

Rav Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook ZTL

‘The Lamentation in Jerusalem’ *

On the twentieth of Tammuz, 5664 (July 3, 1904), Dr. Theodor Herzl (Benjamin Ze’ev) Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, died at the tragically young age of forty-four. Rav Avraham Yitzhak Kook, the newly installed rabbi of the port city of Jaffa, was asked to participate in a memorial service to honor the departed leader. Rav Kook was placed in a difficult situation, for which there was no totally satisfactory solution. On the one hand, the Halakha is quite specific when it comes to those who have deviated from the norms of Torah:

Whoever secedes from the way of the community, namely persons who throw off the yoke of commandments from upon their neck, and do not participate with the Jewish People in their observances, in honoring the festivals, and sitting in the synagogue and study house, but rather are free to themselves as the other nations, and so too the apostates and informers — for none of these persons does one mourn. Rather, their brothers and other relatives wear white (festive garments) and eat and drink, and make merry (*Shulhan ‘Arukh, Yoreh De’ah 345:5*).

However one might lionize Herzl, there was no getting away from the fact that his lifestyle was that of an assimilated Jew far from observance of traditional Judaism. If one were to adhere literally to the passage in *Shulhan ‘Arukh*, the customary *hesped* or eulogy for the deceased would be out of the question.

On the other hand, Rav Kook knew his flock. If in Jaffa itself Rav Kook might find a few individuals capable of relating to the halakhic objection to memorializing a declaredly secular Jew, in Rehovot and the other outlying settler communities, Herzl, with his patriarchal beard and searing eyes, was regarded as nothing less than a modern-day “prophet.” And Rav Kook had been engaged not only as rabbi of Jaffa, but of the recently established moshavot (colonies) as well.

The last thing Rav Kook wanted was renewed bickering, or what is worse, fullblown controversy. Rav Kook, who had arrived in Jaffa from Europe not

* The complete preface and translation of Rav Kook’s words, along with additional comments, were first printed in **When God becomes history: historical essays of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook** (New York, Orot, 2003). The editorial board of Hama’yan thanks Rav Naor for allowing a partial reprinting of his words in this volume of Hama’yan.

quite two months earlier (on the twenty-eighth of Iyyar), was familiar with what had preceded him. Jaffa, not unlike the rest of Erets Israel, was a community with a history of controversy.

The solution (if you can call it that) Rav Kook arrived at was the following. He would speak at the memorial gathering, but at no time would he pay specific tribute to the deceased Dr. Herzl. Instead, he would speak in generalities. As it turned out, Rav Kook's non-eulogy for Herzl is without doubt one of the most inspired and profound *hespedim* ever! The address operates on many levels simultaneously — Biblical, Talmudic, kabbalistic — as well as responding to the contemporary maelstrom of Jewish life.

Bezalel Naor

The Lamentation in Jerusalem

On the death of Dr. Theodor Herzl

**On that day the lamentation will be great in Jerusalem,
like the lamentation of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.¹**

The sages said that Jonathan ben Uziel translated the Prophets into Aramaic and the Land of Israel trembled for an area of four hundred parasangs by four hundred parasangs.² The reason for the disturbance was that contained in the Prophets are things which are not explicit but veiled, namely this verse. As Rav Yosef said, "Were it not for its Aramaic translation, one would not know to what the verse refers." The sages report that Jonathan ben Uziel stood up on his feet and declared: "It is I who revealed Your mysteries to men. He Who spoke and the world came into being knows full well that I did this neither for my honor nor for the honor of my father's house, but only that controversy not proliferate in Israel."³

1 Zechariah 12:11.

2 Traditionally, the area of Erets Israel is four hundred square parasangs.

3 *Megillah* 3a.

We should inquire what was the veiled reference contained in this verse that was revealed by Jonathan's paraphrase, "Like the lamentation for Ahab son of 'Omri who was killed by Hadadrimmon son of Tabrimmon in Ramot Gil'ad, and like the lamentation for Josiah son of Amon killed by Pharaoh Necho in the valley of Megiddo." Furthermore, how did revelation of this divine mystery prevent proliferation of controversy?

Now our sages said this lamentation will be for Messiah son of Joseph who is killed.⁴ The entire concept of two Messiahs, Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David, requires explanation. Why the need for two Messiahs, when the goal is to have one man preside over the entire Jewish nation? As it says, "And David My servant shall be prince unto them forever."⁵



The key to understanding this dichotomy lies in examining the individual human being. God created in man a body and a soul, and corresponding to them, forces that strengthen and develop the body, as well as forces that strengthen and cultivate the soul. Ultimate wholeness is achieved when the body is strong and well developed, and the soul, vital and cultivated, leads all the faculties of the body in the service of the intellect, which is God's will in His world. So on the collective level of Israel, God ordained these two faculties: A faculty corresponding to the physical entity, that aspires to material improvement of the nation,⁶ and a second facet devoted to the cultivation of spirituality. By virtue of the first aspect, Israel is comparable to all the nations of the world. It is by dint of the second aspect that Israel is unique, as it says: "The Lord leads it (Israel) alone"⁷; "Among the nations it (Israel) shall not be reckoned."⁸ It is the Torah and unique sanctity of Israel that distinguish it from the nations.

Originally, these two faculties were assigned to the two tribes destined

4 *Sukkah* 52a.

5 *Ezekiel* 37:25.

6 Material improvement is the right basis for all the great and holy plans that characterize Israel, whereby it is a nation holy to the Lord, "one nation in the land" (*II Sam* 7:23; *Ezekiel* 37:22); "a light to the nations" (*Isaiah* 42:6; 49:6). – Author.

7 *Deuteronomy* 32:12.

8 *Numbers* 23:9.

to rule Israel, Ephraim and Judah, which is another way of saying Joseph and Judah. “The deeds of the fathers are a sign to the sons.”⁹ Just as in the beginning, Joseph was the provider sent by God to save many from starvation,¹⁰ who sustained Jacob and his sons materially when they came to Egypt looking for grain [so in future generations, the descendants of Joseph would develop the material side of Jewish national existence]. Joseph is paradigmatic in other ways as well: Joseph was swallowed up by the nations.¹¹ He was also fluent in seventy languages.¹² This last point symbolizes the contiguity between Israel and all the nations of the world. Despite this, Joseph knew the power of his holiness. It is for this reason that “Esau succumbs only to the children of Rachel (i.e. Joseph).”¹³ As the adage goes, “The ax handle that fells the forest is made of wood.”¹⁴

Judah on the other hand, symbolizes that which is distinctive about the Jewish People: “Judah became His sanctified one.”¹⁵ Whereas of Joseph the Psalmist says, “Shiloh, a tent pitched among men.”¹⁶



The purpose of choosing the kingdom of David was that these two faculties be integrated, that they not cancel, but rather reinforce one another. We find an interesting comment of the Midrash regarding the person of David. David was “of ruddy complexion,” just as Esau was “ruddy,” the difference being that David had “handsome eyes,”

9 Midrash Tanhuma, *Lekh Lekha*, 9; Genesis Rabbah 48:7; Nahmanides, Genesis 12:6.

10 Genesis 45:5; 50:20.

11 *Sotah* 36b.

12 Ibid.

13 Genesis Rabbah 73:7.

14 *Sanhedrin* 39b. The Talmud employs this adage to explain the fact that Ovadiah who prophesied the destruction of Edom was himself an Edomite proselyte. By the same token, David who vanquished Moab, was himself descended from Ruth the Moabitess. Rav Kook’s point is that Joseph’s immersion in the society of the nations qualified him to be Esau’s undoing. If it is Rav Kook’s intention to reflect on the biography of Herzl, the latter was an assimilated Jew at home in European civilization.

15 Psalms 114:2. Rav Kook might have pointed out that in that generation of the descent to Egypt, Judah was emblematic of Torah. See RaShi, Genesis 46:28, citing Midrash.

16 Psalms 78:60. Cf. Rabbi N.Z.J. Berlin (Naziv), end *Haskamah* to *Ahavat Hesed* of *Hafets Hayim* (Warsaw, 5648/1888); Rabbi J.A.L. Alter of Gur, *Sefat Emet*, *Vayyehi*, 5646, s.v. *ben porat yosef*.

symbolizing that he would execute only with the permission of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court).¹⁷ Written large, David's kingdom should have been the collection of the material powers necessary for a great and mighty kingdom, coupled with spiritual excellence. Unfortunately, sins brought about that Israel rejected the Davidic dynasty, whereby the nation was divided in two: The ten tribes subsumed under Ephraim (which is in reality Joseph), and the two tribes subsumed under Judah. Were it not for this split, all would have been united under the "tree of Judah."¹⁸ The Psalmist gave expression to this vision of unity: "He will subdue peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He will choose for us our inheritance, the excellence of Jacob which He loves. Selah."¹⁹ By gathering together these two powers, both would benefit: The material would be rarefied and sanctified by its exposure to the unique sanctity of Israel, and the spiritual would be invigorated to enhance Israel. Eventually, the rays would light up the entire world. This will be the case in the future: "And it shall happen on that day, that the root of Jesse, who shall stand as an ensign of the peoples, to him shall nations inquire; and his resting place shall be glorious."²⁰ No longer shall there be war between two factions but rather complete peace. That is the greatest honor.

But it was not to last. Our sins brought about the division of the kingdom, and these two powers that should have been united, developed each in its own way, oblivious of its companion. Due to our many sins, both of the faculties were greatly damaged.

The kingdom of Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom) founded by Jeroboam, who was appointed by Solomon over the task force of Joseph in appreciation of his practical talent,²¹ turned its back on Israel's unique sanctity. "And Me you have thrown behind your back."²² This was the

17 Genesis 25:25; I Sam 16:12; Genesis Rabbah 63:8. A ruddy complexion was thought to be the mark of a killer. The Sanhedrin are referred to as the "eyes of the congregation." See eg. Leviticus 4:13; Numbers 15:24. Cf. Rabbi Zadok Hakohen of Lublin, *Dover Zedek* (Piotrkow, 5671/1911), 40d-41a; idem, *Zidkat ha-Zadik* (Lublin, 5673/1913), chap. 258 (70d).

18 Ezekiel 37:19.

19 Psalms 47:4, 5.

20 Isaiah 11:10.

21 I Kings 11:28.

22 Ibid. 14:9.

source of the sin of idolatry, that developed in time into Israel's ongoing aping of the nations' negative traits. At its nadir it was said, "Ephraim is assimilated among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake readily devoured."²³

Judah, deprived of the material side that enlivens, was in need of a spiritual supplement to replace the missing material aspect. Unable to rise to the occasion, the spiritual power was also ruined. "Judah too shall stumble with them."²⁴

Even after the separation, the wound might have healed, had the two sides realized that though each has its own propensity, they might benefit one another. Judah could receive from Ephraim ways to round the nation in terms material and universal; Ephraim could imbibe from Judah the ways of holiness unique to Israel, be they Torah, character development, or prophetic ability.

The political reality made no such allowance. Were this mutual cooperation to come about, the dominant side would have been the spiritual, for it is the soul that vivifies the body. This is precisely what Jeroboam did not wish to occur. Our wise men summed it up in anecdote:

The Holy One grabbed Jeroboam by his garment and said to him, "Repent, and I and you and the son of Jesse will stroll together in the Garden of Eden."

Jeroboam asked, "Who will lead?"

The Holy One replied, "The son of Jesse will lead."

Sniffed Jeroboam, "If so, I am not interested."²⁵

God offered that together David and Jeroboam could bring the Jewish People to its goal of a nation consecrated to the Lord, God of Israel, while worthy of being a light to the nations. There would be room within the overall structure for the universalist dimension (represented by Jeroboam's kingdom). But to the question—"Who is at the helm?"—the answer must be, "The son of Jesse is at the helm." Without the recognition of the supremacy of the spiritual side—"For the portion of the Lord is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance"²⁶—heaven forbid, Israel's destiny would be lost. Israel is the smallest among the nations,

23 Hosea 7:8.

24 Ibid. 5:5.

25 *Sanhedrin* 102a.

26 Deuteronomy 32:9.

and God forbid, the most likely to disappear. Jeroboam's ego stood in the way. "If so, I am not interested." This set into motion a long chain of calamities, culminating in Israel's exile until the End of Days.



So it came about that throughout the Exile there is a see-saw effect of these two opposing forces. At times, there is exhibited a drive toward material, worldly success that flows primarily from the foundation of Joseph and Ephraim; other times there is a stirring of the spiritual drive for observance of Torah and spiritual development, for awe and love of God.

Since it is impossible for our nation to attain its lofty destiny other than by actualizing these two components—the universal symbolized by Joseph, and the distinctive symbolized by Judah²⁷—there arise in the nation proponents of each aspect. Those who would enhance spirituality prepare the way for Messiah son of David, whose focus is the final destiny. Truly the focus of life is spiritual attainment, except that the spiritual can only develop properly if it is accompanied by all the material acquisitions of which a full-bodied nation is in need. Those who redress the material, general aspects of life prepare the way for Messiah son of Joseph.²⁸

When these two forces work at cross purposes as a result of the calamity of exile, shortsightedness and disarray, these are the "birthpangs of Messiah," or to be more exact, the "birthpangs of Messiahs" (plural). The Psalmist writes: "That Your enemies have defied, O Lord; that they have defied the footsteps of Your Messiahs."²⁹ Two footsteps of two Messiahs.

Now since the major achievement of Messiah son of Joseph, which is the general advancement of mankind, is accomplished by de-emphasis of

27 The Kingdom of David by dint of its distinctive nature subsumes as well the universal aspect. This is the symbolism of "ruddy with handsome eyes." – Author.

28 Cf. writings of Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, where Messiah son of Joseph is equated with *hizoniyut* (outwardness) and Messiah son of David with *penimiyut* (inwardness). See *Kin'at Adonai Zeva'ot*, in Rabbi Hayyim Friedlander ed., *Ginzei RaMHaL* (B'nei Berak, 5740/1980), pp. 101-102, and sources cited in Rabbi David Cohen, *Kol ha-Nevu'ah*, p. 309, n. 454-455.

29 Psalms 89:52.

the unique Jewish form, Messiah son of Joseph cannot endure, so he is destined to be killed.³⁰



When this happens, all will recognize the perversity of the situation. They will realize that it was wrong not to subjugate the universal dimension to the spiritual aspect which is Israel's destiny, to the kingdom of David.

“They will lament him as one laments an only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for the firstborn son.”³¹ The lamentation for an only child is bereft of hope for future children. Elderly parents who have lost their only son, are totally forlorn. If the verse were to end on that note, it would spell utter doom, but the bitterness is mitigated by intellect. Intellect perceives that the nation has produced the soul of the Messiahs. The nation is not as elderly parents who have lost their only child, but rather as young parents who have lost their firstborn child. Being inexperienced at raising children, they did not attend properly to the child in its state of illness, so the child succumbed.

By the same token, the nation comes to the realization that it did not know how to make proper use of this universalist dimension, did not understand how it could contribute to Israel's unique destiny. In that way, it could have survived. The nation labored under the illusion brought on by the divisiveness of exile that these two forces are truly at odds. The result is that whoever holds up the universal side of the nation becomes unfortunately an enemy of Torah and *mitsvot* (commandments). Contrariwise, whoever focuses on the uniquely Jewish, becomes an adversary of material wellbeing. In the first scenario, the fence of Torah is broken down; in the second, the result is weakness and morosity.

After this latest experience of Messiah son of Joseph's impermanence, let us deduce that truly the two forces are not mutually antagonistic. It is time to bring it all together and to organize the nation's ways. Let every universal perfection serve as a basis for perfecting the uniquely Israelite. Let both parties—those disposed to the material and universal, and those disposed to the spiritual and particularistic—come to the same conclusion.

³⁰ *Sukkah* 52a.

³¹ Zechariah 12:10.

Then the lamentation will be on both sides; both will recognize their mistake. These two forces were created to be united; once rent asunder, they were mutually injurious.



The quality of love of nation was exemplified by Ahab. He had such love of Israel! He followed in the ways of his father 'Omri, who added a city to Israel.³² Even when pierced through by an arrow, he kept up the pretense, so that his troops not be demoralized by the loss of their commander.³³ For this reason, he was assured the world to come. "Mine is Gil'ad—This refers to Ahab who fell in Gil'ad."³⁴ Such courage comes from a wonderful love. Though on a superficial level Ahab respected Torah,³⁵ nevertheless, he did not comprehend the value of Torah and its unique divine sanctity which uplifts Israel. Thus he followed in the ways of Izebel and the pagan rites practiced by the contemporary nations.

At the other end, Josiah strengthened the spiritual dimension. In this respect, he was unequaled among kings. "Before him there was no king who so returned to the Lord with all his heart, soul, and might."³⁶ He would brook no linking of Israel to the nations. This reached an extreme in his refusal to accede to Jeremiah's prophetic demand that he allow the army of Egypt to enter Israel's territory.³⁷

Clearly, in Ahab and Josiah there found expression the two forces of Joseph and Judah, or put differently, Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David. Once this distortion—whereby the nation failed to make proper use of the energies revealed in the gifted few—is removed, at the End of Days the realization is reached that it is possible to unite these two powers. So the lamentation is a double lamentation for both Ahab and Josiah together. As distant as they were in actuality, so is the potential for their closeness and interdependence. The purpose of the lamentation is to learn from the mistakes of the past in order to rectify toward the

32 *Sanhedrin* 102b.

33 I Kings 22:35; *Mo'ed Katan* 28b.

34 Psalms 108:9; *Sanhedrin* 104b.

35 *Sanhedrin* 102b.

36 II Kings 23:25.

37 II Kings 23:29, 30; II Chronicles 35:20-25; *Ta'anit* 22.

future; to study how to integrate the powers into a unified system that contributes to the general welfare.



Now the truth is, as long as the nation is fractured and incapable of uniting the powers, at times an attempt at unification will actually result in some theological or moral damage. This deep separation is the source of controversy in Israel. That to which the prophet Zechariah only alluded, Jonathan ben Uziel paraphrased in Aramaic and made manifest, whereupon the Land of Israel shook for an area of four hundred square parasangs. In a generation unprepared for uniting these two tendencies, bringing them together produces a “short circuit.” Undaunted, Jonathan ben Uziel declared, “It is known to You that I did this neither for my glory nor for the glory of my father’s house but only that controversy not proliferate in Israel.” Through the door of intellect lies the way to unify these two resources, both of which are indispensable. Solutions must be found.



The Zionist vision manifest in our generation might best be symbolized as the “footstep of Messiah son of Joseph” (*ikva de-Mashiah ben Yosef*). Zionism tends to universalism (as opposed to Jewish particularism). It is unequipped to realize that the development of Israel’s general aspect is but the foundation for Israel’s singularity. The leadership of the Zionist movement must be greatly influenced by the gifted few of the generation, the righteous and the sages of Israel. On the other hand, the ideal of Israel’s national renaissance, including all the material accouterment—which is a proper thing when joined to the spiritual goal—to date has not succeeded, and the lack of success has brought on infighting, until finally, the leader of the movement has fallen, a victim of frustration.³⁸

It behooves us to take to heart, to try to unify the “tree of Joseph” and the “tree of Judah,”³⁹ to rejoice in the national reawakening, and to know that this is not the end goal of Israel, but only a preparation. If this

38 Herzl died an untimely death at the age of forty-four.

39 Ezekiel 37:15-19.

preparation will not submit to the spiritual aspect, if it will not aspire to it, then it is of no more value than the kingdom of Ephraim, “a cake readily devoured,”⁴⁰ because “they abandoned the source of living waters,”⁴¹ and “Egypt did they call hither, to Assyria did they go.”⁴²

This is the benefit to be gained by remorse over one whom we might consider the “footstep of Messiah son of Joseph” (*ikva de-Mashiah ben Yosef*), in view of his influence in revitalizing the nation materially and generally. This power should not be abandoned despite the wantonness and hatred of Torah that results in the expulsion of God-fearing Jews from the movement. We must develop the courage to seek that any power that is of itself good be fortified, and if it is lacking spiritual perfection, let us strive to increase the light of knowledge and fear of the Lord such that it (i.e. the light) is capable of conquering a powerful life-force and of being built up through it. Then there will be fulfilled in us the prophecy, “I will grant unto Zion salvation, unto Israel My glory.”⁴³

Return (*teshuvah*) must be from our side. Return will be enduring only if all the powers presently found (and possible to be found) in the nation will be vigorous, and directed to good. Then we will be a vessel for the divine will, “a crown of ornament in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God.”⁴⁴



Rav Yosef, who said that he penetrated the meaning of the verse in Zechariah only through its Aramaic translation, willingly accepted upon himself to witness the “birthpangs of Messiah.” When other sages said, “Let him (Messiah) come, and may I not see him,” it was Rav Yosef who said, “Let him come, and may I merit to sit in the shadow of the dung of his donkey!”⁴⁵

The other sages were daunted by the intensity of the spiritual

40 Hosea 7:8.

41 Jeremiah 2:13.

42 Hosea 7:11.

43 Isaiah 46:13.

44 Isaiah 62:3.

45 *Sanhedrin* 98b. Cf. Rabbi A.I. Hakohen Kook, *Orot* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 5745/1985), p. 80; Bezalel Naor trans., *Orot* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993), p. 188.

birthpangs that would perforce result from the pressing demands to fortify the material side that had been neglected in the course of the exile. Exile came primarily to preserve and enhance the spiritual, “to close up the transgression, and to make an end of sins.”⁴⁶

“The shadow of the dung of his donkey.” The word *hamorei* (his donkey) by a double entendre, refers to the material (*homer*). Customarily, devotion to the material affairs of the nation clouds spiritual ascent. Even so, if this movement would not be so audacious as to spread in a way unbecoming Israel, it would be easy to accept. Were it not for its extremism, the movement would not find oppressive the spirit of the Torah, and it would not attack the foundation of Torah, which is tantamount to “blinding the eye of the world.”⁴⁷ But the “dung,” the gross tendencies that are loathsome to all peoples, produce a shadow that dims the pure intellectual lights deriving from Torah.

Nonetheless, Rav Yosef was confident that eventually all these negative manifestations would surrender to the light of Torah and the knowledge of God. Rav Yosef will sit in the shadow of the dung of Messiah’s donkey. In the very midst of the darkness, of the shadow, “rendering like night in the midst of the noonday,”⁴⁸ Rav Yosef will light the candle of the commandment and the light of Torah, and a little light dispels much darkness. The evil will be transformed into good, the curse into blessing.

This is the import of the cryptic passage in the Zohar:

The head of the academy in the palace of Messiah said, “Whoever does not transform darkness to light and bitterness to sweetness, may not enter here.”⁴⁹

The prerequisite for the generation of Messiah is the ability to utilize all forces, even the most coarse, for the sake of good and the singular sanctity with which Israel were crowned.

(*Ma’amarei RAYaH I* [Jerusalem 5740/1980] pp. 94-99)

46 Daniel 9:24.

47 *Bava Batra* 4a.

48 Isaiah 16:3.

49 *Zohar* I, 4a.