigrate to Eretz Israel, and it continued to be so until Israel became a state. The British Government restricted the purchase of lands and immigration of Jewish people to Israel (as per the White Book). Only a very limited number of immigration permits were allocated by the British Government which, of course, was not enough for the large number of Jewish people who wanted to come to Israel and were suffering in Europe. Immigration to Israel was initiated by the HeHalutz movement and the Palmach, and after the war, was organized by settlement institutions (Yeshuv) and the Zionist movement, and continued despite the restrictions. British soldiers were on the lookout at Israel's shores for illegal immigrants, and were in pursuit of immigrants' boats. During that period, more than one hundred thousand people arrived in Israel illegally.

When a boat, arriving at Israel's shores, was captured by British soldiers, the various people involved in helping the new comers would try to fight them; or the boat people would be returned to where they came from or they would be sent to camps in Cyprus. Many people got sick and died due to the harsh conditions on the boats at that time.

**Although conditions in Israel were very difficult, the immigration continued. Both citizens and the new immigrants lived under grueling conditions, but they did so out of idealism and a great belief that they are living towards a greater purpose, being part of the building of a Jewish State for the Jewish people.**

**Since the founding of the State of Israel, the Jewish Agency for Israel was mandated as the organization responsible for Aliyah in the diaspora**



[Nefesh B'Nefesh](#) group welcomes North American olim to Israel

## **Conclusion**

As we review more than a century of Aliyot , we note that Aliyah has been and continues to be a phenomenon among the Jewish people, a factor which has no parallel in the history of modern migrations.

**Waves of immigration continued to come from Ethiopia, the former USSR, France, United States, Canada, Morocco, etc.**

It was and remains the ultimate goal and essence of the Zionist character of the State of Israel; it has brought full circle the many distinctive and diverse communities which were formed, flourished or foundered in the Diaspora as a creative people together in its own land.

**Israel became a country that absorbed Jewish people returning after two thousand years of yearnings and longings.....**