

# Hak'hel הקהל

## Conceptual Conversations: On the Longing for Zion

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טבת תשס"ה January 2005

# Introduction of Hakhel

*At the end of every shmita period (the fallow year, which occurs every seven years), on the pilgrimage holiday of Sukkot, there is a mitzva to gather all the Jews in Israel and read aloud certain portions of the Torah. Together, these Torah portions represent the quintessential nature of Judaism. In times when there was a king, he was responsible for reading to the people, but in his absence, any leader of the people was obliged to do so. The underlying concept of Hakhel is the establishment of a fixed, cyclical time to re-engage with the true meaning of Judaism. In the same way, these units are designed to help North American Jewish adults re-engage with and explore the essential issues that underpin their relationship with Israel.*

Below are listed the six Hakhel discussion units that have been developed to date, each one intended to clarify critical issues of North American Jewish engagement with Israel.

1. **Conceptual conversation on: Why Israel?**

Is the existence of Israel a privilege or/and a necessity for the global Jewish community? Why does Israel exist and what are its reasons for existing today?

2. **Conceptual conversation on: The Longing for Zion.**

What is the place of "longing" in Jewish life, in a world in which a Jewish State exists? How do we define "longing"? This unit offers a cultural Jewish perspective on the collective and personal sense of Jewish longing.

3. **Conceptual conversation on: Myth and Reality.**

Are we interested in engaging with a "mythic Israel" or with the reality of Israel in 2005? Are we comfortable engaging with this reality? What role do myths play in our relationship with Israel?

4. **Conceptual conversation on: Engaging with Israel through Culture**

Achad Ha'Am conceived of Israel as a Jewish center that will generate a vibrant Hebrew culture. Do you agree with his vision? What is Israel's role in Achad Ha'Am's vision? Does contemporary Israeli and/or American Jewish literature express Achad Ha'Am's dream?

5. **Conceptual conversation on: Media's role in shaping our image of Israel**

What are the ramifications of constant exposure to media images of Israel on our own perceptions and attitudes? How dominant and powerful is the media in comparison to other sources of information about Israel?

6. **Conceptual conversation on: The nature of our engagements with Israel**

What are the ultimate (or desired) outcomes of our engagement with Israel? What do we perceive to be the most effective ways of actively engaging with Israel? What role, if any, do we play in Israeli society?



## Conceptual Conversations: The Longing for Zion

"One of the key mythical ideas related to Israel is the notion of 'longing.' Historically, the Jewish People longed to return to Zion, and wrote lovingly about it in a whole host of Jewish texts. But what does it mean today, to long for a State that actually exists? Longing is a critical idea in Judaism – without it, there may be room to seek our physical survival, but Judaism as a whole is condemned. It may be that reawakening the feelings of longing amongst Jews in Israel and the Diaspora is important because it will help people to envision Israel... On the Jewish notion of longing, it was counter-argued that this idea was not simply about Israel, but rather about the creation of a better world. The point of the Jewish People's existence is to do something, and longing for redemption is part of the driving force that encourages this."

(NACIE's Philosopher's retreat, New-York, September 2003)

The above is an excerpt from the "Philosopher's Retreat," an intensive meeting held by a small group of Jewish thinkers from Israel and the United States in the summer of 2003 to address conceptual issues relating to the meaning of Israel for North American Jews. This meeting made it clear to all concerned that the task of engaging Jews in a series of discussions about Israel and its role in North American Jewish life should be at the heart of NACIE's mission. A set of educational units (six to date) is being produced as a vehicle for implementing this mission. This particular unit was designed by NACIE, the North American Coalition for Israel Engagement, as part of its ongoing efforts to encourage American Jews to discuss, explore and conceptualize their relationship to Israel

What is the place of "longing" in Jewish life? What are the subject matters for which we long? What role does "longing for Zion" have in the world in which a Jewish State exists? And can we -- North American Jews -- long for a (collective) home away from (our personal) home? These questions and other will be the focus of this session.

B'hatzlacha,

Esti Moskovitz-Kalman, Director of Education-Israel, NACIE / Makōm



# The Activity

## Context

Jewish longing has been a central myth in Jewish text, prayers, creativity, and collective memory. Some would begin the narrative of Jewish longing with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the human desire to return there (blocked by the angels with the fiery swords). Others would begin with Abraham's departure from Ur, following the commandment of a higher force, to set out West, to the distant land "that I will show you". Then there is the story of the Exodus from Egypt and 40 years of wandering in the desert in search of the Land of Milk and Honey. Finally, after the first expulsion to Babylonia in 586 B.C.E., the Psalmist wrote the famous line: "On the rivers of Babylon, where we sat down, there we wept when we remembered Zion."

Many great civilizations share this sense of human longing and give it various religious and poetic expressions. Longing is a powerful human drive – it drives people to change the world, to make it a better place. According to Maslow, humans long to climb the next rung in their own evolution. A suffocating man will long for air, a hungry man will long for food, a refugee will long for a safe haven and a home, and a person who "has it all" will long for self-fulfillment and love.

Jews, due to centuries of persecution and oppression, developed a rich and colorful language of hope and longing – longing for peace ("*Oseh Shalom Bimromav, Hu Ya'aseh Shalom Aleinu V'al Kol Yisrael*", from the Siddur); for family (hence the popularity of Jewish genealogy web sites); for a better world (*Tikkun Olam*).

One form of Jewish longing was the yearning for Zion. This yearning is a Jewish archetype, in the sense that it was not necessarily concrete and was often used as a metaphor. Often the longing for Zion was a Messianic yearning for a better world or for the resurrection of the dead, or for world peace, for safety, and even for material abundance. However, in the collective Jewish subconscious (to use Jungian terminology), at the heart of the longing for Zion there was a strong emphasis on the physical ingathering of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel. At times it sounded more like a supernatural miracle that Jews were waiting for, at other times it was expressed through political activism.

Perhaps the most striking sentence in the Webster on-line dictionary definition for longing is "to feel a strong desire or craving especially for something *not likely to be attained*."

Yet, modern western culture believes that nothing is beyond our reach, if only we work hard enough. *Everything is attainable*. Our very own modern Zionist visionary, Theodore Herzl, was a product of this western culture. He inspired the generations that followed him with his almost prophetic call that "If you will it, it is no dream!"

Then, 56 years ago, the dream was materialized and a Jewish state was born. On a certain level, the fulfillment of the Zionist dream changed the nature of the longing for Zion and brought Jewish longing to an



end. But perhaps more than Zionism, the emancipation and equal rights granted to the Jews in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century redefined Jewish longing by changing the nature of Jewish "be-longing" (pun intended, suggesting perhaps, that longing ends with a spiritual and political sense of belonging). If Jews were to be truly equal to their non-Jewish neighbors, for the first time ever in Jewish history, what would constitute home, homeland, homecoming, and what place would longing play in their life – both on the existential level, and on the level of their historical longing for Zion, for their ancestral homeland. Indeed, the nature of this longing changed radically. Some may say that it has even vanished altogether, that Jews no longer long.

But has it? Is the Jewish notion of *Tikkun Olam* not a form of longing for a better world for all human beings? Is the drive for higher education among Jews in the West not a form of longing for a better life? Is building a strong synagogue not a form of longing for community? For meaning? In other words, could it be that the establishment of the State of Israel on one hand, and the successful integration of Diaspora Jews into the mainstream (primarily in North America) on the other hand, allowed for a transformation of Jewish longing from the traditional collective sense of longing to a new form, or absence of, longing (for Zion as well as other kinds of longing altogether)?

To remind us just how universal the awareness of the "Longing for Zion" as an archetype of longing (i.e., even beyond the scope of the Jewish psyche) is, one should watch the best-selling "Matrix" trilogy (a true product of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century), listen to Bob Dylan sing "Do you long to ride on that old ship of Zion?" or Boney M. sing "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion."

In this module we would like to explore our very own relationship to longing. Do we long? And if so, what do we long for? Then we would like to examine where Israel fits into modern Jewish expressions of longing, be it the dream of a modern, sovereign State for Jews who wish to live there, or a yearning for an Israel which will be a light unto the nations, fulfilling the prophetic vision of a world repaired (*Tikkun Olam*).

## Goals

### Meta Goal:

To explore the place of Israel in the context of longing within Jewish culture and thought.

### Goals:

- To explore manifestations of Jewish longings
- To better understand the connection between longing and Israel
- To encourage participants to explore the place of Israel within one's personal and collective longings.



## Target Audiences

**Unit leaders:** The conversations in this module require three main skills: comfort with text study and engagement with modern as well as traditional texts; an ability to lead a group in an open discussion, in which each view expressed is accepted, validated, and woven into the overall flow of the discussion; and a basic familiarity with the content matter.

**Participants:** These conversations are suitable for adults; no prior knowledge is necessary. The participants may include community lay leaders and members of various boards and committees; Jewish educators from all types of frameworks; and/or members of the public, who are interested in exploring the Meta Questions of engaging with Israel. (General comment: The texts used in this session were chosen to fit the general audience as defined above. Based on your participants' profile, you may decide to add or replace the texts used in the unit.)

## Structure and Duration of Activity

There are two possible variations for this conceptual conversation:

The first is a shorter version, which focuses on conversational components (1.5 hours):

1. Introduction to conversation - 5 minutes
2. "Supermarket of longing" activity and short discussion – 15 minutes
3. Jewish Longing - text study – 20 minutes
4. "Longing for Zion" - activity - 30 minutes
5. Summary or concluding activity - 20 minutes

The second option is to expand the session into a 3-4 hour workshop that incorporates art and creative expressions of the concepts discussed. This is further explained after the description of the first option. In short:

1. Introduction to the cultural concept of "Mizrach" ("east" in Hebrew) -10 minutes
2. "Supermarket of longing" – activity and short discussion – 20 minutes
3. Jewish Longing - text study – 20 minutes
4. "Longing for Zion" – activity - 30 minutes
5. Art workshop using clay, paper mache, or any other type of plastic arts – 20 minutes



## Advance Preparation

### For 1<sup>st</sup> option – discussion unit only:

1. “Longing source cards” (sources #1 - #11) + copies of cards for each participant.
2. Copies for each participant of source #12
3. Copies for each participant of source #13
4. Copy of 'The Matrix' (1/3) (DVD/Video)
5. DVD/Video machine + TV equipment
6. Copies for each participant of source #14

### For 2nd option – discussion unit with art workshop:

All components mentioned above, plus:

7. A 'Mizrach' (if possible, bring more than one) \*\*
8. Materials for the arts workshop
9. You might also want to ask a local artist from the community to lead the arts section.

*\*\* A Mizrach is a traditional piece of artwork, usually a needlework decorated with Jewish symbols, that was hung on the wall of the synagogue and the home to mark the direction to Jerusalem, both for purposes of knowing the direction of prayer and as a reminder of where the "heart" is. So why the reference to the East? Because the Mizrach was used mainly by Jews in the West (both North Africa and Europe).*



## Let's begin...

### Version 1: Focusing on the conceptual conversation

1. Introduction to conversation: Using the introduction to the unit, briefly describe the content of this unit and its goals (5 minutes).
2. "Supermarket of longing": Participants choose a text from among the source cards. Spread the source cards (sources #1-#11) around the room, leaving enough copies for each participant, or tape a copy of each text to the wall and place the copies under each text. Allow 5-10 minutes for participants to stroll around the room and choose the texts that they feel most connected to. Then go around the room and ask participants to share their texts and explain their choice.

Use the following questions as tools to discuss the concept of longing:

- What is longing?
- Can you personally relate to "longing?" Have you experienced anything similar to this? In what context? Can you identify a "Jewish sense of longing"?
- Do these texts relate to realistic or mythic entities?
- Where does longing come from? What evokes/generates longing?

After the group has explored the general concept of longing and the personal meaning they attribute to it, initiate a conversation on the Jewish notion of "longing."

3. "Jewish Longing" text study: Distribute source #12, which includes three opening texts and guiding questions. Read the texts together (either aloud or separately) and use the questions on the source sheet to lead participants through the discussion.
4. "Longing for Zion"- Hand out the sources booklet (source #13) and straightaway show the scene from *The Matrix* (the first film in the trilogy) where Neo is being told about Zion. Without any further discussion, read from the sources booklet and consider the following questions:
  - What Zion are they each longing for?
  - How did the concept of Zion, as this collective Jewish archetype of longing, enter the realm of Hollywood (*Matrix*)?
  - Can you personally relate to any of those "Zions" as the object of your longing? Please explain.

Conclude the discussion about the "Longing for Zion" by reading or giving out source #14 from NACIE's first Philosopher's Retreat and discuss the questions found below the text.



5. Summary or concluding activity- You'll find that if you have some time left, a good concluding activity for this session is to read together as a group the story of the goat in source #15 (you may want to make copies for the entire group to take home). The story is followed by several questions. However, at this stage, they are best used as food for thought rather than as a trigger for further discussion.

### **Version 2: Expanding the conversation into the realm of our home**

1. Begin by showing the group a "Mizrach" ("east" in Hebrew) and explain that a Mizrach is a traditional piece of artwork, usually a needlework decorated with Jewish symbols, that was hung on the wall of the synagogue and the home to mark the direction to Jerusalem, both for purposes of knowing the direction of prayer and as a reminder of where the "heart" is. So why the reference to the East? Because the Mizrach was used mainly by Jews in the West (both North Africa and Europe). Finish this short introduction with the question: Is it possible that this cultural product has other uses and meanings besides the instrumental use of pointing the direction during prayer? Tell the group that during today's activity each participant will create a "Mizrach" to take home.
2. Move through the unit as explained in version 1 above and follow it through until step 5.
3. Instead of concluding the unit, present the group with the art materials that you brought (try to choose materials that don't require too much time, such as perhaps paper-mache), and ask them to try and create their own "Mizrach," based on the thoughts and insights gained during the discussion. At this stage, you may want to bring in a professional artist who can introduce Jewish motifs and facilitate the group's creativity and assist those people who are challenged by art. As a part of the process of planning the artistic concept, you may want to raise the following questions: What are they longing for? Where do they intend to hang the Mizrach? Where will it be facing? What symbols represent their longing?
4. When you decide it's time, reassemble the group and read together the story in source #14. If people want to comment on the workshop, this is a good time to do so. If not, you may want to send them home with a copy of the story and the questions at the end of it.



# Sources

"Longing source cards"

Taken from Professor Adir Cohen, ed., "The Collection of Jewish Quotes,"  
Kinneret Publishing House, 2001, pp. 234-236

## Source #1

Longing does not count the hours.

(Arthur Schnitzler- innovative Viennese writer and inventor of the stream of consciousness technique  
1931-1862.)

## Source # 2

What is satisfaction? What is the good of it? If a man is satisfied, he no longer yearns, no longer dreams,  
no longer makes demands. No. I have never known a single moment of satisfaction.

(Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister in, d. 1973, responding to a question posed by a 12 year old school girl: "Mr.  
Ben Gurion, at what time in your life did you feel the greatest satisfaction?")

## Source #3

Longing is the soil on which love grows.

(Micha Yosef Berdichevski, born in 1865 in Medjiboj, Podolia, Russia, died in 1921 in Berlin. M.Y Berdichevski was  
a radical Zionist thinker)

## Source #4

A great gift has been granted to every person from the time humans were created, longing is its name.

(Dr .Moshe Glikson, born in Russia in 1878, made Aliyah in 1919, one of the founders of the Zionist Democratic  
Party, and the editor of Ha'aretz, died in Palestine, in 1937)

## Source #5

Longing creates the Messiah.

(Theodore Herzl, founder of the Zionist Congress, a visionary, born in Budapest in 1860, died in Vienna in 1904, at  
the age of 44)



## Source #6

Shores sometimes long for the river...So too the shells sometimes long for a house they always loved...  
(Nathan Yonatan, an Israeli Poet, Born in the Ukraine in 1923, died in Israel in 2004)

## Source #7

And when all is sealed and closed to the four corners of the earth – to where will the longings burst?  
(Smilanski Yizhar, an Israeli author, past member of the Knesset, born in 1916, in Rechovot, Israel)

## Source #8

Even within the blue depth of your eyes, a great longing will nestle, my child. Quick, walk away from me...  
(David Fogel, writer and poet, born in Poland in 1891, perished in the Holocaust in 1944)

## Source #9

We are not giving you God, for you must find God by yourselves – within your souls, by the labor of solitude. We are not giving you Home, for you must discover Home by the toil of your heart and thought. We are not giving you Love for humankind, for there is no Love without forgiveness, and forgiving is a difficult and exacting task, which you must perform by yourselves. We are giving you Longing for a better life – for one that is lacking now, but will exist in the future – after there is truth and justice. Perhaps this Longing will lead to God, to Home, and to Love.

(Janusz Korczak, born in Poland as Henerick Goldschmidt in 1860. Died in 1942 with the orphans from his Warsaw Ghetto orphanage, in Auschwitz).

## Source #10

You, my longings, you, my yearnings, where, where are you pulling me? To what horizons, to what worlds? My eyes will not see them, my ears will not hear them, but they exist. Had they not, they would not have pulled me...

(David Shimonovitz-Shimoni, an Israeli poet, born in Belarus in 1886, died in 1956 in Israel)

## Source #11

My longings ignite for themselves the patience, and I cover myself with rags of mercy...

(Yossi Sarid, an Israeli politician, member of Knesset, born in Rechovot, Israel in 1940)



## Source #12: Opening texts – “Jewish longing”

### 1. Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 2, 1-4:

ישעיהו פרק ב

א הדבר אשר חזה, ישעיהו בן-אמוץ, על-יהודה, וירושלם. ב והיה באחרית הימים, נכון יהיה הר בית-יהוה בר' אש ההרים, ונשא, מגבעות; ונהרו אליו, כל-הגוים. ג והלכו עמים רבים, ואמרו לכו ונעלה אל-הר-יהוה אל-בית אל'הי יעקב, וי'רנו מדרכיו, ונלכה בא'רח תיו: כי מציון תצא תורה, ודבר-יהוה מירושלם. ד ושפט בין הגוים, והוכיח לעמים רבים; וכתתו חרבותם לאתים, ונחיתותיהם למזמרות-- ל'א-ישא גוי אל-גוי חרב, ול'א-ילמדו עוד מלחמה. {פ}

"(1) The word that Yesha'yahu the son of Amoz saw concerning Yehuda and Yerushalayim. (2) And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow unto it. (3) And many people shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Ya'aqov; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Ziyon shall go forth Tora, and the word of the Lord from Yerushalayim. (4) And he shall judge among the nations, and shall decide among many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

1. Is this description solely a Jewish Longing?
2. This and other prophetic sources have been the inspiration for perceiving Israel (the People and the Land) as the hub for Tikkun Olam. Have you ever thought about Israel as being the object of longing in the context of Tikkun Olam?
3. What is the longing for?

### 2. Excerpt from: "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl"

"It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more." July 15, 1944

1. What is Anne Frank longing for? Have other Jews throughout history longed for it before? Have they found it throughout history?
2. Have all the Jews living today found what she was longing for?
3. Is this a unique Jewish longing throughout history or a generic human longing which under historic circumstances has become common in the Jewish context?



### 3. Excerpts from the FAQ of "JewishGen: The Home of Jewish Genealogy"



Bring a screen print <http://www.jewishgen.org/>

The above web-site was the first result from about 21,700 for Jewish genealogy .

"JewishGen®, Inc. is the primary internet source connecting researchers of Jewish genealogy worldwide. Its most popular components are the JewishGen Discussion Group, the *JewishGen Family Finder* (a database of 350,000 surnames and towns), the comprehensive directory of InfoFiles, *ShtetLinks* for over 200 communities, and a variety of databases such as the *ShtetSeeker* and *Jewish Records Indexing-Poland*. JewishGen's online *Family Tree of the Jewish People* contains data on nearly three million people."

There are over 75 Jewish Genealogical Societies (JGSs) world-wide, in 50 U.S. and Canadian cities, plus Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Netherlands, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and Venezuela. Your local JGS is your best source for learning how to trace your roots, discovering sources, meeting other genealogists, and sharing research ideas. Most JGSs hold Beginners' Workshops, have monthly meetings, and publish a newsletter

1. Why is Jewish genealogy succeeding to pull people's time and attention today?
2. What are people "longing" for- when they search for relatives?



## Source #13: "Jewish longing for Zion"

1. Extracts relating to "Zion" from The Matrix, by Larry and Andy Wachowski, June 3, 1997

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(Chapter 14- 46:48)

INT. NEO'S ROOM

Neo is awake in his bed, staring up at the lights. The door opens and TANK steps inside.

TANK

Morning. Did you sleep?

NEO

No.

TANK

You will tonight. I guarantee it. I'm Tank. I'll be your operator.

He offers his hand and Neo shakes it. He notices that Tank doesn't have any jacks.

NEO

You don't have...

TANK

Any holes? Nope. Me and my brother Dozer, we are 100 percent pure, old-fashioned, home-grown human. Born free. Right here in the real world. Genuine child of Zion.

NEO

Zion?

TANK

If this war ended tomorrow, Zion is where the party would be.

NEO

It's a city?

TANK

The last human city. The only place we got left.



NEO  
Where is it?

TANK  
Deep underground. Near the earth's core, where it's still warm. You live long enough, you might even see it.

Tank smiles.

TANK  
Goddamn, I got to tell you, I'm fairly excited to see what you are capable of. I mean if Morpheus is right and all. We're not supposed to talk about any of that but if you are, well then this is an exciting time. We got a lot to do, so let's get to it.

\*\*\*

(Chapter 27 1:33:27)

TANK  
They're hacking his mind.

NEO  
How?

TANK  
They inject virus-like serums to attack the neuro-systems. It's like cracking a computer. All it takes is time.

NEO  
How much time?

TANK  
Depends on the mind. But eventually, it will crack and his alpha pattern will change from this to this.

Tank punches several commands on Morpheus' personal unit. The monitor waves change from a chaotic pattern to an ordered symmetrical one.

TANK  
When it does, Morpheus will tell them anything they want to know.



NEO  
What do they want?

TANK  
Every leader of every ship is given the codes to Zion's mainframe computer which can be accessed only through the Matrix. They are used only in emergencies. If an agent had those codes and got inside Zion's mainframe they could disable the entire defense system. It would be the end of everything.

He looks up at Trinity who is pacing relentlessly.

TANK  
We can't let that happen, Trinity.  
Zion has to be protected.

\*\*\*  
(Chapter 28- 1:40:26)

AGENT SMITH  
Repulsive, isn't it?

He lifts Morpheus' head, holding it tightly with both hands.

AGENT SMITH  
I must get out of here, I must get free. In this mind is the key. My  
key.

Morpheus sneers through the pain.

AGENT SMITH  
Once Zion is destroyed, there is no need for me to be here. Do you  
understand? I need the codes. I have to get inside Zion. You have  
to tell me how.

He begins squeezing, his fingers gouging into his flesh.

AGENT SMITH  
You are going to tell me or you are going to die.



## 2. A Daily Jewish Meditation - Siddur Tfilah

"Sound the great ram's horn for our freedom, and raise a standard to gather in our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth to our land... Return in mercy to Your city, Jerusalem... And may our eyes behold Your return to Jerusalem in mercy. Blessed are You, O Lord, Who restores His presence to Zion."

Discussion:

Traditional Jews say this prayer three times a day!

1. Throughout the generations even when it was possible to make aliyah, despite many obstacles, Jews preferred to pray for the return of the Jews to their ancestral land and not take matters into their own hand. Given the phrase that "God helps those who help themselves" how do we explain this phenomenon?
2. What needs to happen in order for this prayer to be fulfilled? Is aliyah to Israel indeed the fulfillment of this prayer? What are other ways?

## 3. Heart is there, though the Body is Not - Rabbi Judah Halevi (c.1075 CE, born in Toledo, Spain, Jewish poet and philosopher)

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west -  
How can I find savor in food? How shall it be sweet to me?  
How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet  
Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?  
A thing light would it seem to me to leave all the good things of Spain -  
Seeing how precious in mine eyes it is to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

*(Selected Poems of Judah Halevi, trans. into English by Nina Salaman, ed. Heinrich Brody, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, p.2)*

Discussion:

Though this is one of the most famous poems from that era, there are many others.

1. Is our heart indeed in the east? If so, how?
2. Have you ever experienced such a schism in your life, in which a part of you is indeed not here? Is that a kind of longing? Can you share what that experience was?
3. Spain is "all the good things", but then, why is all the good things not good enough?
4. What is it that makes us long for a desolate sanctuary, when we enjoy all the riches of "Spain"?



#### 4. The Land of Israel is Anywhere You Go - Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

"Every where I go, I go to the Land of Israel."

Discussion:

1. What does "Everywhere I go" mean?
2. In the same context – what does the Land of Israel mean?
3. It sounds almost like a compass pointing to the 'right' direction. How does that play out in our lives?
4. Does the text actually tell us that since Israel is everywhere, it doesn't matter where we are?



## Source #14: "Longing? For Zion? Today? "

"...One of the key mythical ideas related to Israel is the notion of 'longing.' Historically, the Jewish People longed to return to Zion, and wrote lovingly about it in a whole host of Jewish texts. But what does it mean today to long for a State that actually exists? Longing is a critical idea in Judaism – without it, there may be room to seek our physical survival, but Judaism as a whole is condemned. It may be that reawakening the feelings of longing amongst Jews in Israel and the Diaspora is important because it will help people to envision Israel... On the Jewish notion of longing, it was counter-argued that this idea was not simply about Israel, but rather about the creation of a better world. The point of the Jewish People's existence is to do something, and longing for redemption is part of the driving force that encourages this."

(NACIE's Philosopher's Retreat, New-York, September 2003)

1. "...It may be that reawakening the feelings of longing amongst Jews in Israel and the Diaspora is important because it will help people to envision Israel"- How can longing help people envision Israel? Do you agree with the excerpt?
2. What do you perceive Israel's role to be in the creation of a better world (*Tikkun Olam*)? In what way does this relate to how our prophets foresaw the role of Israel in Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 2:1-4 (Source #12)?
3. Today, when Israel is challenged with complex realities and her narratives are, at times, not compelling, can this perception of Israel as a major component in our vision of *Tikkun Olam* provide a gateway to a reawakened longing for Zion?



## Source #15: The Land of Milk and Honey – The Fable of the Goat, by S.Y. Agnon

Chapter one:

The tale is told of an old man who groaned from his heart. The doctors were sent for, and they advised him to drink goat's milk. He went out and bought a she-goat and brought her into his home. Not many days passed before the goat disappeared. They went out to search for her but did not find her. She was not in the yard and not in the garden, not on the roof of the house of study and not by the spring, not in the hills and not in the fields. She tarried several days and then returned by herself; and when she returned, her udder was full of a great deal of milk, the taste of which was as the taste of Eden. Not just once, but many times she disappeared from the house. They would go out in search of her and would not find her until she returned by herself with her udder full of milk that was sweeter than honey and whose taste was the taste of Eden.

One time the old man said to his son, "My son, I desire to know where she goes and whence she brings this milk which is sweet to my palate and a balm to all my bones."

His son said to him, "Father, I have a plan."

He said to him, "What is it?"

The son got up and brought a length of cord. He tied it to the goat's tail.

His father said to him, "What are you doing, my son?"

He said to him, "I am tying a cord to the goat's tail, so that when I feel a pull on it, I will know that she has decided to leave, and I can catch the end of the cord and follow her on her way."

The old man nodded his head and said to him, "My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will rejoice."

The youth tied the cord to the goat's tail and minded it carefully. When the goat set off, he held the cord in his hand and did not let it slacken until the goat was well on her way and he was following her. He was dragged along behind her until he came to a cave. The goat went into the cave, and the youth followed her, holding the cord. They walked thus for an hour or two, and maybe even a day or two. The goat wagged her tail and bleated, and the cave came to an end.

When they emerged from the cave, the youth saw lofty mountains, and hills full of the choicest fruit, and a fountain of living waters that flowed down from the mountains; and the wind wafted all manner of perfumes. The goat climbed up a tree by clutching at the ribbed leaves. Carob fruits full of honey dropped from the tree, and she ate of the carobs and drank of the garden's fountain.

The youth stood and called to the wayfarers: "I adjure you, good people, tell me where I am, and what is the name of this place?"

They answered him, "You are in the Land of Israel, and you are close by Safed."

The youth lifted up his eyes to the heavens and said, "Blessed be the Omnipresent, blessed be He who has brought me to the Land of Israel." He kissed the soil and sat down under the tree.



He said, "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee away, I shall sit on the hill under this tree. Then I shall go home and bring my father and mother to the Land of Israel." As he was sitting and feasting his eyes on the holiness of the Land of Israel, he heard a voice proclaiming:

"Come, let us go out to greet the Sabbath Queen."

And he saw men like angels, wrapped in white shawls, with boughs of myrtle in their hands, and all the houses were lit with a great many candles. He perceived that the eve of Sabbath would arrive with the darkening, and that he would not be able to return. He uprooted a reed and dipped it in gallnuts, from which the ink for the writing of the Torah scrolls is made. He took a piece of paper and wrote a letter to his father:

"From the ends of the earth, I lift up my voice in song to tell you that I have come in peace to the Land of Israel. Here I sit, close by Safed, the holy city, and I imbibe its sanctity. Do not inquire how I arrived here but hold on to this cord which is tied to the goat's tail and follow the footsteps of the goat; then your journey will be secure, and you will enter the Land of Israel."

The youth rolled up the note and placed it in the goat's ear. He said to himself: When she arrives at Father's house, Father will pat her on the head, and she will flick her ears. The note will fall out, Father will pick it up and read what is written on it. Then he will take up the cord and follow the goat to the Land of Israel.

## Chapter two:

The goat returned to the old man, but she did not flick her ears, and the note did not fall. When the old man saw that the goat had returned without his son, he clapped his hands to his head and began to cry and weep and wail, "My son, my son, where are you? My son, would that I might die in your stead, my son, my son!"

So he went, weeping and mourning over his son, for he said, "An evil beast has devoured him, my son is assuredly rent in pieces!"

And whenever he saw the goat, he would say, "I will go down to my grave in mourning for my son."

The old man's mind would not be at peace until he sent for the butcher to slaughter the goat. The butcher came and slaughtered the goat. As they were skinning her, the note fell out of her ear. The old man picked up the note and said, "My son's handwriting!"

When he had read all that his son had written, he clapped his hands to his head and cried, "Vay! Vay! Woe to the man who robs himself of his own good fortune, and woe to the man who requites good with evil!"

He mourned over the goat many days and refused to be comforted, saying, "Woe to me, for I could have gone up to the Land of Israel in one bound, and now I must suffer out my days in this exile!"

Since that time the mouth of the cave has been hidden from the eye, and there is no longer a short way. And that youth, if he has not died, shall bear fruit in his old age, full of sap and richness, calm and peaceful in the Land of the Living.



Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888-1970) was born in Buczacz, Eastern Galicia. Raised in a mixed cultural atmosphere, in which Yiddish was the language of the home, and Hebrew the language of the Bible and the Talmud which he studied formally until the age of nine, Agnon also acquired a knowledge of German literature from his mother, and of the teachings of Maimonides and the Hassidim from his father. In 1907, he left home and made his way to Palestine, where, except for an extended stay in Germany from 1913 to 1924, he has remained to his death. At an early age, Agnon began writing the stories which form a chronicle of the decline of Jewry in Galicia and the Zionist endeavor in the Land of Israel (From *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967*, Editor Horst Frenz, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1969)

Discussion:

### Chapter 1:

Agnon is a master storyteller, and he is known for his use of symbols. Let us examine his use of symbols here, and what could he be teaching us, what could he be alluding to, and what existential secrets he wants us to discover:

1. The illness
2. The goat
3. The milk
4. The cave
5. The rope
6. The son
7. The Sabbath
8. The note
9. The ear

### Chapter 2:

- This is not a story with a happy ending! It could have ended differently, and in fact in some other forms (when adapted for children) the story does indeed end on a happy note. Why does the story end the way it does? What needs to happen for the story to end differently?
- S.Y Agnon lived in Israel. Why would he write such a story? What could his understanding of the "Land of Milk and Honey" be?



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