



## Yerushalayim — the complete picture

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As we get ready to celebrate the reunification of the holy city of Jerusalem, we contemplate the meaning of the rebirth of this once-barren city. We consider the reasons why we lost Jerusalem some 2000 years ago, as well as the ramifications of regaining our eternal capital.

The Gemara in Masechet Yoma (9b) presents a few explanations for the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash and the succeeding exile, the most famous being *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. Another Gemara (Nedarim 81a) brings an alternate explanation: Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav explains that G-d Himself declared that the reason for the destruction was that we didn't say *birkot hatorah*, the brachot on the Torah, before learning. These Gemaras are quite puzzling. The sins responsible for the destruction of the First Temple — the three cardinal sins — seem like valid reasons, and likewise, it is not difficult to understand how hatred can lead to the breaking apart of a nation. However, how is omitting *birkot hatorah* a valid reason for 2000 years of exile? Furthermore, what is the real cause of the destruction: baseless hatred, or not blessing before learning Torah? Finally, how can these two reasons be integrated?

The Ba"ch (OHC 47) explains that when we learn Torah for the wrong reason, whether as an intellectual pursuit, for honour, or as an escape from other responsibilities, we are separating the divine world from the material world. The purpose of Torah study is to connect ourselves to and make every part of our lives more divine. Thus, the blessing on the Torah is designed to direct one's Torah learning in the right direction, towards this ultimate connection.

In Hebrew, the word *Yerushalayim* is made up of two words: *ירושלם*, to see, and *שלם*, complete. Hence, Jerusalem is to "see the complete picture". Chazal expand on this idea based on the pasuk in Tehillim (122:3): *יְרוּשָׁלַם הַבְנוּיָה כְּעִיר שְׁחִבְרָה לָהּ יִחְדָּו*, "Jerusalem, when built, is like a city connected together." Rav Yochanan (Ta'anit 5a) says, "G-d declares, 'I will not come to the Jerusalem of Above until I have arrived at the Jerusalem of Below.'" From here we learn that there is a Jerusalem of Above and a Jerusalem of Below: there is the reality of Jerusalem as we see it today, the physical Jerusalem, but there is also a divine Jerusalem — a potential of what Jerusalem can be, and the destiny of where Jerusalem is headed. Jerusalem is a model for the whole world, and thus every creation is made up of its current state and its potential: what it is now and what it

could be. To "see" completely, to live the idea of Jerusalem, is to recognize in everything both the mundane and the divine; to see beyond the surface to the hidden depths, and to strive to realize that potential.

To omit the blessing before learning Torah, therefore, is to forsake the purpose of the Torah, namely bringing the idea of Jerusalem into our lives and joining the Divine with the mundane. Accordingly, the root of baseless hatred may be the inability to see the divine potential in the physical reality, for if one were to view every single person not only as who they are at the moment, but as someone with divine purpose and potential, then there would be no way to come to hate them. Rav Kook writes that Jerusalem will only be rebuilt when we love each individual because we view them as an integral part in the national goal of Am Yisrael — perfecting the world under the Royalty of G-d.

On Yom Yerushalayim we celebrate not only the unification of a city, but also the unification of a people with their destiny, of theory with actuality, and of dreams with their realization.

מועדים לשמחה ולגאולה שלמה! 



# “And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return in compassion”

Rabbi Elyakim Levanon  
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Elon Moreh

## I. The yearning for redemption in Shemona Esrei

Our love for Yerushalayim knows no bounds. We find the yearning for our redemption in all of our prayers. The Shemona Esrei prayer has nineteen brachot: Thirteen of these are requests, and four of these requests are dedicated to the theme of redemption:

1. Ingathering of the exiles: “Sound the great Shofar for our freedom...”;
2. Restoring our judicial system: “Restore our judges ... our counselors as they were at first...”;
3. Rebuilding Jerusalem: “And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return...”;
4. Mashiach: “The offspring of your servant David may You speedily cause to flourish...”.

In the final brachot of Shemona Esrei we add a fifth request, to return the service to the Beit Hamikdash: “Return the service to Your house...”

Based on these five requests, we can assume that there are five stages of redemption; but in practical terms, it seems that we can only identify four:

1. The Jewish people's return to the Land of Israel;
2. Building the State of Israel;
3. Mashiach is coming;
4. The building of the Beit Hamikdash.

It is unclear what exactly we are asking from Hashem in the request to return to Jerusalem. What is the need for this stage before the coming of Mashiach?

## II. When was the bracha about Jerusalem written?

When the Romans surrounded Jerusalem towards the end of the Second Temple, Raban Yochanan Ben Zakai went out to negotiate with the Caesar Vespasian. Although one might assume that the most natural request to the conquering army would be to spare our national capital, Jerusalem, Raban Yochanan's request was to spare the city of Yavneh and its sages. He understood that Jerusalem would fall, so he focused on establishing a future for Torah in Israel. His effort proved successful, and Yavneh was where the Oral Law was concretized and preserved for generations to come.

**This process will begin in the same place where our hopes and dreams were united: in Jerusalem.**

Raban Yochanan's successor as leader of Yavneh's Torah center was Raban Gamliel. One of Raban Gamliel's objectives as leader was to reorganize the brachot of the Shemona Esrei, which had been written during the building of the Second Beit Hamikdash. Now that the Temple lay in ruins, Raban Gamliel wrote the bracha that expressed his generation's yearning to return to the way things were until the fateful move from Jerusalem to Yavneh, and that would guide subsequent generations to ask Hashem for help with finding their way back from Yavneh to Jerusalem: “And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return in compassion.”

## III. The relevance of this bracha today

The holy city of Jerusalem unites all the Jews in the world. For generations, the prayer of every Jew across the world has been directed towards Jerusalem. Our national longing for the city has been a unifying factor for nearly two millennia.

When we look at the Jewish people today, we will see many disputes: We are divided politically between the left and the right, and are divided religiously between secular and observant. And within the Torah-observant there are many different sects with often opposing views. We must ask ourselves: If Mashiach came today on his white donkey, where would he go? If he is from the right, the left won't accept him; if he is a Chassid, others wouldn't believe him; a Sephardi, and the Ashkenazi community won't accept him, and so forth.

In this reality, an essential step must take place prior to the coming of Mashiach: unity within the Jewish people! We must learn to respect one another and each others' opinions. We must realize that every Jew is like a piece of the puzzle, and when the puzzle is complete, it will form the most beautiful picture. This is what we yearn for. And this process will begin in the same place where our hopes and dreams were united — “And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return in compassion...”.

Jerusalem is the city that has brought our people together!

On Yom Yerushalayim, we will say this prayer and beseech Hashem to show us the way to a full redemption through a unity of forces and love between one another. 🇮🇱



## “Blessed are You Hashem, the Builder of Jerusalem.” But what about us?

Rabbi Aviad Pituchey-Chotam  
Shaliach, Bnei Akiva Schools of Toronto

Every year on Yom Yerushalayim my father reminds me of a story:

It was the first Shavuot after Jerusalem was liberated. My father describes the electric atmosphere that was felt all around. The streets were so packed with people that the police had to put up road blocks every few meters to manage the flow. Everyone was trying to enter into Old City, to get a glimpse of the place that we have been longing for for generations. My father was walking with his friends from Bnei Akiva when they approached a group of soldiers and all of a sudden he saw a familiar face: his own father! He hadn't seen his father for a while, for my grandfather, a soldier at the time, was one of the fighters in the battle that freed the Old City. My father ran towards his father and they embraced, and my father reminds me of his very exciting reunion every year on Yom Yerushalayim.

A few weeks ago we celebrated Pesach where the central Mitzvah is “And you should tell your offspring [the story of the Exodus]...” (Shemot 13:3), and year after year we look for new and creative ways to make our Seder night exciting and interesting to help us relate

to what happened so long ago.

Yom Yerushalayim, however, is a day that we can remember and commemorate naturally, in the manner that the Torah commands us to remember the Exodus. My father can tell me his own memories of liberating Jerusalem, without having to think up creative ways to make it interesting, for they are his own memories! This is a tremendous privilege, and we have an obligation to continue the tradition of the Seder and tell the story of our redemption.

However, Yom Yerushalayim comes with its own distinct challenges, ones which are different than the Seder night.

At the Seder there is a written story for us to read. We elaborate on it by telling the story from different angles, sharing different ideas and holding halachic discussions about the different laws and practices. Each family has their own traditions for this night, which get passed down through the children to the next generation.

Yom Yerushalayim, though, is hardly mentioned in the halachic literature and has no family traditions of any sort. This issue forces us to reflect on the famous words that Hillel said in Masechet Avot

(1:14): “If I am not for myself, who is for me?” — If we do not act for ourselves, then who will act for us?

Every year, my rebbe, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein זצ"ל would discuss with us the meaning of the verse, “In days to come, when your sons ask...” (Shemot 13:14). We would discuss our responsibilities as parents and teachers, to think of not only the questions we get now, but questions we will be asked in the future, the questions that might challenge and stretch our thinking.

“There is a tomorrow that is now and there is a tomorrow that comes later” (Rashi in Parashat Bo).

There are no structured minhagim for Yom Yerushalayim, or halachot which define the day. Therefore we must think of Jerusalem in terms of her status today and how we will see her in the future, in generations to come. It is our responsibility “In every generation” to ask ourselves, what is the meaning of a free Jerusalem for us? We cannot allow this day to only be taught in the schools and for the youth to celebrate, we must identify with the words of the Israeli poet Natan Yonatan: “Everyone has a city, and it is called Jerusalem!” 🌟



### SPOTLIGHT ON: YESHIVAT ELON MOREH

The Beit Midrash of Elon Moreh, located near the city of Shechem in the Shomron, was founded in 1980 with the stated goal of playing a significant role in Israel's national and spiritual revival.

Under the leadership of Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, the Beit Midrash trains Torah scholars in varied educational programs which instill devotion to Torah ideals, a dedication to greater Israel and a sense of commitment to the entire people of Israel.

Students are driven to strive for excellence and they, in turn, act to exert influence on ever-widening circles in general society, thus leaving an indelible mark on all levels of the nation.





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**RAV RONEN NEUWIRTH**  
*is the rabbi of Ohel Ari  
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and the Executive Director  
of Beit Hillel, a  
Modern-Orthodox spiritual  
leadership organization.  
He was the head  
Rabbinical Training at  
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