

The Meaning of Jerusalem for the Jewish People

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Most experts agree that the city of Jerusalem has no special strategic value or terrain that makes it a desirable location for an occupying army. Neither does Jerusalem possess many natural resources that would attract a large population to relocate there, nor is it located near any major waterway or trade route. Normally, one or more of these qualities is a pre-requisite for making a city a major center and an attractive place for people to live. And, yet, more wars have been fought to occupy or retain Jerusalem than any other city in history. Why? Without any physical advantages making this city special, why is it so desirable and important to so many people? What makes Jerusalem unique for nearly all the major religions?

Christians believe that Jesus was brought to Jerusalem as a child to be “presented” at the Temple. They also believe that Jesus preached in Jerusalem and that the Last Supper, his trial, crucifixion and resurrection took place in Jerusalem. Islam considers Jerusalem its third holiest city, even though Jerusalem is never mentioned in the Koran. Moslems believe that Muhammad visited the city on a nocturnal journey in 610, while he prayed and visited heaven. Jerusalem was the first Qibla (direction of prayer) for Muslims, and the Al Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem was designated for pilgrimage.

But for the Jews, in contrast, Jerusalem is the center of their universe, their focal point. By understanding what Jerusalem means to the Jew and why, perhaps we may be able to discover an underlying paradigm and concepts for idyllic Jewish living and creating an ideal Jewish society.

IMPORTANCE OF JERUSALEM FOR JEWS

Each time a traditional Jew prays the central Amidah prayer anywhere in the world, three times daily, he or she is required by Jewish law to face Jerusalem.¹ One of the nineteen blessings in that weekday Amidah or Shmoneh Esreh beseeches G-d to return to His city, Jerusalem, and reside there forever, and eventually rebuild the Temple.² Every time a Jew recites the prayer of Grace following a meal,³ Jerusalem is the central focus of one of the four blessings, asking for G-d’s mercy upon the city and the rebuilding of the Temple. Even after eating a cookie or certain fruits or drinking wine, Jewish law requires a blessing that mentions Jerusalem.⁴ On the holiest day of the year, the Kohen Gadol -- High Priest made a special blessing for the city of Jerusalem,⁵ which Jews today repeat every Shabbat, asking G-d for Mercy on the city because it is the source of our Jewish life.⁶ At a Jewish wedding, the Seven Blessings are an integral part of the ceremony. One of these blessings beseeches G-d to bring joy to the city of Jerusalem through the ingathering of Jews from all over the world.⁷

¹ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 94:1

² 14th blessing of the weekday Shmoneh Esreh

³ Third blessing of the Birkat Hamazon-Grace

⁴ “Al Hamichya” blessing

⁵ Sotah 41a

⁶ Blessings after the Haftarah

⁷ Blessing #4 of the Seven Wedding Blessings-Sheva Berachot

While mentioning Jerusalem at times of his greatest joy, a Jew also must remind himself or herself that no joy can be complete and total as long as the city of Jerusalem lies bereft of its true spirituality and central jewel, the Temple. Thus, at the most joyous moment of marriage, a groom often places ashes upon his forehead as a symbol of mourning, and then a glass is broken, symbolizing the destruction of the Temple.⁸ Another great time of joy occurs when a person buys a home, usually the largest single purchase of a lifetime. Because of the mourning over Jerusalem, traditional Jews leave one small corner of the house barren, unpainted, indicating that life is incomplete as long as the Temple is in ruins.⁹

Even in times of greatest sorrow, when mourning a relative, the city of Jerusalem is also prominently remembered. The traditional words of comfort one expresses to a mourner is “May G-d comfort you among the mourners of the city of Jerusalem,”¹⁰ equating the personal tragedy and loss with the national tragedy and loss of the Temple and Jerusalem.¹¹ The rabbis tried to enact several additional laws that would remind a Jew each day about the status of Jerusalem, establishing daily mourning customs to remind Jews of life without the Temple, but these were never adopted en masse by the people. For example, the rabbis forbade eating meat and drinking wine (two primary rituals performed in the Temple) on any day in which a Jew visits Jerusalem in its destruction, without a rebuilt Temple.¹² But when some rabbis also tried to ban wine and meat altogether for the same reason, this ban never was enacted because this restriction would have been beyond the ability of the majority of Jews to observe.¹³ In the same passage, the rabbis legislated that a family should leave out one course of each cooked meal in remembrance of Jerusalem, and a woman should leave off one ornament of her numerous items of jewelry when dressing up, for the same reason. While these customs did not “take,” the practice of leaving approximately 1.8 square feet of the wall opposite the entrance to a house unfinished did become normative Jewish custom.

WHAT MAKES THIS CITY SO SPECIAL? WHY IS THE TEMPLE LOCATED HERE?

In Jewish tradition, Jerusalem is literally the very center of the universe, the place from which G-d created the world.¹⁴ The “rock” in the Dome of the Rock that the Muslims built on the site of the Temple is based on the Jewish tradition that the Foundation Stone-*Even Shtiyah*, located in front of the Temple Ark, was the place from which G-d created the world.¹⁵ This is the place, where, according to tradition,¹⁶ Adam brought the first sacrifices to G-d, Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices (which led to Abel’s murder by Cain),¹⁷ and the place that Noah brought his sacrifice following the Great Flood.¹⁸ This is also the place where Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at G-d’s command.¹⁹ That mountain, the Temple Mount, the mountain to where G-d directed Abraham, was first called Mount Moriah in Genesis, and was the place that King Solomon knew he should build the Temple.²⁰

Because of this unique location and all the events that occurred at this place, the entire city of Jerusalem is infused with holiness -- so much so that the city of Jerusalem is called the connecting point

⁸ Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha-Ever, 65:3

⁹ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 560:1

¹⁰ Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim Section 5:20

¹¹ Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, Chachna VaDaat on Genesis 42:28

¹² Tosefta Nedarim 1:4

¹³ Baba Batra 60b

¹⁴ Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim 10

¹⁵ Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 12:4, Midrash Tanchuma Pikudei 3

¹⁶ Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 2:2

¹⁷ Genesis 4:1-5, 8

¹⁸ Genesis 8:20

¹⁹ Genesis 22:1-5, 14-18

²⁰ II Chronicles 3:1

between the two worlds, this physical world and physical Jerusalem, with the heavenly world with the heavenly Jerusalem.²¹ Thus, there is a parallel, ethereal Jerusalem that is hovering above, which in some ways mirrors the physical Jerusalem below. From the time the Temple was built, the city of Jerusalem became G-d's "residence" on earth, and, according to tradition, it will be so once again when the Temple is rebuilt.²² Therefore, it is not only the Temple that is holy or the Temple Mount which houses the Temple that possessed holiness, but the entire city of Jerusalem possesses holiness.²³

THE NAMES OF THE CITY IN THE SCRIPTURE BUT NOT IN THE TORAH

The city of Jerusalem is not mentioned even once in the Koran, but it is mentioned 669 separate times in Jewish Scripture (Tanach). But not of these of verses about Jerusalem is mentioned specifically in the Torah, only in the later books of Jewish Scripture. Why not? Although the city's specialness and holiness was indeed transmitted orally to Jewish leaders through the generations, Maimonides gives several explanations why the name was not written down specifically in the Torah.²⁴ First, if the nations of the world had known in advance that Jerusalem was the holiest city of the Jewish people (through its proclamation in the Torah), those other nations would have fought desperately never to allow the Jews to conquer this city and proclaim it as their capital. Second, the non-Jewish religions of the time would have taken that Jewish holiness and intentionally used the city of Jerusalem for their own idol worship (which is what happened in later times), something that would be an anathema to Jews. In addition, non-Jews might have purposely razed the city and destroyed it, simply to prevent the Jewish people from ever using it as their holy city and capital. Finally, the sibling rivalry between the Jewish tribes might all have caused each tribe to claim Jerusalem for itself, in its territory. Thus, G-d intentionally never mentioned the name of the city in the Torah, before the Jews conquered Jerusalem, but merely called it "the place where I will choose to put My name."

The first allusion to the city of Jerusalem in the Torah is in Genesis,²⁵ where Malki Tzedek was king of the city called Shalem. One early commentary²⁶ says that this was the city of Jerusalem. The next mention of this place is Mount Moriah, described above, where the binding of Isaac by Abraham took place. After this event, Abraham calls this place "*Adonai Yireh*-G-d will see" because in this place G-d will be seen.²⁷ Rashi comments on this verse²⁸ that this will be the place in the future where G-d will choose His Divine Presence to reside and where the people will bring future sacrifices as well. Apparently, before it was conquered by the Jews, Jerusalem under Jebusite rule was divided into two cities, the western part called *Jeru* (Yere) and the eastern part called *Salem* (Shalem). The Midrash²⁹ explains that today's name of Jerusalem is made up of the combination of the original name of the city, "Shalem," given by Shem son of Noah, indicating completeness or perfection, and "Yireh" the name given by Abraham, to become "*Yireh Shalem*," -the place where completion or perfection will be seen, "Yerushalayim".

Later on, scripture refers to the city of Jerusalem by other names. It was called "The Holy City" by Isaiah and Nehemiah.³⁰ Isaiah and Daniel also referred to the city of Jerusalem when they called it

²¹ Psalms 122:3 with Rashi commentary

²² Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 1:3-4

²³ Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 7:14

²⁴ Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed 3:45

²⁵ Genesis 14:18

²⁶ Targum Onkelos commentary on Genesis 14:18

²⁷ Genesis 22:14

²⁸ Rashi commentary on Genesis 22:14

²⁹ Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 56:10

³⁰ Isaiah 48:2, Nehemiah 11:1

“The Holy Mountain.”³¹ Zachariah called it “The City of Truth”³² and King David, who captured the city and lived there as king, called Jerusalem “The City of G-d.”³³ King David also describes Jerusalem as Mount Zion and the “City of the King” that is both beautiful and joyous.³⁴

HOW THE CITY OF JERUSALEM IS REFERRED TO BY THE RABBIS

In the post-Scriptural era, the rabbis also referred to Jerusalem and described it with numerous designations. When G-d told the Jews that they would eventually come to the place of “rest” and inheritance,³⁵ the rabbis described Jerusalem as either “the place of rest” for the Jewish people or “the place of inheritance” or both.³⁶ The Talmud simply calls Jerusalem “the City,”³⁷ as someone living in the suburbs today would refer to “going to the city” where everyone understands the designation to refer to their main center. The Mishna³⁸ refers to Jerusalem as “the place within the walls” because Jerusalem was one of the few walled cities from the time of Joshua, and many special Jewish laws applied to Jerusalem as long as a person was located within its walls. By inference, the Talmud³⁹ refers to Jerusalem as the “City of Prophets.” When a prophet gave his name and his city, all knew he was from the city he cited. When he gave only his name, all knew he came from Jerusalem.

TO WHOM DOES THIS CITY OF JERUSALEM BELONG?

Of course, Jerusalem belongs to the Jewish people, as G-d promised it in the Torah, either as the city of “rest” or “inheritance”, referred to in the verse cited above. But within the Jewish people, to which tribe or tribes did this city really belong? We know that every inch of the Land of Israel was divided among the twelve tribes. To which tribes did the city belong?

There is one opinion that the city was indeed divided between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with the Temple area in the section of Benjamin. But the other opinion is that this is the one place in Israel that was never apportioned to the Tribes because Jerusalem is a unique city in that it belongs to all the tribes equally (similar to Washington D.C., but not an exact parallel). It is this second position that seems to be accepted,⁴⁰ which affects Jewish law in a number of ways. For example, because the city did not belong to any one tribe, all the city’s expenses, according to the Mishna, were taken and paid for from the Temple’s treasury.⁴¹ Maimonides finds a parallel between the four camps in the desert and the four layers of holiness in Jerusalem leading up to the Temple itself.⁴² But the city of Jerusalem parallels the camp of the Israelites because, like the Israelite camp, the city belongs to the entire people.

THE UNIQUE LAWS THAT PERTAIN TO THIS UNIQUE CITY

Because Jerusalem was so distinctive, many special laws were enacted and maintained to demonstrate that Jerusalem is unique. In a certain sense, these laws show us what the ideal Jewish city should look like and how it should be taken care of.

³¹ Isaiah 27:13, Daniel 9:16

³² Zachariah 8:3

³³ Psalms 46:5

³⁴ Psalms 48:3

³⁵ Deuteronomy 12:9

³⁶ Zevachim 119a

³⁷ Sanhedrin 2a and Rashi commentary

³⁸ Mishna Kelim 1:8

³⁹ Megillah 15a

⁴⁰ Megillah 26a

⁴¹ Mishna Shekalim 4:2

⁴² Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 7:11

Since Jerusalem was holy and certain sacrifices could be eaten only within the city walls, Maimonides⁴³ outlines numerous laws and procedures to maintain Jerusalem as the holy city. When someone died, burial had to be immediate, in order not to have the corpse remaining overnight in the city. Since the city of Jerusalem belonged to the entire Jewish people, it was forbidden to take money or rent from lodgers, especially when the entire people came to the city for the festivals three times a year. These lodgers, after all, were technically part owners in the city. (The rabbis worked out a system whereby the people living in Jerusalem did not lose money). At that time, no cemeteries were allowed in the city proper, except for graves of the family of King David and Chulda the prophetess. Certain plants and fruits could not be planted in the city because they would give off a foul odor, and the scent of the holy city had to remain sweet. In the same vein, no garbage heaps could be located in the city proper. No smokestacks were permitted in Jerusalem in order that there should be no air pollution and smoke in the city.

Because Jerusalem belonged to all Jews and was considered holier than any other city, a husband or wife could legally force his or her spouse to move to Jerusalem from any other city in Israel (in the same way that a spouse could force his or her partner to move to the Land of Israel against his or her will) from the Diaspora. If the spouse refused, this was grounds for divorce, and the side that refused would forfeit the money promised in the Ketuba (dowry).⁴⁴ In the same manner, no spouse could force his or her partner to leave the city of Jerusalem or the Land of Israel.⁴⁵ Both Maimonides⁴⁶ and Tur⁴⁷ cite these Talmudic cases as normative Jewish law.

The Jerusalem Talmud states⁴⁸ that the Jerusalem of Talmudic times featured not only 460 synagogues, but also tied to each synagogue was its own (equivalent to today's) elementary school and high school. Unlike any other city then (and some cities even today), the streets of Jerusalem were cleaned daily.⁴⁹ Rashi⁵⁰ states that the reason for the cleaning was to remove the dirt that might accumulate upon the feet (which was not permitted in the Temple), while Tosafot⁵¹ explain the reason was to clear away all dead bugs and rodents that might impurify people, which was forbidden in Jerusalem. In addition, while certain types of daily activities were permitted to be performed in other cities on Chol Hamoed, the Intermediate Days of the Festivals, all such activity was mandated by the Rabbis as forbidden in Jerusalem on these days.⁵² In order not to create any sadness in the city of Jerusalem, an accounting station was set up outside the city, in order for people who had to settle accounts to do so outside the city, so that feelings of anger or disappointment would not be felt inside the city itself.⁵³

SPECIAL CUSTOMS BY ITS RESIDENTS THAT MADE JERUSALEM UNIQUE

There are certain customs and stringencies that the people who lived in Jerusalem took upon themselves, as they recognized that better behavior and a higher level of spirituality were required in the Holy City.

⁴³ Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 7:14

⁴⁴ Ketuvot 110a

⁴⁵ Jerusalem, Ketuvot 22a

⁴⁶ Maimonides, Hilchot Ishut 13:20

⁴⁷ Tur, Even Ha-Ezer 85

⁴⁸ Jerusalem Talmud Ketuvot 67b

⁴⁹ Bava Metzia 26a

⁵⁰ Rashi commentary on Bava Metzia 26a

⁵¹ Tosafot on Bava Metzia 26a

⁵² Moed Katan 11a

⁵³ Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 52:5

While everyone in the rest of the world slept on Yom Kippur night, with Jews preparing for a day of prayer and repentance, the leaders/prominent people of Jerusalem stayed up all night, to insure that the Kohen Gadol-High Priest would not fall asleep,⁵⁴ which would have been a violation of Jewish law.⁵⁵ On Sukkot, these noble people would bind their lulavim-palm branches with gold strands to hold it together,⁵⁶ unlike the customary strands from the lulav itself that people use today. The entire population of Jerusalem observed a very unusual pattern of ritual behavior regarding the Four Species,⁵⁷ in that all daily activities were performed with the lulav and etrog in hand (unlike the custom today, which is to take the Four Species only during the Hallel and Hoshanot prayers in the synagogue). They would walk around the city with Four Species in hand, walk to the synagogue, say the Shema and Amidah – all with the lulav and etrog in hand. They would put these on the side only for Torah reading and the Priestly blessing. They even went to visit the sick, comforted a mourner in his home and learned Torah with lulav and etrog in hand.

There is another interesting custom that was adopted only by the “special” people who lived in Jerusalem, and which has also been adopted by many Jews today: to honor the Torah scroll by following it from the ark to the place the Torah is read and then again walking behind the Torah as it is returned to the Ark.⁵⁸

Some have heard of the following customs that were performed only by the single ladies of Jerusalem on the afternoons of Yom Kippur and the Fifteenth of the Month of Av (Tu B’av).⁵⁹ These young women would borrow white clothes from each other, so that none of the single men could know who was wealthy and who was poor. They would go out into the fields and ask the single men to choose a bride, not based upon beauty and looks, but based on family and values. Unlike in other cities where each family decided when children should begin fasting on Yom Kippur (before the mandatory fast at the age of majority, 13 for boys and 12 for girls), all the children of Jerusalem who reached the age of 11 would fast half a day.⁶⁰ At age 12 they would all fast the entire day and then each child would pass before each elderly person in Jerusalem and receive a blessing. Then the parents would take the children directly to the synagogue in order to inspire them to keep the commandments properly.

Another custom unique to Jerusalem was for the benefit of the poor and the guests who came to the city on holidays three times a year. Rather than merely give out leftover food to feed the poor or guests, which was an undignified way to provide them with meals (ask anyone who has had to wait on line at a soup kitchen or for food stamps), the residents of Jerusalem would put a special napkin on their doors, indicating that anyone who wished could come and dine with the family. When the napkin was removed, it was a sign that the time of dining was over. In this way, people felt that they received their food as welcomed guests, rather than as a handout.⁶¹

Jerusalem was also the site of other unique customs that benefitted people in need. A place was set up in the city called the “Stone of Claims” in an era when Internet message boards were not available. Anyone who lost an item went to this place, as did anyone who found a lost object. The “finder” would stand up on the stone and announce what was found. If the owner supplied proper signs indicating the object was his, he claimed it.⁶² Similarly, based on a verse⁶³ that the Midrash⁶⁴ explains

⁵⁴ Yoma 19b and Rashi commentary there

⁵⁵ Mishna, Yoma 1:7

⁵⁶ Sukkah 37a

⁵⁷ Sukkah 41a

⁵⁸ Soferim 12:14

⁵⁹ Taanit 26b

⁶⁰ Soferim 18:5

⁶¹ Bava Batra 93b

⁶² Bava Metzia 28b

refers to Jerusalem, two Chambers of Secret Gifts were established in the city.⁶⁵ People who no longer needed any items in the house donated them to one chamber, and those unfortunate who did not possess many needed objects could come and take what they needed from that chamber. The second chamber worked in the same manner, but involved money. People of means could leave money for the poor, and the poor took only the minimum they required to survive. Amazingly, there was never any reported gouging of these chambers, where thieves robbed everything in the chamber, or that one poor person hoarded all its contents.

Finally, Rabbi Eliezer says⁶⁶ that King Solomon saw many charitable people of Jerusalem, and he built two gates of the city, one for these generous people, and the other for the downtrodden and those in need of help, such as grooms, mourners and those who were ostracized. On Shabbat, all these groups would go up to the Temple and sit between these two gates, as the generous people helped out all those in need. Later, after the Temple was destroyed, these same people would gather at the back of the synagogue, where the practice continued. The mourners would receive a special blessing and then would say the Mourner's Kaddish prayer. This may be the origin of the practice of mourners saying this prayer together, and, in some congregations today, it may be the reason this recitation always takes place at the back of the synagogue.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CITY THAT RENDER JERUSALEM SPECIAL

There are numerous statements made by the rabbis which indicate particular attributes about Jerusalem that make it special and different from other places in the world.

Concerning the verse cited above that Jerusalem "binds together" various elements (Psalms 122:3), one interpretation⁶⁷ is that this is the city that unites people and creates peace between all Jews. While this is certainly not the case today, in general, it may have been true once and will hopefully become the reality once again in the future. The Midrash⁶⁸ explains that because of its special holiness, anyone who prays in Jerusalem, it is as if he or she is praying directly before the throne of G-d. Although beauty is generally held to be in the eye of the beholder, the Talmud declares that 90% of the physical beauty in the world was given to the city of Jerusalem.⁶⁹ While some may disagree, many today, in fact, see Jerusalem as the most or one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Similarly, the Talmud tells us that one who did not see Jerusalem of old in its splendor never saw a beautiful city.⁷⁰

Jerusalem is constantly referred to as "The Holy City," both today and in the Talmud.⁷¹ Because of this holiness, until the First Temple was destroyed, there were ten supernatural miracles that constantly took place in the city of Jerusalem (eight in the Temple).⁷² While these may not be considered grandiose by today's standards of supernatural miracles, they certainly defied the laws of nature. For example, despite no refrigeration in a Middle Eastern climate, and thousands of pounds of meat slaughtered daily in the Temple, there was never a foul odor emanating from all this raw meat in the city. No flies ever gathered around this raw meat either. On the contrary, there was always a pleasant fragrance in the entire city, emanating from the *Kitoret* spices that were brought as a sacrifice.⁷³ This

⁶³ Deuteronomy 15:10

⁶⁴ Midrash, Sifri Re-eh 64

⁶⁵ Mishna Shekalim 5:6

⁶⁶ Soferim 19:12

⁶⁷ Jerusalem Talmud Chagiga 26a

⁶⁸ Midrash Tehilim 91:7

⁶⁹ Kiddushin 49b

⁷⁰ Sukkah 51b

⁷¹ Berachot 9b, Beitza 14b, Tamid 27b

⁷² Avot DeRabbi Natan 35:1, Yoma 21a

⁷³ Yoma 39b

fragrance was so powerful that women in the city did not need to wear perfume. Furthermore, a fire never broke out in the city nor did a snake ever bite anyone in Jerusalem. On the Three Festivals when more than a million people must have descended upon the city, no one ever had to sleep on the street without a bed, and there was always ample room to pray and bow. Another Midrash⁷⁴ echoes this sentiment when it says that just as many rivers emptying into the sea never totally fill the sea, the city of Jerusalem never felt full despite all adult Jews in the Land of Israel who came for the Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot holidays.

HOW WILL JERUSALEM BE BUILT IN THE FUTURE?

While the entire political world, both inside and outside of Israel, continuously debates how and if the city of Jerusalem should be divided, they are referring to a vertical division between the eastern and western parts of the city. However, Judaism has always spoken about a different kind of division of Jerusalem, a horizontal division, between Jerusalem above and Jerusalem below. This is significant because G-d vowed that He would not return to the perfect Heavenly Jerusalem until He first returns to the improved and a spiritually superior earthly Jerusalem.⁷⁵ And today, as the building of each new apartment in the city of Jerusalem engenders world reaction and often elicits condemnation, and as the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) often deliberates where and how to build in Jerusalem, the Talmud long ago discussed this question and gives guidance about the proper way to build in Jerusalem.

The verses in Isaiah⁷⁶ speak about the afflicted who are not comforted. The Midrash⁷⁷ explains that this refers to the Jews living in the Diaspora who are frustrated because they cannot build in Jerusalem. G-d responds and says that He will direct the Jews how to build in Jerusalem and comfort them (by carefully reading the words in the next verses).

Those verses in Isaiah say that “I will lay your stones with fair colors and lay your foundations with sapphires. And I will make your *shimshotayich*-windows of *kadkode*, and your gates of beryl, and your borders of precious stones.” The verses conclude “And all your children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children.” On this last verse, the Talmud⁷⁸ says that we should not read *banayich*-children, but, rather, *bonayich*-builders. Thus the key to the building in Jerusalem are the stones that are described in these verses. What are they telling us?

WHICH STONE WILL BUILD JERUSALEM?

The Talmud⁷⁹ discusses and argues about the meanings and names of the stones and the unusual words in the verses. When discussing the strange stone of *kadkode*, the description is very odd. The phrase “*kadkode shimoshtayich*” is a gateway or window that provides light (from the word *Shemesh*-sun). The argument in the Talmud is between two angels, Gavriel and Michael, or between two rabbis, about the definition of the word *kadkode*. One says it is the stone *shoham*-onyx and one says it is the stone *yashfe*-jade. What are these stones? In the fourth row of 12 stones located on the *Choshen*-Breastplate of the Kohen Gadol-High Priest, these are the last two stones.⁸⁰ Then the Talmud says the name *kadkode* in the verse signifies “*kedain ukedain*” -- i.e. that both explanations are correct. G-d rules that Jerusalem will be built from both stones. What is the underlying idea of this argument? Why is it significant that this is an argument between two angels, which is almost never found in the Talmud?

⁷⁴ Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 1:20

⁷⁵ Midrash Tehilim 122:4

⁷⁶ Isaiah 54:11-13

⁷⁷ Midrash Tehilim 53:2

⁷⁸ Berachot 64a

⁷⁹ Bava Batra 75a.

⁸⁰ Exodus 28:17-20

If this argument took place in Talmudic times, then how could it be that the prophet Isaiah wrote the word *kadkode* (i.e. both opinions are correct) even before the argument took place? What, then, is the secret to understanding this passage and the means by which Jerusalem should be built?

Rashbam⁸¹ explains that *shimshotayich* actually signifies the walls of Jerusalem. The argument, then, was which stones would be used to build the walls of Jerusalem in the future. And Rashbam then says that even from earlier times in the period of Isaiah, the question was asked about how Jerusalem should be built – with which stone, and this was Isaiah’s prophecy: there will be arguments in the future about how Jerusalem will be built, but it will be built according to all the opinions together. But what is the underlying argument and the significance of the stones?

The stones in the Breastplate were set up according order of the Twelve Tribes. The *shoham*-onyx, the 11th stone in the Breastplate, is the stone of Joseph, and the twelfth stone, *yashfe*-jade, was the stone of Benjamin. The underlying concepts of these particular tribes relate to the building of Jerusalem. Maharsha⁸² enlightens us, and says the fourth row containing these stones symbolize the redemption. The argument is about which concept, which stone, will light Jerusalem and be the foundation of its building. First there will be the building by the Messiah of Joseph and then the light of the city of Jerusalem will shine, which is in the section of Benjamin (according to one opinion cited above). This is “*kedain Ukedain*.” Both concepts are necessary to build Jerusalem.

The concepts of Joseph and Benjamin are two diametrically opposite systems. Both are children of Rachel, but Joseph always symbolizes the one who provides physical sustenance to the Jews (and to the Egyptians).⁸³ Joseph argues that the redemption comes about because of the building up of nationhood as well as physical building, and initially through Egypt and Shechem. Benjamin, on the other hand, the only son of Jacob born in Israel and who never bowed to Eisav, is known as “*Yedid Adonai*-the beloved of the Lord,”⁸⁴ symbolizing pure holiness and spirituality (see the chapter “Judaism: A Religion or a Nation?” for a fuller discussion of these two philosophies). Thus, the argument rages, then and today, about how Jerusalem will be built -- from the material, bricks and mortar, symbolized by Joseph, OR will Jerusalem be built spiritually, symbolized by Benjamin, and also symbolized by the Messiah descended from David when he will build the Holy Temple. (The Davidic Messiah actually has both components, as he fights wars and also builds the Temple.)

The builders will argue about how Jerusalem is to be built. Both sides seem to be mutually exclusive. The argument takes place by the angels, arguing about the Jerusalem above, but also by actual rabbis, arguing about the Jerusalem below. And both Jerusalems have to be built properly for G-d to return to either city.⁸⁵ The final decision is that Jerusalem will be built according to both concepts together, according to all opinions, with any one vision of building alone insufficient. And whoever who does not understand that both Messiahs (Joseph and David) are necessary, does not understand how to build Jerusalem. Joseph’s materialism, nationality, culture, must be the basis, but Benjamin’s (ben David’s) spirituality must be there as well, in the lead. The light that comes from this combination, *shimshotayich*, is the essential vision of the Jewish people that originated at Sinai, that Jews must be both a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Rashbam commentary to Bava Batra 75a

⁸² Maharsha commentary to Bava Batra 75a

⁸³ Genesis 47:12, 41:57

⁸⁴ Deuteronomy 33:12

⁸⁵ Midrash Tehilim 122:4

⁸⁶ Exodus 19:6

This struggle between these two visions, the two sides vying to build Jerusalem, is demonstrated in another passage⁸⁷ in the guise of two kings. G-d appears to King Yerovam and says that you, Me, and King David will walk together in the Garden of Eden. Yerovam, who is descended from Joseph, was previously responsible for the material needs of the country before he split the kingdom. He was a man of action, of nationhood, like his great-great-grandfather Joseph. Yerovam sets up his kingdom specifically in Shechem,⁸⁸ the very place that Joseph is sold by his brothers and the place where Joseph is buried and that his descendants inherit.⁸⁹ G-d wishes to reunite the two kingdoms, demonstrating that it is impossible to have a true Jewish kingdom, a Jewish nation in which G-d will walk among the Jewish people, without both components. Yerovam responds by asking, "Who will ultimately be at the head?" When G-d answers that it must be Ben Yishai (King David) at the head, Yerovam refuses G-d's offer, and the opportunity is lost. Only when the Jewish people realize that both the foundation of Joseph is needed in combination with the spirituality of Benjamin, will Jerusalem be rebuilt properly, and only then the final Messiah descended from David will follow the Messiah descended from Joseph.

There is a story of a non-Jewish tourist who came to the Kotel-Western Wall, looked at it and commented to the Jew next to him, a Jerusalem resident who spoke English: "I have visited China, and their Great Wall is far more impressive than this." The Jew then responded and asked, "Maybe so. But did anyone ever kiss that wall?" For the Jew, the Western Wall and the city of Jerusalem is much more than a landmark, a tourist site or even a home. It is part of his soul, part of his body. There is no other nation that feels this way about any other city in the world. No other people equates forgetting one's city with losing one's tongue and losing the ability to speak, just as no other nation equates losing its capital city with losing one's limb, one's right hand.⁹⁰ And no other religion completes two of its most sacred rituals, Yom Kippur and the Pesach Seder, thinking only about a far-off city (for most), Jerusalem, as each Jew pronounces the words "Next Year in Jerusalem."

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel currently works with Rabbi Berel Wein and the Destiny Foundation as the Director of Education, whose mission is "to bring Jewish history to life in an exciting, entertaining and interactive way." Rabbi Amsel has also served as a teacher, a school principal, and an adjunct professor. He has also taught over 2000 educators how to teach more effectively. Rabbi Amsel has worked in all areas of formal and informal Jewish education and has developed numerous curricula including a methodology how to teach Jewish Values using mass media. Recently, he founded the STARS Program (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers), where more than 3000 students in 12 Russian speaking countries learn about their Jewish heritage for five hours weekly. Rabbi Amsel previously served as the Educational Director of Hillel in the Former Soviet Union. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and has four children and four grandchildren.

⁸⁷ Sanhedrin 102a

⁸⁸ II Kings 12:25

⁸⁹ Genesis 48:22

⁹⁰ Psalms 137:5-6