



## **Around the Shabbat Table**

**Shabbat Bechukotai 5763  
May 2003**

**Yom Yerushalayim**

*This week's writer: Tuvia Book, Director of Israel & Zionist Education, Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York; Shaliach for the Jewish Agency for Israel.*

### **Introduction**

This week, we read the Torah portion of Bechukotai, which is the last *parasha* in the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus). The *parasha* of Bechukotai, similar to the preceding *parshiyot*, deals with *Chukim* (Statues) and *Mishpatim* (social ordinances), which tell us what we must do in order to hallow our lives as individuals and as a nation. These are the sole conventional intermediary between us and God and the only means for assuring our welfare, as noted by the commentator, Samson Raphael Hirsch.

The *parasha* begins by describing the happiness and prosperity that will come if the nation observes the Law of God:

“I will give you rains in their season; the earth will yield its produce and the tree of the field will yield its fruit...you will dwell securely in your land...I will set My presence among you”  
(26: 4-11)

Conversely, if the nation fails to carry out God’s law it will be to blame for the ruin that will follow:

“...and I will set My countenance against you; you will be beaten by your enemies...I will make your heavens be like iron and your land copper...I will scatter you amongst the nations” (26: 17-33)

The corner-stone of Judaism is freedom of choice. We have the freedom to decide which path to take. Even if we sin we still have the option of repentance. If we show true remorse;

“Then I shall remember my covenant...and I will remember the Land.”(26:42)

During the coming week, communities throughout the world will celebrate **Yom Yerushalayim** (Jerusalem Day). Israel’s 36<sup>th</sup> *Yom Yerushalayim* is celebrated this year on

Wednesday night, May 28 – Thursday, May 29, which is actually a day before the Hebrew date (28 Iyar). The celebration is always moved a day earlier if the Hebrew date falls on Friday (*erev Shabbat*).

During these times, more than any other in our recent history, we need to realize how fortunate we are to once again be in our homeland, Israel and its capital Jerusalem. Yom Yerushalayim is celebrated throughout Israel. In Jerusalem, the scenes of jubilation are beautiful to behold. Spectacular fireworks displays illuminate the city as tens of thousands of youths dance and sing through the streets of the city recalling the jubilant return to the *Kotel* (the Western Wall) after its liberation in 1967. Days after the Wall was liberated, multitudes of Jews from all over the world went up to the *Kotel* to celebrate Shavuot as in days of yore.

‘A song of ascents, by David. I rejoiced when they said to me, “Let us go up to the House of God.” ...For there the tribes ascended - the tribes of God...to give thanks to the name of God...may there be peace with in your walls.’

(Psalm 122)

Many Synagogues recite the psalms of *Hallel* and other joyous prayers to celebrate this modern miracle.



### **Questions for Your Family's Discussion**

Yom Yerushalayim gives us the opportunity to join hands with our brothers and sisters in Israel. It is a time when we thank God that Israel is once again a proud, free, strong nation, allowing our Jewish people to take charge of its own destiny.

1. How can you celebrate Yom Yerushalayim with your family?
2. Do you know any of the stories of famous historical Jerusalem personalities? [You can learn about some at <http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/jerusalem/activities.html>]
3. What is the origin of the name “Jerusalem (Yerushalayim)”?

About the parasha:

1. The Torah portion tells us about rewards for following the Torah and punishments for those who do not follow the Torah. Most of the rewards deal with agriculture and farming. Why do you think this is so?
2. For many centuries, people have wrestled with the question of why righteous people often suffer, and why evil people sometimes seem to flourish. How do we explain that in light of a Torah portion that promises to reward good and punish evil?

### **A Contemporary Text to Learn From**

The following two texts portray Jews crying for Jerusalem. In Psalm 137 the tears are of hopelessness and despair. They are tears of weakness.

Yet this text also contains one of the secrets of Jewish survival. Even during the lengthy period when we had no physical sovereignty over Jerusalem we had a spiritual sovereignty. Jews always had a “yearning for Zion.” This yearning is reflected in our daily prayers and rituals. Each family concludes the Seder through the generations with: “Next Year in Jerusalem.”

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and also wept when we remembered Zion...If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue adhere to my palate if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy”

(Psalm 137)



In our own lifetimes we have been privileged to see this dream become a reality. We now have physical sovereignty over Jerusalem. The reuniting of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War is the emotional highpoint of recent Jewish history. The tears of the paratroopers at the wall, movingly portrayed in Chaim Hefer's poem, are tears of remembrance, hope and survival. They are tears of strength.

### **The Paratroopers are Weeping**

This wall has heard many prayers;  
This wall has seen many walls falling;  
This wall feels pain from mourning women and beloved messages between its stones;...  
This wall saw Caesars arise and be blotted out,  
But never before has this wall seen paratroopers weep.

This wall saw them, tired and squeezed dry;  
This wall saw them, wounded and scratched  
Running to it with a beating heart, with roars, and in silence,  
Spreading out like madmen into the valleys of the Old City,  
And there covered with dust and with burned lips,  
They are silent: “If I forget thee...If I forget thee, O Jerusalem!”  
Their tanks are chariots of fire of Elijah the prophet.  
They pass as thunder. They pass angrily.  
They remember the 2000 terrible years during which we did not have even a Kotel before which we could pour out our tears.

Here they stand before it and breath deeply;  
Here they are looking at it with sweet pain;  
And the tears fall, and they look at each other with understanding – as to

How is it possible that paratroopers weep.  
How is it possible for them to excitedly touch a wall?  
Perhaps it's because that these 19 year-old boys  
Who were born with the State itself  
Carry on their backs – 2000 years.

Chaim Hefer

The best known contemporary song about Jerusalem was written by songwriter/singer Naomi Shemer:

### **Jerusalem of Gold**

The mountain air is clear as water.  
The scent of pines around  
Is carried on the breeze of twilight,  
And tinkling bells resound.

The trees and stones there softly slumber,  
A dream enfolds them all.  
So solitary lies the city,  
And at its heart – a wall.

Oh, Jerusalem of gold, and of light and of bronze,  
I am the lute for all your songs.

The wells ran dry of all their water,  
Forlorn the market square,  
The Temple Mount dark and deserted,  
In the Old City there.

And in the caverns in the mountain,  
The winds howl to and fro,  
And no-one takes the Dead Sea highway,  
That leads through Jericho.  
Oh, Jerusalem of gold, and of light and of bronze,  
I am the lute for all your songs.

But as I sing to you, my city,  
And you with crowns adorn,  
I am the least of all your children,  
Of all the poets born.

Your name will scorch my lips for ever,  
Like a seraph's kiss, I'm told,  
If I forget thee, golden city,  
Jerusalem of gold.

Oh, Jerusalem of gold, and of light and of bronze,  
I am the lute for all your songs.

The wells are filled again with water,  
The square with joyous crowd,  
On the Temple Mount within the City,  
The shofar rings out loud.

Oh, Jerusalem of gold, and of light and of bronze,  
I am the lute for all your songs.

Within the caverns in the mountains,  
A thousand suns will glow,  
We'll take the Dead Sea road together,  
That runs through Jericho.

Oh, Jerusalem of gold, and of light and of bronze,  
I am the lute for all your songs.

### **Towards an Action Agenda**

Learn more about all aspects and time periods of Jerusalem including:

- Activities for youth and teens—a historical journey from Yochanan Ben Zakkai to Teddy Kollek!
- Sermon ideas -- aspects of spirituality
- Timeline
- A bibliography for further research
- Other web links
- Frequently asked questions (FAQ)—about the kotel, maps, places in Jerusalem, and more!
- The history of Jerusalem in secular and religious texts
- Pictures

You can find a variety of activities and ideas for how you can **connect with and help Israel** at the BJE's new and updated web site. Go to:

**[www.bjeny.org](http://www.bjeny.org)**

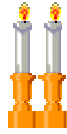
Then, click on “Israel Action Agenda” to learn more.

You can also find this and more at the web site of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Pedagogic Center:

**[www.jajz-ed.org.il/jerusalem/activities.html](http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/jerusalem/activities.html)**

For a musical treat, listen to *Yerushalayim shel Zahav* (Jerusalem of Gold), a song about Jerusalem written by famous Israeli songwriter/singer Naomi Shemer:

[http://www.rochesterhillel.org/birthright/songs/Debbie%20Friedman%20-%20Yerushalayim%20Shel%20Zahav%20\(Jerusalem%20Of%20Gold\).mp3](http://www.rochesterhillel.org/birthright/songs/Debbie%20Friedman%20-%20Yerushalayim%20Shel%20Zahav%20(Jerusalem%20Of%20Gold).mp3)



## **Shabbat Shalom!**

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to [RavADS@bjeny.org](mailto:RavADS@bjeny.org)

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: [www.bjeny.org](http://www.bjeny.org)

*Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Nassau / Queens Center of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. This project has been funded through a generous grant by the Long Island Program Services Committee of UJA-Federation of New York.*