



Around the Shabbat Table

**Behar/Bechuotai/Yom Yerushalayim 5764
May 2004**

This week's writer: Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan, Director, Nassau/Queens Services, Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York

Shalom!

Introduction

The final chapters of the book of Leviticus (Vayikra) are read this Shabbat. The Torah reading includes two parshiyot (Torah portions), Behar and Bechukotai. It begins with the laws of the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year. The law of the Sabbatical year, which was to take effect when the people of Israel took possession of the land of Israel, called for a seven-year agricultural cycle. Every seventh year was to be a Sabbatical year, during which the Israelites were not to actively farm the land. Just as the Jewish people were to take a break from their labor on the seventh day (Shabbat), the land also was to observe what our Torah portion called a Shabbat, every seventh year. In the book of Deuteronomy (Devarim), additional laws are mentioned that year. It is in that later text that the word "shemittah" is first used to describe the Sabbatical year [The word actually refers to the cancellation of debts that Deuteronomy commands as part of the observance]

The Jubilee year (Yovel) was to occur in the 50th year of an agricultural cycle. This was also to be a year in which the land was not actually farmed. In addition, all lands in Israel were to revert to the family which originally owned it -- The book of Joshua describes how the land was divided according to tribe and family. Thus, a system was set up so that no person or family would ever permanently lose their land; they could only "sell" it for the time until the Jubilee year. The Torah portion concludes with further details about how land was to be redeemed and returned to the family from which it came.

The portion of Bechukotai consists of blessings and curses. The blessings are promised as rewards for observance of the mitzvot, while the curses are to be punishments should the people abandon God and the mitzvot. The rewards and punishments described here are described as applying to the faithfulness of the entire nation, not as rewards and punishments for an individual's actions.

Finally, this is the Shabbat preceding the holiday of Yom Yerushalayim, the anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem that occurred in 1967. This year, the holiday falls on Wednesday, May 19. Many synagogues add special prayers for the holiday on this Shabbat and on Yom Yerushalayim itself.



Questions for your Family Discussion

When your family joins in dinner this Friday night, you might wish to discuss these questions:

1. Why did the land have to rest in the Sabbatical year? Do you think it was an agricultural law, designed to protect the earth's resources? A law designed to allow farmers to rest? Or some other reason?
2. Why do you think the rewards and punishments discussed in the Torah reading applied to how the entire community behaved, rather than focusing on an individual's actions?



A Text to Wrestle With

The song Jerusalem of Gold was written by singer-songwriter Naomi Shemer in 1967, while Jerusalem was a city divided between Israel and Jordan. With the reunification of the city as a result of the Six Day War (in June of that year), the closing lines of the song were written, reflecting the new life of the city.

JERUSALEM OF GOLD by Naomi Shemer

**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 forever,
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.**

**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.**

- While this song has become known worldwide, there were some who objected to the verse which described the empty markets, noting that, prior to the reunification, Arabs controlled the markets, but they were certainly not "empty." What do you think Naomi Shemer's intent was in describing them as "empty" during a period in which the city was divided?
- How do the last several lines of the song reflect Jerusalem reunified?



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

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

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

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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

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This project is supported through the generosity of Joyce & Fred Claar.

BJE is an agency of UJA-Federation of New York

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