



Rav Kook Torah

Stones with Hearts

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by Chanan Morrison • www.ravkooktorah.org

What is the significance of the Kotel? Why do Jews gather from around the world to pour out their hearts facing this ancient stone wall?

In 1937, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook published an article entitled "Mei'achar Kotleinu" ("Behind our Wall"). The rabbi chose a title which evokes God's constant presence at the Kotel:

"Behold, [my Beloved] is standing behind our wall, looking from the windows, peering from the lattices" (Shir HaShirim 2:9).

Rav Tzvi Yehuda objected to the term "Wailing Wall". He felt that this is a superficial description of the Kotel as a place of mourning and inconsolable loss. Even worse, this name suggests the helplessness of a weak and stateless nation.

More appropriate, he felt, is the name Kotel HaMa'aravi, the "Western Wall". This term describes the Kotel as a holy remnant of the Second Temple complex (and, in fact, the Temple Mount wall which was located closest to the Holy of Holies). It recalls the ancient tradition that "the Sh'china has never left the Western Wall", and denotes the Kotel as a symbol of the eternal nature of Israel, despite

centuries of exile and persecution. Its unmoving stones are testimony that the Jewish people will return to their land and lofty heritage.

When originally published, the article was mistakenly attributed to Rav Kook. The article was later printed in a collection of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook's writings called LeNetivot Yisrael. Below is a translation of parts of the article, as well as the popular song that it would inspire forty years later.

Behind our Wall

by Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook

Secure and invincible with its Divine strength, the Kotel holds its own - throughout the generations of change, transformations and vicissitudes, the horrors and the shocks, which visited the land and its inhabitants. The Kotel is in them and with them.

Even if the disgrace of ruin conceals its beauty, and signs of destruction are displayed prominently over it, and clouds of desolation cast shadows over its radiance; even if it is hidden behind a thicket of dark and squalid alleys, as it is shoved aside in the cruelty of its neighbors, surrounding it from all sides, trying to invade its borders, to suppress and consume its legacy. Nonetheless, like a stone fortress, it stands guard, without moving and without allowing its inner dignity to be sullied. It remains pure and exalted in the strength of its very essence...

For it is a remnant of the holy and precious, of the Divine abode. In the

wonderful quality of its very existence, it is a witness to world events and the millennia of human history.

There are hearts and there are hearts. There are human hearts, and there are hearts of stone.

There are stones and there are stones. There are silent stones, and there are stones which are hearts.

These stones, remnants of our dwelling on high, "retain their holiness even in desolation" (Megila 3:3), for "the Sh'china has never left the Western Wall" (Tanhuma Shemot 10)... These stones are our hearts!

Each of us knows that this wall, for all of its somber simplicity and signs of ruin and exile, is not a "Wailing Wall" for us, as it is called by strangers and foreigners. For us, it is a wealth of life, a hidden treasure of light and strength, guarded and secured by our tears.

The healthy Jewish eye does not see in the Kotel a symbol of our nation's ruin, destruction and degeneration. On the contrary, we see the wall, in the hidden strength and power of its existence, still standing - even after they fell and when they fell - as it raises itself up and reaches out with Divine strength to eternal redemption.

Yossi Gamzu's song "The Kotel"

After the Kotel's liberation in the Six-Day War, Israeli lyricist Yossi Gamzu composed a song which quickly became an Israeli classic -

HaKotel. Gamzu utilized imagery from Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook's 1937 article. He even dedicated one stanza to Rav Tzvi Yehuda, accurately describing the rabbi's lofty elation in the historical event, as well as his profound love for the Jewish soldiers who fought in the war.

The Kotel

The Kotel, moss and sadness; the Kotel, lead and blood.

There are people with a heart of stone; and there are stones with a human heart.

...

Together with us, facing the Kotel, stands an elderly rabbi, in prayer.

He said, "Fortunate are we, that we all merited this!"

Then he remembered, "But not all."

He stood with glistening tears. Alone, among the dozens of soldiers.

He said, "Under your khaki uniforms, in fact - you are all holy kohanim and Levites." 