



Around the Shabbat Table

**Shabbat Kedoshim 5763
May 2003**

Yom Hazikaron-Yom Ha'atzmaut

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Introduction

This week, we read the *parasha* of Kedoshim, in the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus). The majority of this *parasha* deals with the positive mitzvot (commandments) regarding *Mishpatim* (social ordinances) that govern a communal life flourishing under the Law of God. The father of Modern Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), stated that:

“[The *mishpatim* / social laws are necessary] in order to make clear that the justice, selflessness and brotherly love which God requires man to practice and on which alone man's true happiness is founded can be translated into reality only by a people whose existence is firmly rooted in these statutes.”

(Hirsch, commentary on Kedoshim)

Of the many well known commandments in this *parasha*, such as leaving a corner of your field for the poor (*Vayikra* / Leviticus 19:9-10), not putting a stumbling block in front of the blind (19:14), not standing idly by the blood of your neighbour (19:16) and loving the stranger in your midst 19:34), perhaps the most well known is found in chapter 19, verse 18.

This principle: “And you shall love your neighbour as yourself, I am God” is one of the fundamentals of Judaism. In the Talmud (*Shabbat* 31a) we are told of a gentile who approached Hillel and asked him to explain the whole of the Torah while he stood on one foot. Hillel replied, “Do not do anything unto others that you would not like them to do unto you.” Hillel took a different approach to the dictum in our *parasha*. He was cognizant of the fact that loving others unreservedly is difficult. Therefore, he suggested that humans avoid detrimental acts against each other. They must refrain from acts of revenge, from verbal attacks and from harbouring baseless hatred. From avoidance of

negative acts, which is mostly a matter of self control, one can achieve positive acts of love

During the coming week, communities throughout the world will observe *Yom Hazikaron* (Memorial Day for Israel's fallen soldiers) and *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Israel's 55th Independence Day)

Yom Hazikaron falls on Monday night, May 5th - Tuesday, May 6th.

Yom Ha'atzmaut falls on Tuesday night, May 6th – Wednesday, May 7th (5 Iyar 5763).

It is during these times, more than any other in our recent history that we need to realize that all of Israel are brothers. We need to be proud of our heritage and our land and offer full support to our people:



A few months ago I was visiting my home in Israel and went on a *tiyul* (hike) with one of my brothers in the Judean desert. We spend a couple of days hiking around Masada and Ein Gedi. We were overwhelmed by the natural splendour, beauty and Jewish historical connections of the places.

On Masada, one of Israel's premier tourist sites we seemed to be the only English speakers there. A similar scenario played itself out at Ein-Gedi. The week we visited the Ein-Gedi reserve archeologists from Bar-Ilan University, after years of searching, found more documents from the Bar Kochba period (132-135 CE) in a cave in the reserve itself. This was reported all over the Israeli media & brought to mind the excitement of the original Bar-Kochba letter hoard found by the late Yigal Yadin and his team in the early sixties. I would like to share the contents of one of his last letters, which I feel is still achingly appropriate today:

“From Shimon Bar Kosiba to the men of Ein Gedi...Shalom! In comfort you sit and drink from the property of the house of Israel and don't worry about your brothers!”

Bar-Kochba's desperate appeal was to people who lived in Ein Gedi, whose synagogue has been excavated and is in the fields of the new Kibbutz of that name. They lived in comfort on the periphery of the major events affecting the very future of the Jewish people and homeland raging around them. He criticised their lethargy, lack of involvement and compassion and, most importantly, their failure to realize that "All Jews are responsible for one another" (Talmud: Shavuot 39).

In this, the State of Israel's 56th year of independence, it is up to each and every one of us to do the most we can do to support our homeland physically through visits and emotionally in order to show that we DO worry about our brothers and sisters, and do appreciate the importance of a land of our own.

"The hope of 2000 years: To be a free people in our land, the land of Zion, Jerusalem."

(Hatikvah)

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

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

1. Why does this parasha open with the command to honour one's mother and father?
2. In the book *Sefer Hachinuch*, the author enumerates the mitzvot in each parasha. How many can you find in this week's parasha?
3. What do you understand from the obligation to leave for the poor the "gleanings," "forgotten sheaves," and "corners of the field," regardless of your own economic situation?
4. Why is so much emphasis put on loving strangers amongst us?
5. In the Talmud there is an argument about whether it is more important to follow the commandments or believe in God. What do you think the result of that discussion is, and why?

Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut give us the opportunity to join hands with our brothers and sisters in Israel. It is a time when we realize that Jews are no longer the Ghetto Jews whose fate was decided by others, but a proud, free, strong nation once again in charge of our own destiny.

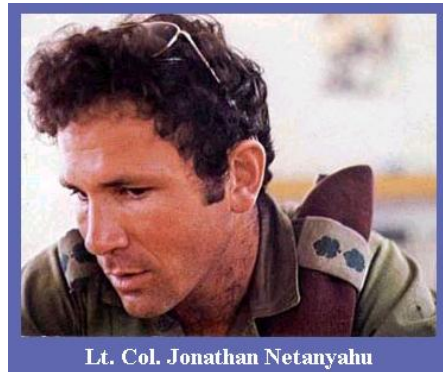
1. Who were the *chalutzim* (pioneers), what was their role in founding Israel, and what can we learn from their example?

2. On Yom Ha'atzmaut we celebrate the modern miracle of the establishment of the Jewish State. What do you do to celebrate? How can we show our support and solidarity in these important times?

Some Texts to Wrestle With

On Sunday, June 27, 1976 an Air France plane flying from Tel Aviv-Athens –Paris was hijacked by PFLP (a terrorist organization) & flown to Entebbe airport in Uganda, then run by the bloody dictator Idi Amin. Upon arrival there was a “Selektzia.” Those who were not Jewish were freed, but the 103 Jewish / Israeli passengers were held hostage. On July the 4th (while America was celebrating the bicentennial of its independence) a daring rescue was launched named “Operation (Thunderbolt) Yoni.” Israeli commandoes flew 2500 miles to Uganda & rescued the hostages. There was a single Israeli military fatality: **Yonatan Netanyahu**, of blessed memory, the commander.

After his death, his family published a collection of his letters (that have recently been reissued (The Letters of Jonathan Netanyahu), which are still an inspiration for us today. Reading the letters we understand the importance of the Jewish State for Jews around the world. Yet our reading is tinged with sadness by knowing the price that has been paid with the blood of our finest young men and women to allow this dream to become a reality.



Lt. Col. Jonathan Netanyahu

Below are extracts from a letter Yoni wrote to his girlfriend a year before he was killed:

*My Dearest Bruria,
March 25, 1975*

Tomorrow is Passover.

I have always thought it is the most wonderful of all our holidays. It is an ancient celebration of freedom - a thousands of year old liberty. When I sail back over the seas of our history, I pass through long years of suffering, oppression, of massacres, of ghettos, of banishments, of humiliation; many years that, in a historical perspective seem devoid of any ray of light-yet it isn't

so. For the fact that the idea of freedom remained, that hope persisted, that the flame of liberty continued to burn through the observance of this ancient festival, is to me testimony of the striving for freedom and idea of freedom in Israel.

In this search through our past we come upon other periods-of tranquility and liberty, when we were the people of the land as well as the people of the book. Yet even then, Passover was celebrated with the same ardour, for freedom is precious and its remembrance long.

And there were other periods-of transition from bondage to liberty, periods of rising and revolt-and it is of those that Passover reminds me most of all. When I say Passover-the feast of freedom-I think at once of the Hasmoneans and the Bar-Kochba revolt and the Exodus and Joshua's conquest of the land.

I also have a special feeling about Passover because of the seder-which for me, as well as for all of us, stirs up personal memories of the past. I clearly remember one Seder in Talpiot, in Jerusalem, when I was six. There were many guests, a big table and much light, and I was in a completely perfect world with myself in it- taking it in, as it were, to sort it all out in adulthood – yet today I know it wasn't in order to sort it out, but to treasure it that I took it all in.

Last year I celebrated Seder with my men in a big tent near a Tel [archeological mound] in a Syrian enclave that was being shelled, and that, too, was a wonderful Seder in its way.

My yearning for the past mingles with my longing for you, and because of you I find myself in my past. And find the time and desire to reminisce in order to share my life with you. Yet by "past" I mean not only my own past, but also the way in which I see myself as an inseparable part, **a link in the chain of existence and Israel's independence.**

Love, Yoni

Questions for your Family

Is this a typical love letter? What is strange about it? What is Yoni's favourite holiday? Why? How can a Seder in a battle zone be as nice as one at home? What does Yoni mean by "past?" What do you mean by "past?" What does it mean to be a "Link in the chain of Jewish history?"

Towards an Action Agenda

1. The letters of Yonatan Netanyahu are thoughtful, insightful and inspirational. If you live in Nassau County, they can be found at the public libraries:

http://www.alisweb.org/web2/tramp2.exe/authority_hits/A0dhmnk4.004?server=Ihome&item=19

You can also purchase the book from its publisher: <http://161.58.167.199/cgi-bin/shop.pl/page=israel.htm/SID=1051724617.22357>

It's also available through most online and retail booksellers.

2. You can find background information as well as prayers and observances for Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut through the website of the Jewish Agency for Israel at: <http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/festivals/ZKATZ/index.html>

3. Learn more about Israel: its history, culture, geography and more, by following the many learning links at the BJE's website:

http://www.bjeny.org/291.asp?Programs_ID=129



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

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