

CEREMONY & CELEBRATION

FAMILY EDITION

THIS SERIES IS BASED ON THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ל"ז



YOM YERUSHALAYIM 5781

Educational content provided by Dr. Daniel Rose together with The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust

Yom Yerushalayim in a Nutshell

YOM YERUSHALAYIM, which falls on the 28th of Iyar (this year on Monday 10th May), celebrates the reunification of the city of Jerusalem in 1967. King David first made Jerusalem the capital city of the Jewish people 3000 years ago. It was conquered by the Romans in 70 C.E., beginning a period of almost 2000 years of Jewish exile, mourning for Jerusalem, and yearning to return. In the late nineteenth century the dream of returning to the Land of Israel became a reality, but after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and the end of the War of Independence in 1949, Israel only had

sovereignty over West Jerusalem, with East Jerusalem, including the Old City and the Kotel, not in Jewish hands. Following the miraculous victory of the Six Day War in 1967, the Israel Defence Force captured the ancient, eastern part of the city, marking the first time in two thousand years that all of Jerusalem was under Jewish control. Finally, Jews once again had access to the holiest site for Judaism, the Kotel and the Temple Mount. Yom Yerushalayim is celebrated each year as a religious festival of thanksgiving, with special tefillot and celebrations held all around the world.



From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks

THE LOVE OF A PEOPLE FOR THEIR CITY

There has never been a love story like it in all of history. The love of our people for our city.

Jerusalem is mentioned approximately 660 times in Tanach. History teaches us that the Temple was destroyed twice, and the city has been besieged 23 times and captured and reconquered 44 times. Yet in all those years, wherever Jews lived they never ceased to pray about Jerusalem, face Jerusalem, speak the language of Jerusalem, remember it at every wedding, in every home they built, and at all the high points of the Jewish year. Somehow it was where every Jewish prayer met and ascended to heaven.

Other cities and other faiths hold Jerusalem holy too, but they have holier places: Rome, Constantinople, Mecca, Medina. Jews only had this one city, a tiny city but somehow it was the

place, said Maimonides, from which the Divine Presence was never exiled.

Never has a city had such power over a people's imagination. Never were a people more loyal than our ancestors who endured 20 centuries of exile and persecution so that their children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren could come home to Jerusalem, *ir hakodesh*, the holy city, the home of the Jewish heart.

REFLECT: Can you think of ways in which Jews have shown their yearning for Jerusalem over the past two thousand years?

JERUSALEM: THE CITY OF PARADOXES

What's special about Jerusalem today is that despite all the very real tensions within and surrounding it, nonetheless it remains a city of peace. It is one of the very few places in the



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Middle East – indeed one of the very few places in the *world* – that is holy to three distinct faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) where those faiths pray together in freedom and in peace. That has only been made possible under Israeli rule in the last fifty years.

Somebody once said about Israel, and you could certainly say this about Jerusalem too, that it is not that long and it is not that wide, but it is very deep. Jerusalem is very deep. And somehow within its relatively narrow confines, it contains, in Walt Whitman's phrase, "*multitudes*".

Another incredible thing about Jerusalem is that something magical happens to our sense of time there. For instance, the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed by every conqueror and then rebuilt using the very same stones. If you look at the stones of the walls around Jerusalem, they come from all the eras. Somehow past and present, the old and the new, are all jumbled together. These bricks are testament to how this city remains the oldest of the old, and yet it has also become one of the emerging high-tech cities of the world.

So it's the oldest of the old and it's the newest of the new. It is the living symbol of what Theodor Herzl titled his book about the return to Zion, 'Altneuland': The old new land, the old new city, for the old and renewed people.

REFLECT: What are the paradoxes mentioned here? Can you think of any others in Jerusalem? Do you think this adds or detracts from Jerusalem's holiness and beauty?

WE NEVER FORGET JERUSALEM

I used to ask myself, how could Jews believe so much in a city they had been exiled from for so long? The answer is very powerful, and it is contained in two words in the story of Yaakov. Recall, the brothers return home and show Yaakov the blood-stained coat of Yosef. Realising Yosef has gone, Yaakov weeps, and when the brothers move to comfort him, we are told, "*veyima'ein lehitnachen*", that Yaakov "refused to be comforted." Why? There are, after all, laws in Judaism about the limits of grief; there is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless.

The answer is that Yaakov had not yet given up hope that Yosef was still alive. To refuse to be comforted is to refuse to give up hope.

That is what Jews did with Jerusalem. They remembered the promise that Am Yisrael had made by the waters of Babylon, *Im eshkachech Yerushalayim tishkach yemini*, "If I forget Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its skill." We never forgot Jerusalem. We were never comforted. We never gave up hope that one day we would return and, because of that, Jews never felt separated from Jerusalem.

And when it happened in 1967, my Jewish identity was transformed as the world heard the announcement – "*Har habayit beyadeinu!*" "The Temple Mount is in our hands!" – Those three words changed a generation.

REFLECT: Why do you think Jews never forgot, or stopped yearning for, Jerusalem?



*"Har habayit beyadeinu!"
"The Temple Mount is in our hands!"
– Those three words changed a generation.*





JERUSALEM OF TODAY CRIES OUT “AM YISRAEL CHAI!”

On Yom Yerushalayim a few years ago, standing on the streets of the city, I watched youngsters from around the world waving Israeli flags, singing and dancing with a joy that was overwhelming. As I watched the celebrations, I was overcome with emotion because suddenly I had a vision of the 1.5 million children who were killed in the Shoah not because of anything they had done, not because of anything their parents had done, but because their grandparents happened to be Jews.

I remembered how 26 centuries ago the Prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the Jewish people reduced to a valley of dry bones. God asked ‘Shall these bones live?’, and Ezekiel saw them come together, take on flesh, and begin to breathe and live again. God promised Ezekiel He would open His people’s graves and bring them back to the land.

I remembered the first reference to Israel outside the Bible on the *Merneptah Stele*, a block of granite engraved by Merneptah IV, successor to Ramses II, thought by many to have been the Egyptian Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. It was an obituary, ‘Israel is laid waste, her seed is no more.’

I thought how some of the greatest empires the world has ever known – Egypt of the Pharaohs, Assyria, Babylon, the Alexandrian Empire, the Roman Empire, the medieval empires of Christianity and Islam all the way to the Third Reich and the Soviet Union – were the superpowers

of their day that bestrode the narrow world like a colossus, seemingly invulnerable in their time. And yet each tried to write the obituary of the Jewish people, and whilst they have been consigned to history, our people can still stand and sing *Am Yisrael Chai*. What I was seeing on that day in Jerusalem was *techiyat hamaytim*, a collective people being brought back from death to life.

When we visit Jerusalem today and see a place of such beauty, it takes your breath away. Jerusalem is the place where all the prayers of all the Jews across all the centuries and from all the continents meet and take flight on their way to heaven. It is the place where you feel brushed by the wings of the Shechinah.

We have had the privilege to be born in a generation that has seen Jerusalem reunited and rebuilt. We have seen the Jewish people come home.

Today God is calling on us all to be Guardians of Zion. Never has this been more important. We must all stand up for the one home our people has ever known and the one city our people has loved more than any other. We are all *shagrirej Medinat Yisrael* (ambassadors for the State of Israel) and we must all make Israel’s case in a world that sometimes fails to see the beauty we know is here. Let us all take on that task. With Hashem’s help, we will succeed and we pray the world will make its peace with Israel so that Israel and Israel’s God can bring peace to the world.

REFLECT: How does Jerusalem embody the story of Jewish history?



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Yom Yerushalayim for the Young (and Young at Heart!)

It Once Happened...

Rabbi Akiva, the Fox, and the Six Day War

IN THOSE critical, tense weeks before the Six Day War, I was just coming near the end of my first year at Cambridge University. And for those three weeks we all felt that something terrible was going to happen, after all the troops were massed on the Egyptian and Syrian borders. All of my generation born after the Holocaust feared that we were about to witness a second holocaust. All the Jewish students, vast numbers of them, turned up in the little shul in Thompson's Lane to pray. I've never seen so many people there before or since. The atmosphere was absolutely intense. And for me it was life-changing.

As soon as we saw the paratroopers, as soon as we heard the words, "*Har habayit beyadeinu*" ("The Temple Mount is in our hands"), I knew I had to go to Israel and see it for myself. I went there, and looking from Har HaTzofim (Mount Scopus), down on the Old City, I suddenly



realised that I was standing at the very place that the Mishnah and Gemara talk about at the end of Tractate Makkot, when Rabbi Akiva and three of his rabbinical colleagues are standing on Har HaTzofim looking down on the ruins of the Temple. And the other Rabbis are weeping, and Rabbi Akiva is smiling.

And he says, "Why are you weeping!?"

And they say, "Look the Holy of Holies, it's all in ruins, a fox is walking through there! The place that only the holiest man, the High Priest, could enter, only on the holiest day, and now it is nothing but ruins. Of course we're weeping. Why are you *not* weeping?"

And Rabbi Akiva says, "Because there were two Prophets who gave prophecies. One, Michah, saw the city in its destruction and another one, Zechariah, saw it rebuilt, and saw it as a place where "*Od yeshvu zekeinim uzekeinot birchovot Yerushalayim*", where old men and women would sit at peace in the streets of Jerusalem, and the streets would be filled with the sounds of children playing.

"So if I have seen the fulfilment of the prophecy of destruction am I not convinced that there will one day come true the prophecy of rebuilding and restoration?"

And as I stood where Rabbi Akiva stood 2,000 years earlier, I said to myself, "If he had only known how long it would take, would he still have believed?" And then I realised, of course he would still have believed, because Jews would never give up hope of Jerusalem. We never allowed it to escape our minds. In any of our prayers, at our weddings, we always remember Jerusalem. Every time we comfort mourners we say, "*Hamakom yenachem etchem betoch sha'ar avalei Tzion v'Yerushalayim*."

You know, Jews were a circumference whose centre was Jerusalem. And I knew then that a people who could never forget this holy city must one day return to it. And as I stood there, soon after the Six Day War, I suddenly realised that *faith* brought back Jews to Jerusalem, and will one day rebuild its ruins. That is the most powerful testimony of faith I know.



In any of our prayers, at our weddings, we always remember Jerusalem.

Chidon on the Chag (A Quick Quiz)

1. Jerusalem is situated in the biblical portion of which of the Twelve Tribes?
2. What is the name of the mountain that is the site of the Temple Mount?
3. According to Jewish tradition, which biblical story took place on this mountain?
4. Which animal is the symbol of the city, dating back to biblical times?
5. Who built the first Temple in Jerusalem?
6. Who built the walls that currently surround the Old City of Jerusalem?
7. What was the name of the first modern neighbourhood to be built outside of the walls of the Old City (in 1860)?
8. When was Jerusalem declared the capital of the State of Israel?
9. What are the four quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem?
10. Can you name all eight gates that lead into the Old City?



Educational Companion to the Questions

FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

THE LOVE OF A PEOPLE FOR THEIR CITY

Reflect: Can you think of ways in which Jews have shown their yearning for Jerusalem for thousands of years?

Yearning for Jerusalem has been cemented in Jewish practice and ritual through halachah and many customs. Three times a day we turn in the direction of Jerusalem and pray to God, because we believe that God has a stronger presence there, and because we have hope that someday we will return and re-establish the Temple as the focal point of Jewish worship. We always conclude the services on Yom Kippur and Seder night (the annual times when almost all Jews of all backgrounds come together, in synagogues and with family), with the words "Next Year in Jerusalem". In our happiest moments we remember Jerusalem, (such as breaking the glass and singing *Im Eshkachech Yerushalayim* at weddings), and in our saddest moments we remember Jerusalem too, (visiting mourners at a shiva, we ask that God comfort them "among the mourners of Jerusalem"). We build remembrance of the destroyed Jerusalem in our very homes, always leaving one cubit undecorated, because how can we have a complete home when God's home in this world has been destroyed? Through these examples and many others, we have maintained a love and yearning for Jerusalem for two thousand years.



JERUSALEM THE CITY OF PARADOXES

Reflect: What are the paradoxes mentioned here? Can you think of any others in Jerusalem? Do you think this adds or detracts from Jerusalem's holiness and beauty?

While Jerusalem is a city of conflict, it is also a paradigm of peace and religious diversity and tolerance. The city itself is physically a mix of ancient and modern, as well as conceptually, with the ancient worship found in the Old City and Meah She'arim next to the high-tech hub of Har Hotzvim. Jerusalem has the most diverse population of any city in Israel, religious and secular, Jewish and Arab. These dichotomies and paradoxes surely add to its complex beauty and reflect humanity itself, including the holiness to be found there. This seems only fitting for the holiest city where God chose to make His earthly home.

WE NEVER FORGET JERUSALEM

Reflect: Why do you think Jews never forgot, or stopped yearning for, Jerusalem?

Jews never lost hope. They never gave up believing that God would bring them back to their homeland one day. So generation after generation they transmitted a love of Jerusalem to their children, and an active hope that they would be the generation to return.

JERUSALEM OF TODAY CRIES OUT AM YISRAEL CHAI!

Reflect: How does Jerusalem embody the story of Jewish history?

Jerusalem tells the story of Jewish history. The kingdoms of David and Shlomo, with Jerusalem as their capital and seat of both political, military, and religious power, tell of the origins of the Jewish people and their land. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. at the hands of the Roman army, signifies the beginning of a two-thousand-year exile and dispersion. Jews lost their home, but never stopped longing for her. Modern day Jerusalem testifies to the miracle of the return, and the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies that spoke of the day when the sound of children playing in the streets of Jerusalem would be heard once again, as it is today.

CHIDON ON THE CHAG (A QUICK QUIZ)

1. Yehudah
2. Mount Moriah
3. Akeidat Yitzchak (the Binding of Isaac)
4. A lion
5. Shlomo HaMelech
6. Suleiman the Magnificent (1538)
7. Mishkenot Sha'ananim
8. 5 December 1949 (by David Ben-Gurion)
9. Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Armenian quarters
10. Jaffa Gate, Lions' Gate, Damascus Gate, New Gate, Zion Gate, Dung Gate, Herod's Gate, and Golden Gate

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