I ❤ ISRAEL: The Challenge of Fasting in Israel

Yesterday we commemorated the 17th of Tamuz, a fast day that opens a period of mourning that grows in intensity until the 9th of Ab. We remember the five tragedies that struck the Jewish people on this date: the breaking of the Tablets of the Law, the betrayal of Menashe, the cancellation of the daily sacrifices, and the breach of the walls of Yerushalayim (see here all the details of what happened on this day: https://halaja.org/2026/07/todo-lo-que-debes-saber-sobre-el-17-de-tamuz/).

In the Diaspora, even in the most comfortable corners of the Jewish world, it is becoming less and less difficult to feel this sense of mourning. To experience these fasts properly, one must feel "exiled": away from home, demonized and hated by one's hosts.

But here in Israel, how do you summon that kind of grief? And not because Israel lacks external threats or internal problems. It's that here it is hard to be sad, while enjoying the extraordinary opportunity HaShem has given our generation: to live in His country and to serve Him in His own place of residence.

NUMBERS

This "contagious" feeling of happiness you sense here is not just theory or a subjective impression.

In the 2026 international happiness index, the World Happiness Report, which measures 147 countries, Israel ranks 8th in the world. For the second year in a row. In the middle of a war with Iran and company!

And the most remarkable detail: it is Israelis under 25, the generation of the future, who rank third in the world. The young people who serve in the army, who run to shelters, who lived through the trauma of the hostages, who buried friends. Third in happiness, far ahead of their peers in the West. In the United States, for example, young people rank around 60th. And Israel's neighbors? Egypt: 139. Lebanon: 144.

And this is not just statistics: you see it in the street! In the malls. Full restaurants, families with many children, people enjoying the present and planning the future.

It is the greatest miracle: the most threatened country in the world is the happiest country in the West.

MEANING AND HAPPINESS

How do you explain it? Researchers point to family bonds, to social cohesion. All true. But I believe there is something more: here there is a sense of purpose.

The ordinary Israeli, the soldier, the farmer, the mother raising five children, knows that his daily life is part of something bigger than himself. He is not simply "living his life": he is keeping the house. The house of the entire Jewish people. Every Jew on the planet, whether he knows it or not, has a home here. And if he ever needs it, if one day his country of residence stops being 100% safe, his refuge, his security, and his future are waiting for him here. Israelis are the guardians of that house. And whoever keeps the house of an entire people has no time for an existential void.

Modern psychology confirms it: happiness does not come from comfort; it comes from purpose. That is why young Israelis, who know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and for whom they are doing it, with everything they carry on their shoulders, are happier than young people who have every comfort and no mission in life, no way to shape the destiny of a nation through their own actions.

That is why the 17th of Tamuz tastes different in Israel. In Israel we fast for the walls of Jerusalem that were broken, while we are surrounded by the walls rising all over the Holy City.

The Mishna (Taanit 4:8) clearly reminds us that one day these fasts will become days of joy. Here in Israel, that day does not seem very far away.