
chapter three

TZION

TZION. NOW THERE'S a confusing and often incriminating word. Isn't it amazing how a word can be adopted, then adapted, and end up meaning the opposite of what it originally did?

The truth is that its meaning didn't really change. Tzion has always meant and still means the redeemed Jewish people:

You will arise and have mercy on TZION, because the time to favor her, the appointed time has come... (Tehillim 102:14)

This refers not only to the redemption of the

Jewish people, but of the Shechinah as well, as we say at least three times daily in the Shemoneh Esrai:

May our eyes behold Your return to Tzion in mercy. Blessed are You, God, who returns His Shechinah to Tzion.

The point of disagreement, therefore, is not the meaning of the word. It is rather its current relevance. Some Jews hold that with the return of the Jewish homeland to the Jewish people in 1948, Tzion was reestablished. Others say, “Nothing doing” at least not until Moshiach comes and sets EVERYTHING Torah-right.

What does it mean to be a Tzioni or Zionist? It does not mean to ONLY love the Land of Israel, because many other people have done and still do that, and they most certainly have NOT been and are NOT now Zionists. Love of the Land is an integral part of Zionism, but it has to be a love born of something higher, something SPIRITUALLY richer.

We know what the PHYSICAL borders of Eretz Yisroel are supposed to be. They’re written in the Torah.¹ But what about the spiritual boundaries of Eretz Yisroel? What are they?

¹ Bamidbar 33:1-13.

To begin with, there is this:

A person should always reside in Eretz Yisroel, even in a city that is mostly populated by Gentiles, and not live outside Eretz Yisroel, even in a city that is mostly populated by Jews. Anyone who lives in Eretz Yisroel is considered as one who has a God, and anyone who resides outside Eretz Yisroel is considered as one who does not have a God. As it is stated: “To give to you the land of Canaan, to be your God” (Vayikra 25:38). But can it really be said that anyone who resides outside Eretz Yisroel has no God? Rather, this comes to tell you that anyone who resides outside Eretz Yisroel is considered as though he is engaged in idol worship. (Kesuvos 110b)

If you ask people what they think the purpose of life is, you may get numerous answers. But only one of them is right: to have and improve a relationship with God.

There are different things a person can do to come closer to God. Actually MOVING to Eretz Yisroel is one of them because of how much one can move SPIRITUALLY once he or she gets there.

It has to do with the sefiros. EVERYTHING

has to do with the sefiros. Physical heights are measured in feet or meters. Spiritual heights are measured in degrees of kedushah, or holiness. The higher something is spiritually, the holier it will be in Creation.

In short, although two objects can appear to exist on the same PHYSICAL plane, they can simultaneously exist on two entirely different SPIRITUAL planes. Thus, we learn:

Eretz Yisroel is higher than all lands. (Kid-dushin 69a)

This does not mean physically. It does not require advanced technology to see that PHYSICALLY that is not the case.

The Talmud obviously means higher SPIRITUALLY. The spiritual level and holiness of some thing or some place depends on the level of sefirah in which its conceptual reality is rooted. The system of sefiros is VERY complex, and Kabbalah details it. It has subsystems, which have subsystems, which have MORE subsystems.

The point is this: the higher up the spiritual ladder we ascend, the more we access divine light, increase our level of holiness, and enhance our GOD EXPERIENCE.

Therefore, what counts is not the PHYSICAL

elevation of Eretz Yisroel. Mt. Everest and so many others are far taller. What matters is the SPIRITUAL level of Eretz Yisroel, where its soul is rooted in the sefiros. That will determine what kind of conduit it can be for the light of God, and the level of spiritual impact it can have on those living on its land.

Consider a person who has defiled himself and sunk to new spiritual lows. What has changed? Certainly his personality. Certainly his outlook on life. Certainly the way he connects with himself and the world around him. He may not even be recognized by those who knew him before the change.

But what about his soul? Has it changed too?

No. The soul of the spiritually descending person remains the same at all times—it just becomes increasingly less accessible. It's similar to what happens when thin layers are applied to a large diamond. After the first few layers, the shape of the diamond can still be seen. But as layer after layer is added, eventually the diamond shape disappears from view altogether.

Has the diamond changed? Not at all. It is the same diamond it always was. But the hidden diamond has become more distant with additional layers over it, less accessible, at least to those on the other side of them. At some point those people

forget the diamond was ever there.

Teshuvah—repentance—is the process of removing layers from the diamond—the soul, that is. People doing teshuvah, by reversing their direction in life and heading toward more spirituality, not less, remove layers. If there are many layers, it may take a while for even the shape of the soul to reappear. But eventually it will, and it will shine brilliantly once again in people who make themselves holier.

We talk about the Shechinah returning to Tzion, but the truth is that it is more about Tzion returning to the Shechinah. The soul of Eretz Yisroel is rooted high up in the sefiros, much higher than any other land, including those physically close to it. But the physical reality of the Land has descended farther and farther, until the soul of Eretz Yisroel has become lost to those who know not how to find it.

That is a fundamental difference between a person and Eretz Yisroel. There is no such thing as only PART of a person doing teshuvah. It's ALL of the person repenting or NONE of the person repenting.

It is clearly different with respect to Eretz Yisroel. It is possible for SOME people living in Eretz Yisroel to access the reality of Tzion, at least somewhat, while OTHERS cannot. The Land af-

fords this possibility. A person can move to Eretz Yisroel for the right reasons, live on the Land the Torah way, and remove layers of klipos² to reveal the soul of the Land—Tzion—to himself or herself.

All the mitzvos are meant to do this, but none do it as well as the Mitzvos T'lui b'Aretz—mitzvos that are land-dependent. Ma'aser, tithes, Shmittah, and the Sabbatical Year are mitzvos that are relevant only in Eretz Yisroel. All of them, when observed properly, keep the “layers” from building up and burying the soul of the Land.

They don't just spiritually protect the Land, but they also act as unique conduits for the light of God, via the soul of the Land. This is why Moshe Rabbeinu wanted so very much to enter the Land—to perform these mitzvos³ and experience that phenomenal reality that cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the world.

Other lands around the world are inherently mired in klipos, at least for now.⁴ There is nothing that can be done to change that reality and allow them to reach higher levels of kedusha because

² Negative spiritual realities that desensitize a person to God and spiritual growth, making sin more likely.

³ Sotah 14a.

⁴ Tuv HaAretz.

THEIR souls are not so high up. They will eventually be higher than they are now, but not nearly as high as the soul of Eretz Yisroel. Living a holy existence abroad cannot produce the reality of Tzion, as the Talmud makes clear.⁵ And it was WRITTEN in the Diaspora.

In Kabbalah, “Tzion” is associated with the level of Yesod, the sefirah of Yosef HaTzaddik. Apparently the light of YOSEF’S soul is very much connected to the soul of TZION. In fact, they are even equal in gematria.⁶ Hence, the Midrash:

All that happened to Yosef will happen to Tzion. (Tanchuma, Vayaishev 10)

Why? Does it have to?

Yes, according to “Ma’aseh Avos siman l’banim,”⁷ because in this case, they share realities. And this is something that can be learned from the sefirah of Yesod itself, and the mitzvah of Bris Milah, one mitzvah in particular associated with the

⁵ Righteous people, the Talmud says, are even called “idol worshippers in purity,” because they happen to live in the Diaspora (Avodah Zarah 8a).

⁶ Gematria 156.

⁷ Literally “The actions of the Fathers are signs for the children.” This principle states that what happened to the Avos and their Shevatim are instructive for the future descendants who will experience similar occurrences.

Land:

For 400 years the one appointed over the descendants of Yishmael stood and asked the Holy One, Blessed Is He, "Does someone CIRCUMCISED have a portion in Your name?"

God answered him, "Yes."

He said to Him, "Yishmael is CIRCUMCISED. Why doesn't HE have a portion in Your name like Yitzchak?"

He answered him, "Yitzchak was circumcised properly as required, but not Yishmael. Not only this, [the Jewish people] appropriately cling to Me for eight days, while the others are distant from Me for many days [not performing bris until the age of 13 years]."

"Nevertheless," he said to Him, "since he was circumcised, should he not be rewarded?"

[Rebi Chiya lamented and said,] "Too bad about the birth of Yishmael and that he was circumcised. What did the Holy One, Blessed Is He, do? He distanced the descendants of Yishmael...and gave them a portion below in the Holy Land, since they were circumcised. In the future, the descendants of Yishmael will rule the Holy Land for a long period of time, while it is desolate and empty, just as

their circumcision is empty and lacks completion. They will prevent the Children of Israel from returning to their place, until the merit of the Yishmaelim has expired." (Zohar, Shemos 32a)

Each of the 10 sefiros corresponds to a different part of the human body. It's Kabbalah 101. The top three, Keser, Chochmah, Binah, correspond to the brains. Chesed and Gevurah are the right and left arm, respectively, and Tifferes is the torso to which they are attached—spiritually speaking of course.

That leaves the last four sefiros, and really just three. The tenth and final sefirah, Malchus, isn't considered a body part, but rather the level of earth and, more specifically, Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, Netzach and Hod are the right and left legs, respectively, and incidentally the source of prophecy.

What about Yesod? That corresponds to the place of Bris Milah, which removes the orlah—foreskin. As long as the orlah remains, a person's susceptibility to spiritual impurity is great. After it is removed, he is more spiritually open to holiness and a much closer relationship with God.

It's just an extra layer of skin to be removed, but it makes a huge spiritual difference. While the

orlah is there, the soul of the Yesod remains buried and hidden from the outside world. After its removal, the true spiritual potential of the person is revealed...like Yosef...and Tzion.

Shlomo HaMelech wrote:

A righteous person is the Yesod—foundation—of the world. (Mishlei 10:25)

On a simple level, this means that the world survives in the merit of the righteous people living at the time. But it can also mean that, just like a foundation of a building is below ground and out of sight, so is a tzaddik's contribution to the survival and success of the world:

Rav Yosef, the son of Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi became ill and his soul left him. When he recovered, he asked him, "What did you see?"

He answered, "I saw an upside-down world, where whoever is important here is unimportant there, and whoever is unimportant here is important there."

He told him, "You saw a CLEAR world, my son!" (Pesachim 50a)

Is Tzion here?

Yes.

Where is it?

Below ground. It is the spiritual foundation on which we are building the REST of redemption. But the REST of redemption will require the removal of ALL the layers—klipos—covering the soul of Eretz Yisroel, in order to COMPLETELY transform it into TZION. Then Tzion will be as clear ABOVE ground as it is BELOW it.

We have to work on this ALL year round, every year until Moshiach comes. But we specifically have THREE WEEKS, beginning with SHIVA ESRAI B'TAMMUZ, and ending with TISHA B'AV, to really think about how we, as individuals and as a nation, can expedite this historic process. Our redemption and the redemption of Tzion depends on it.