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# Chapter 1

# The Continuous Connection to the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael)

(1) Throughout 400 years of struggle with the Roman Empire, millions of Jews were killed in Israel and the Diaspora. (2) Hundreds of thousands were exiled from Eretz Yisrael and sold as slaves all over the world. (3) Our Temple was destroyed about 2,000 years ago (70 CE), and our holy city Jerusalem became a Roman-idolatrous city: Aelia Capitolina. (4) Even during the Byzantine era, there were persecutions of the Jews that remained in Israel, which reduced the Jewish Yishuv¹ even more. (5) Am Yisrael left for a long exile of approximately 1,600 years. (6) But the Jewish people did not forget their homeland. (7) In every prayer, every blessing, at every event – whether

<sup>1</sup> Literally "Settlement," but here a term referring to the body of Jews living in the Land of Israel before the establishment of the State.



joyful or sad - we remembered the Land of Israel and Jerusalem. (8) We remained loyal to the oath we swore when we left for the Exile: (9) "If I forget you O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue stick to my palate if I do not remember you; if I fail to raise Jerusalem at the head of my joy." אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני, תדבק לא אופרכי; אם לא אַעַלה אַת ירושׁלִים על ראש שמחתי. (10) We did not even forget to mention our Land, our City and our Temple in the blessing we said after eating a few cookies: (11) "Blessed are You, Our God, King of the Universe, for the food and the sustenance and for the produce of the field and for the Land which is sweet, good and expansive, that You wished to bestow upon our ancestors, to eat of its fruit and be satiated from its goodness. (12) Have mercy, Hashem our God, on Your people Israel and Your city Jerusalem and on Zion, the sanctuary of Your glory. And on Your altar and on Your Temple. (13) And rebuild Jerusalem, city of holiness, speedily in our days. And bring us up to it, and allow us to rejoice in its rebuilding, and let us eat from its fruit and be satiated from its goodness and we will bless You for it in holiness and purity. (14) Because You, God, are good and beneficent to all and we thank you for the Land and for the food. (15) Blessed are You O God, for the Land and for the food and for the sustenance." ברוך אתה ה', א-לחינו טלה העולם, על המחיה ועל הכלכלה ועל תנוכת סשבה ועל ארץ פעדה שונה ורסנה שרצים והנסלת לאכומינו לאכול מפריה

וְלִשְׂבוֹעַ מְטוּבָה. רַחַם נָא ה׳ אֵ-להינוּ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמֶּךְ וְעַל יְרוּשֶׁלַיִם עִירֶךְ וְעַל צִיּוֹן מִשׁפַן כְּבוֹדֶהָ. וְעַל מִוְבַּחַהְ. וְעַל הֵיכֶלְהְ. וּבְנֵה יִרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקּדֵשׁ במהרה בימינו. והעלנו לתוכה. ושמחנו בבנינה ונאכל מפריה ונשבע מְטוּבָה וּנָבַרְכָּךְ עַלֵּיהַ בִּקְדִשָּׁה וּבְטַהֱרָה. כִּי אַתָּה ה' טוֹב וּמִטִיב לַפּל וְגוֹדֶה לְּךְּ על הארץ ועל המחיה. ברוך אתה ה', על הארץ ועל המחיה ועל הכלכלה. (16) So much love, so much yearning, so much will to return home is reflected in this little blessing. (17) So too in our daily prayers - morning, afternoon and evening - and in the Grace After Meals, on Shabbat and Festivals, under the Chupa, when we comfort mourners, in Hallel on Festivals, and on fast days. (18) In every one of these blessings, we declared loud and clear: (19) We have not conceded our Land; we have not deserted our birthplace, or neglected our Holy City. (20) We will yet return, as our God promised us through His servants the Prophets. (21) And all those dwelling in our home need to know they are temporary residents, transient guests, until we merit returning to our home, from which we were forcefully and brutally exiled. (22) It wasn't only in the prayers and blessings our Sages formulated that we remembered Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem. (23) In all the liturgy composed by poets in Jewish communities worldwide - in Germany and Spain, Morocco and Yemen the central theme is the longing to return to the Holy Land and the Holy City. (24) Elazar HaKalir and Yossi ben Yossi, Shmuel HaNagid and Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gvirol, Rabbeinu Gershom, the Light of the Exile, and Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi), Rabbi

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Avraham Ibn Ezra and Yehuda Alharizi, Rabbi Yisrael Najara and Shlomo Elkabetz, Rabbi Shalom Shabazi and Rabbi Eliezer Azkeri are just a few examples of hundreds of Zion-oriented lyricists. (25) But perhaps the greatest of them all was Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, who lived in Spain approximately 900 years ago (1075-1140). (26) His song "Zion Halo Tishali," which was added to the Lamentations on Tisha B'Av, is the archetypal anthem of yearning to return to God's inheritance, the place of the Divine Presence. (27) Many of his other songs are also saturated with the same deep emotion: "My heart is in the East and I am at the end of the West, how can I taste what I eat and how will it be sweet?" (28) "Fairest of sites, joy of the universe, the great King's city - it is for you my soul yearns from the corners of the West." (29) Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi was not satisfied with poetry of yearning; in his book, "The Kuzari," he calls the Jews of the world to leave the Exile and make aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. (30) He also set a personal example for those in his generation, making aliyah himself to Eretz Yisrael, then under the control of the Crusaders. (31) Legend claims he was trampled by an Arab horseman as he prayed by the Western Wall. (32) Modern-day scholars believe he did not manage to reach Israel but died on the way - apparently on a boat that sank on its way from Egypt to Jaffa. (33) Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi was not the only one who tried to make aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. (34) Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (the Rambam), the great

philosopher and halachic authority, also reached Israel at that time, but he was forced to leave in the wake of the Christian-Crusaders' religious zealousness, as they brutally uprooted any lewish presence whatsoever. (35) After them, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (the Ramban) made aliyah. He had the merit of re-instating the Jewish community in Jerusalem and establishing the first synagogue there after the Crusader Era (1267-1270). (36) Following the calls and aliyah of Israel's great Sages, 300 rabbis and their students from France and England made aliyah at the end of the Crusader period. (37) They were led by Rabbi Yechiel from Paris and Rabbi Yehonatan from Lunil, and they set up a community in Acre, with Torah institutions and places of prayer. (38) But when the Mamelukes conquered and destroyed Acre, they too were forced to leave. (39) Jews didn't just make aliyah to learn Torah. They also came to explore the Land and tell their brethren in the Diaspora about it and about the situation of the Jews there. (40) The first such "tourist-explorer" was Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, Spain, followed by Rabbi Petachia from Regensburg, in Germany. (41) Their writings contain many anecdotes of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael during the Crusader Period, and the beginnings of historical-geographical research on holy sites and places in the Land. (42) It was Rabbi Ishtori HaFarchi who continued their work. He made aliyah during the Mameluke Period about 700 years ago, settling in Beit Shean

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and devoting much of his life to the geographical and halachic study of Eretz Yisrael and the mitzvot dependent on the Land. (43) He summarized his findings in his seminal work "Kaftor VaFerach," which should be regarded as the first research in the field of Eretz Yisrael Studies. (44) Alivah to Eretz Yisrael increased after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. (45) A large group of rabbis and kabbalists felt that the cruel end of glorious Spanish Jewry was a sign from Heaven: the time had come to leave Exile and return Home. (46) The first to come were Rabbi Yosef Caro and Rabbi Shlomo Elkabetz. both from families expelled from Spain, who - according to their own testimony - received Ruach HaKodesh (lit. a holy spirit), which commanded them to make aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. (47) They settled in Tzfat in the Galilee, and from there called their kabbalist friends to join them, "because the time of Redemption is at hand." (48) And indeed, the greatest kabbalists answered their call, including Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, author of "Pardes Rimonim" and "Tomer Devorah." (49) Rabbi Moshe Alshich, author of "Torat Moshe" on the Torah, and Rabbi Eliezer Azkeri, author of "Sefer Haredim." (50) Rabbi Eliyahu Di-Vidash, author of "Reishit Chochma," and the lyricist Rabbi Yisrael Najara. (51) But the most significant of them all was the Ari, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, who became the teacher and leader of this whole group. (82) They and their students transformed Tzfat into the Torah center for the

Jewish people. (53) About 1,000 years after the annulment of the Sanhedrin in Tiberias, Eretz Yisrael once again became the people's spiritual center. (54) From Tzfat came the "Shulchan Aruch" by Rabbi Yosef Caro, which became the main Halacha source for the Jewish people all over the Diaspora. (55) From Tzfat came the kabbalistic doctrine of the Ari – written by his student Rabbi Chaim Vital – which became the foundation for all streams of Kabbalah and Hassidism that followed. (56) From Tzfat came the poems that brought the hope of Redemption to the entire nation, such as Rabbi Shlomo Elkabetz's "Lecha Dodi," and "Ka Ribon Olam," by Rabbi Yisrael Najara. (57) The kabbalists' call had an impact on two



Hannah Mendes (née Lavi) - Donna Gracia





The Hurva (ruins) of Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid's Synagogue

Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, reached Tiberias and Tzfat. (69) They were led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Rabbi Avraham from Kalisk, and Rabbi Menachem of Premishlan. (70) Rabbi Gershon of Kitov, the Ba'al Shem Tov's brotherin-law, arrived in Chevron, City of our Forefathers. (71) Clusters of rabbis and their students built up "The Four Holy Cities": Jerusalem, Chevron, Tiberias and Tzfat. (72) They developed Torah centers in these cities which were supported by Diaspora Jews, who saw them as the revival of Torah in Eretz Yisrael. (73) But the vast majority of the Jewish people remained in exile, to which they had become accustomed and where they had built their financial, social and Torah lives for hundreds of years. (74) On the other hand, Eretz Yisrael was being ruled alternately by Christianity and

Islam, two religions that had emanated from Judaism, and which viewed the Jewish people as an accursed nation that had lost its right to return to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem. (75) The people deeply understood that while these two religions were controlling Eretz Yisrael, there was no real chance of the Return to Zion and the Ingathering of the Exiles. (76) Only a great miracle, unnatural and superhuman, could again open up the Land for its children. (77) And in recent generations, that great miracle has been transpiring before our very eyes!



#### Lecha Dodi

#### Rabbi Shlomo Elkabetz

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Come, my Beloved, to meet the bride; let us welcome the presence of the Shabbat.

"Observe" and "Remember the Sabbath day," the one God caused us to hear in a single utterance: the Lord is One, and His name is One to His renown and His glory and His praise.

Come, let us go to meet the Shabbat, for it is a great source of blessing; from the beginning, from of old it was ordained, last in action, first in thought.

O sanctuary of our King, O regal city, arise, come out of your ruins; long enough have you dwelt in the valley of tears; verily He will have compassion on you.

Shake off your dust, arise, put on your glorious clothes, O my people! Be near to my soul and redeem it through the son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite.

Wake up, wake up, for your light has come: arise, shine; wake up, wake up; sing a song; God's glory is revealed upon you. Be neither ashamed nor confounded. Why are you downcast, and why are you groaning? The poor of my people trust in you, and the city shall be rebuilt on its hill.

And they that plunder you shall be spoiled, and all who would swallow you shall be far away: your God shall rejoice over you, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

You shall spread to the the right and the left, and you shall revere God. Through the offspring of Perez we shall rejoice and be happy.

Come in peace, crown of your husband, with happiness and cheerfulness, amidst the faithful of the chosen people: come, O bride; come, O bride.

Come, my Beloved, to meet the bride; let us welcome the presence of the Shabbat.

### לְּכָה דוֹדִי ר' שלמה אלקבץ

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לְכָה דוֹדִי לְקְרַאת כַּלָּה פְּנֵי שַׁבֶּת נְקַבְּלָה

לא תַּבשׁי וְלֹא תִּכְּלְמִי מַה תִּשְׁתוֹחֲחִי וּמֵה תָּחֶמִי בָּךְ יֶחֱסוּ עַנְיֵי עַמִי וְנָבְנָתָה עִיר עַל תִּלָּה

> וְהָיוּ לִמְשָׁפָּח שׁסָיָהּ יְחָיִהּ כָּל מְבַלְעָיִהּ יָשִׁישׁ עָלִיִהּ אֱ-לֹהָיִהּ פִמְשׁוֹשׁ חָתָן עַל פַּלָּה

יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל תִּפְּרֹצִי וְאֶת ה' תַּעֲרִיצִי עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן פִּרְצִי וְנִשְּׁמִחָּה וְנָגִילָה

בּאִי בְּשָׁלוֹם עֲטֶרֶת בַּעַלֶּה גַם בְּשִׁמְחָה בְּרָנָה וּבְצָהֵלֶה תוֹך אֱמוּנֵי עַם סְגֻלָּה בוֹאִי כַלָּה בוֹאִי כַלָּה

בּוֹאִי כַלָּה שַׁבָּת מַלְכָּתָא

שָׁמוֹר וְזֶכוֹר בְּדַבּוּר אֶחָד הַשְּׁמִיעָנוּ אֵל הַמְּיֻחָד ה' אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אָחָד לְשֵׁם וּלְתִפָּאֶרֶת וְלִתְהִלָּה

לָקְרֵאת שַׁבָּת לְכוּ וְגַלְכָה פִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה מֵרֹאשׁ מִקָּדָם נְסוּכָה סוֹף מַעַשָּׁה בִּמַחֲשָׁרָה תִּחִלֵּה

> מִקְדָּשׁ מֶלֶּךְּ עִיר מְלוּכָה קוּמִי צְּאִי מִתּוֹךְּ הַהַפֵּכָה רַב לֶךְ שֶׁבָת בְּעַמֶּק הַבְּכָא וָהוֹא יַחָמֹל עָלֵיִךְּ חָמָלָה

הָתְנַעַרִי מֵעֶפֶר קוּמִי לְבְשׁי בָּגָדִי תִּפְאַרְתִּךְ עִמִּי עַל יַד בֶּן יִשִּׁי בִּית הַלַּחְמִי קַרְבָה אֵל נַפִּשִׁי גִּאָלָה

> הָתְעוֹרְרִי הִתְעוֹרְרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרֵךְ קוּכִי אוֹרִי עוּרָי עוּרִי שִׁיר דָּבֵּרִי כְּבוֹד ה' עָלֵיִדְ נָגְלָה

























