



Around the Shabbat Table

Shabbat Behar-Bechukotai / Yom Yerushalayim 5762

May 2002

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

Introduction

This week, we read the *parashiot* of Behar/Bechukotai, in the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus). The parasha of Behar deals with the concept and laws of *shemitta*, the "sabbatical year" and *yovel*, the "jubilee year." The *parasha* of Bechukotai concludes the book of Vayikra with Moshe foretelling the consequences that will follow the Jews' obedience or defiance of God's commandments. Adherence to the laws will result in prosperity and peace for the people and the land. Conversely, resistance to God's laws will lead to disaster.

The concept of *shemitta* - letting the land lie fallow every seventh year - seems harsh and unusual, given that this was before modern agronomical science has proven that it is actually beneficial for the land to lie fallow, as it restores nutrients and minerals to the soil.

Shemitta is an acknowledgement that all earthly possessions, our land, our money are ultimately in God's dominion. Our purpose in this life is to amass good deeds, not material deeds, and better the world (*tikkun olam*).

During the *yovel* (every fiftieth year), all lands were to revert to their original owners. In addition, Hebrew slaves were to be set free. This ethical system ensured peace and justice. One couldn't hold a fellow Jew in servitude for perpetuity. This system was so humane that when the American colonies broke from the perceived yoke of British oppression they adopted a sentence from this week's parasha. It is engraved on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia:

“Proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants thereof.”

(Leviticus 25:10)



During the coming week, communities throughout the world will celebrate **Yom Yerushalayim** (Jerusalem Day). Israel's 35th *Yom Yerushalayim* is celebrated this year on Thursday night, May 9 – Friday, May 10.

During these times, more than any other in our recent history, we need to realize how fortunate we are to have control of our homeland, Israel, and its capital, Jerusalem. Yom Yerushalayim is celebrated throughout Israel and the Jewish world. 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 Hallel and other joyous prayers to celebrate this modern miracle.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

1. The laws of *shemitta* are observed in Israel in a variety of different ways. Do you think its observance could lead to any difficulties? How could these be overcome?

2. Why are we forbidden in this week's parasha to lend money to a fellow Jew with interest?
3. "We were slaves for Pharaoh in Egypt." Is there still slavery in the world today? What can we do about it?

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

Some Texts to Wrestle With

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

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

www.jajz-ed.org.il/jerusalem/activities.html

You can also 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. New materials are being added daily! Go to:

www.bjeny.org

Then, click on the Israeli Flag icon to learn more.

For a musical treat, listen to Yerushalayim shel Zahav (Jerusalem of Gold), a song about Jerusalem written by famous Israel 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)

There are two important opportunities to both support and celebrate Israel this week. On Sunday, join with thousands of families and young people in the Salute to Israel parade. Details are at:

<http://www.salutetoisrael.org/>

[...and, here in Nassau County, join in a solidarity rally for Israel. Co-sponsored by the Board of Jewish Education. See the flyer below.](#)



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

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

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.

**STANDING
TOGETHER...
NASSAU COUNTY
RALLY IN
SUPPORT**

OF ISRAEL

Thursday, May 9, 2002

7:30 pm, Temple B'nai Sholom

100 Hempstead Avenue

Rockville Centre, NY

(Rain or Shine)

ISRAEL NOW

A N D

F O R E V E R

Sponsored by:

Conference of Jewish Organizations of Nassau County

Long Island Board of Rabbis

UJA-Federation of New York

Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York – Nassau/Queens Center

Directions: Southern State Parkway to Exit 19 South (Peninsula Blvd.) – Travel South on Peninsula Boulevard Bearing Left Immediately – Bear Left onto North Village Avenue – Travel to Lakeview Avenue (approximately 2 ½ miles) – Make a left onto Lakeview Avenue to Hempstead Avenue, Temple is on Right corner, make a right turn onto Hempstead Avenue into parking lot

For additional information: 516-364-4477 or 516-764-4100