**YOM YERUSHALAYIM**

**SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A**

**Adapted from a sicha delivered on Yom Yerushalayim 5748**

**Summarized by Yair Yaniv; Translated by Kaeren Fish**

**Seeking the Welfare of Zion and Jerusalem**

"For I will restore health to you and I will heal you of your wounds, says the Lord, because they called you 'deserted,' saying: 'This is Zion, whose welfare is sought by none.'" (Yirmiyahu 30:17)

There are two parts to the above verse: First the good tidings - God's promise that He will heal the suffering of his nation and bring health to Zion after all the blows that she has been dealt, after the period of "hester panim" (hiding of God's face) for Knesset Yisrael. God promises that salvation is near. Together with this promise comes the second part of the verse - a summary of the view of the nations of the world with regard to Zion during the period of the destruction and exile; the way in which they explained the historic fate of Zion and of Knesset Yisrael. Their historiography includes two central aspects: the first is their recognition of God's connection to Zion - "they called you 'deserted'" - God has abandoned His land, left His holy place, and Zion has been deserted and is cut off from God. And since we are speaking of nations with a religious consciousness, their explanation for the severing of this connection is the same one predicted in Parashat Nitzavim:

"And all the nations will say, 'Why has God done thus to this land? What is the meaning of this great anger?' And they will say, 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they went and served other gods and worshipped them, gods which they did not know and which He did not give them. And God's anger burned against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book. And God rooted them out of their land in anger and in wrath and in great fury, and He sent them to another land unto this day.'"

God exiled Knesset Yisrael from Zion, and Zion itself from His holy place.

However, we have here not only a theological-philosophical view, but also a reflection of the relationship between Knesset Yisrael and Zion. Zion has been abandoned not only by God, but even by the nation - "whose welfare is sought by none." Knesset Yisrael has come to terms with galut (exile), at least on the practical level. There is no real expectation of return, no practical plan, no activism. At most there is some sort of prayer. But beyond a glance upward, beyond the 'Zion component' of Israel's eschatological vision, Zion has been abandoned even by the nation. And this feeling of Zion's abandonment and desertion by her inhabitants is what tempts the nations of the world to dare to take Jerusalem for themselves - "they cast lots upon Jerusalem" (Ovadia 1:11). They assume that Israel has given up hope of Jerusalem and has forgotten her, and hence they are free to cast lots, according to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Kilayim) which says that although land cannot be stolen, in the event of the owners despairing of their property, their legal ownership is cancelled. So it was during the short Babylonian exile, and so it is during the longer exile. The nations of the world see Knesset Yisrael despairing of Zion, and develop philosophies and theologies to explain the severance and their right to claim the land in Israel's place.

However, Israel has a different view - not only with regard to the legalities, but even with regard to the facts of the situation. We see a third component of this verse - the halakhic view. The mishna in Rosh Hashana (30a) says, "Originally the lulav was taken up in the Beit Ha-mikdash (Temple) all seven days, and only one day in the rest of the country. When the Beit Ha-mikdash was destroyed, R. Yochanan ben Zakkai ruled that the lulav should be shaken for seven days throughout the country in memory of the Beit Ha-mikdash, and that the entire day of the waving [of the Omer] it should be forbidden to eat [of the new grain]." The gemara on this asks, "From where do we learn that we must have a 'zekher le-mikdash' (remembrance of the Temple)? For it is written: 'For I will restore health to you and I will heal you of your wounds, says the Lord, because they called you "deserted," saying: "This is Zion, whose welfare is sought by none."' - From here we learn the obligation of 'derisha' (seeking her welfare)." The situation of "whose welfare is sought by none" is an anomaly, a situation which does not tally with Israel's destiny. If Zion exists, and God has tied up her destiny with that of Israel, then her very presence and existence demand that her welfare be sought. Zion and forgetfulness are mutually contradictory.

What is the nature of this "seeking of her welfare" (derisha) that Zion requires, and to which we are obligated? The concept of 'derisha' is used in several different ways in Tanakh. The first refers to seeking and searching: "She seeks (darsha) wool and flax" (Mishlei 31:13); "And Moshe sought out (darosh darash) the goat of the sin offering" (Vayikra 10:16). A second meaning is that of clarification: "And you shall inquire (ve-darashta) and search out and ask diligently" (Devarim 13:15). Yet another use of this concept is that of demanding or claiming property: "So says the Lord God, Behold I am against the shepherds, and I shall demand (ve-darashti) My flock from their hand, and I will end their feeding of the sheep and the shepherds will no longer feed on them, and I shall deliver my flock from their mouth, and they shall no longer be food for them" (Yechezkel 34:10). This is the demand of a surety - the reclaiming of the sheep from the shepherds, or sometimes the demand for the realization of an obligation - "For God will surely demand it (darosh yidreshenu) from you" (Devarim 23:22). It can also mean the imposition of a moral-spiritual obligation, of fear-of-Heaven - Mikha prefaces the presentation of his three basic principles with the words, "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what God demands (doresh) of you" (Mikha 6:8).

Sometimes several facets of this concept are combined and intertwined - demanding together with seeking: "Until your brother will require (derosh) it" (Devarim 22:2) - the seeking of a lost article, and then claiming it.

However, there is yet another important meaning of the word 'derisha.' Beyond all the practical aspects of seeking, clarification and demanding, there is the aspect of hoping. This hoping can sometimes be negative in nature - "Those who seek after my life... and they who hope (dorshei) for my harm" (Tehillim 38:13) - but is usually positive, referring to great and lofty aspirations, matters of holiness and of strong spiritual longing. Of course, this type of 'derisha' can refer to God Himself - "A land which the Lord your God cares for (doresh otah); the eyes of the Lord your God are upon it always, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" (Devarim 11:12). However, more often it refers to a feeling on the part of Knesset Yisrael: "Seek (dirshu) God when He is present, call on Him when He is near" (Yeshayahu 55:6); "And you shall seek the Lord your God from there; when you long for Him (tidreshenu) with all your heart and with all your soul"; "For so says God to the house of Israel: Seek Me (dirshuni) and live!" (Amos 5:4); "Seek (dirshu) God and His strength, seek His face continually" (Tehillim 105:4); "Is there anyone with understanding, who seeks (doresh) God?" (Tehillim 14:2).

The Ramban (commenting on Bereishit 25:23) says, "I have found no instances of the word 'derisha' in connection with God which did not refer to prayer, for example 'I sought out (darashti) God and He answered me' (Tehillim 34:5), 'Seek Me (dirshuni) and live' (Amos 5:4), 'Upon My life, I shall not be sought out by you' (Yechezkel 20:3)...." But prayer is merely the practical expression of seeking and longing. And attached to this seeking there is always hope: "God is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him (tidreshenu)" (Eikha 3:25). For this reason we say in our prayers, "All those who wait for You shall not be disappointed, all those who trust in you shall not be ashamed forever."

This longing is admittedly a seeking of and longing for God Himself, but it also involves a longing for all that is connected with Him - for that which represents His presence and dwelling place on earth, the mikdash and Jerusalem: "You shall seek (tidreshu) His dwelling, and you shall come there" (Devarim 12:5). There are several aspects to this 'derisha' of Zion and Jerusalem, and it can be divided into three time periods. The first is that of the pre-Zion era - before its establishment and definition as the dwelling place of the Shekhina. Throughout Parashat Re'eh we read of the pilgrimage towards a mysterious "place which will be chosen." This place must be sought and pursued. Its identity and character are unclear. Much effort must be invested in the careful search, with discerning eye and longing soul, to reveal this anonymous place. This seeking and pursuit involves two levels: the topographical search of the land for that place - and here practical considerations come into play - as well as the more lofty aspiration, because that rock and those boulders will be the foundation of God's eternal dwelling place. These two aspects are intertwined. On the verse "Except to the place which the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put His name there, you shall seek His dwelling place and you shall come there" (Devarim 12:5) - the Sifri comments: "Seek (derosh) - by means of the prophet. Perhaps from this one would think that we should wait until we are prompted by the prophet; therefore we are told 'you shall seek His dwelling place and you shall come there' - seek it and find it, and afterwards the prophet will confirm it." Only if we exert ourselves in the search will we be rewarded with Divine guidance. The search itself increases our longing, as well as removing the 'magical' associations of the place. It is not inherently different in any way - it is simply the place which God has chosen. And the search involves both the active searching for this "place that will be chosen" and, at the same time, the longing for it.

The next period is that of the churban. Jerusalem is destroyed, and there is no possibility of fulfilling the command of "you shall seek His dwelling place." Whether or not we accept the opinion of the Rambam, who holds that Jerusalem is holy for all generations, from a practical point of view there is no possibility of "seeking His dwelling place." The seeking and pursuit are no longer operative, and hence the 'derisha' must be in two directions: firstly, in the direction of 'zekher le-mikdash' - to constantly remember and never allow our thoughts to leave Zion, to maintain a profound spiritual connection, and following this, the demand to seek her welfare. This is a situation with which we dare not come to terms, and to the extent that there is a possibility of 'derisha,' of making a demand for Zion - we are obligated to do so.

The demand is on two levels. Firstly, we demand it on a political level, i.e. reminding the nations of the world that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Knesset Yisrael, and has never left our thoughts, remaining forever at the forefront of our longing. Jerusalem, as the symbolic nucleus of all of Eretz Yisrael, is an inheritance to us from our forefathers. It may not be 'in our possession,' but it is forever 'ours.' However, by law, Jerusalem is not only ours but also in our possession. The gemara in Bava Metzia says that if something is stolen and the owner has not yet despaired of it, then, if there is any possibility of him getting it back by law, it is still defined as being in his possession. We can demand it back by law. We have a claim to present to the Great Judge, God Himself, a claim and demand of "until your brother will seek it out" - the demand that the surety is paid back. The Rishonim were divided as to the wording of the blessing of "Boneh Yerushalayim" (He Who builds Jerusalem) in Birkat Ha-mazon. Some said "boneh Yerushalayim," others held that it should be "boneh be-rachamav (in His mercy) Yerushalayim." The Vilna Gaon ruled that we should say "boneh Yerushalayim" because we are entitled to demand Jerusalem not only by virtue of God's mercy, but by pure 'din' (justice). "Zion will be redeemed in judgment" (Yishayahu 1:27). This is a legal claim, the presentation of a title deed and the demand for repayment.

Both demands existed during the period of the churban. Firstly, the demand from the nations of the world: "You have developed all kinds of theories to explain why 'her welfare is sought by none' - see, here we are to be 'doresh' Jerusalem; practically, politically." Secondly, a demand that God fulfill His promise, that He repay the title deed.

The third period of 'derishat Zion' is that of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This 'derisha' involves two aspects: Firstly, attention. Special attention should be paid even to those things which are in our possession. The existence of Zion should not be regarded as natural and taken for granted. We should always regard it as something to which we are spiritually and existentially connected. 'Derisha' is not only for what is missing, but also for what already exists. "The eyes of the Lord your God are upon it ALWAYS" - even during her flourishing, God seeks the welfare of Zion. This is symbolized by the presence of the Shekhina. And the Shekhina always remains in Jerusalem - "since the holiness of the mikdash and Jerusalem are because of the Shekhina, and the Shekhina is never removed" (Rambam, Hilkhot Beit Ha-Bechira 6:16). Can we be satisfied with any less?! Even while Zion is in our possession and under our control, we have to appreciate it and guard it as our most precious jewel.

The other aspect of 'derishat Yerushalayim' in our days is that of "seeking (dirshu) God when He is present". Seeking God not only as an address for our prayers and for the fulfillment of our aspirations, but also out of longing, out of love and awe, out of recognition that He is the all-good, the most elevated, the source of all existence, out of our longing for truth and for loving-kindness. Anyone who possesses a spark of holiness, a spark of God's flame, is among those who are "doresh Hashem," those who seek and search for Him. This 'derisha' involves a dialectic of searching on one hand - seeking God's revelation, seeking His presence, seeking to encounter Him with those tools that are at our disposal, and longing on the other hand - as expressed throughout Shir Ha-Shirim - longing for a beloved who reveals but a tiny portion of Himself, a beloved who peeps through the cracks, appears and disappears. The longing for God as our companion, as it were, is the longing for something which we know we shall never attain, something which is beyond our reach, behind the wall, between the cracks, in the faraway 'hills of Bater.' And so it is with His accessories, as it were - Zion and Jerusalem first and foremost among them; the focal point of the Shekhina on earth. We see Zion in front of our eyes, count her towers, admire her strength, take pride in her physical and spiritual growth; yet at the same time "one tefach is revealed and two tefachim remain hidden."

A Jew is obligated to be 'doresh Yerushalayim' even while he stands in the rebuilt city, to be 'doresh' those existential-metaphysical layers of holiness which remain hidden, which peep out from the cracks in the wall. We must guard that which we already have, but also long for what is still missing; appreciate what is built, but keep in mind that "even the sky and the heavens cannot contain You."

We are in the position of bridging between two periods. On one hand Jerusalem and Zion - with all their connotations for the Jewish soul and halakha - are still not in our hands. Metaphorically, foxes still prowl among the ruins of our Beit Ha-mikdash. Despite our seeming sovereignty, we still lack real control over the place of the mikdash; it remains in the hands of others. The mikdash remains within the realm of dream and vision. But, on the other hand, fortunate are we who have merited to see Jerusalem - not yet rebuilt but nevertheless in the process of rebuilding, with towers that house Knesset Yisrael. We have merited to see Jerusalem as a flag, as the heart of Israeli sovereignty.

And in this intermingled situation, our 'derishot,' too, are intermingled. On one hand, there is a need for attention: we dare not allow our thoughts to leave Zion, we dare not give up hope - neither in our consciousness nor in our actions - for Jerusalem in her full scope, her full strength and her full sanctity. We dare not reach a situation of "her welfare is sought by none." On the other hand, there is a practical demand from the nations of the world. We have not given up, nor shall we in the future. We will not come to terms with the situation. We do not accept that the nations take it for granted that there is a mosque there, and not a Beit Mikdash. And a further demand from God: "Zion will be redeemed in judgment." You promised, and now we ask, "Matai timlokh be-Zion, be-karov be-yamenu le'olam va'ed tishkon" - "When will You reign in Zion, speedily in our days You will dwell there forever."

It is important that we know how to appreciate the privilege of walking in the streets of Jerusalem. The dream held dear by many generations has come true; the dream of hundreds and thousands of years, a dream which many Gedolei Yisrael did not merit to realize. But at the same time we must appreciate Jerusalem not just as a capital which is flourishing economically, esthetically, socially and politically, but also as appearing and disappearing over the "mountains of Bater." We should see not only the glory that exists, but also the glory that was prophesied.

A formidable challenge awaits us. We have to realize that 'derisha,' to set matters right: This city is no longer abandoned. "For I will restore health to you and I will heal you of your wounds, says the Lord." We have to announce to the world - and above all to ourselves - that this is Zion, and we are here to be 'doresh' her. And in the merit of this may God grant us the privilege of the realization of the rest of Yirmiyahu's prophecy: "So says God, 'Behold, I will return the captivity of Yaakov's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places. And the city shall be built upon her foundation, and the palace will stand on its proper place. And thanksgiving and the sound of joy shall proceed from them, and I will multiply them, and they shall not be diminished; and I will glorify them, and they shall not suffer... And you shall be My people, and I will be your God" (Yirmiyahu 30:18-22).