

# The Site as Text

## Introduction

This booklet contains educational guidelines and ideas to help you deal with the issues *Pluralism and Peoplehood* at the key sites your group will visit.

The guidelines are arranged by site. Within each site a number of different issues are presented. Each issue is accompanied by ideas, points and questions for group discussion at the site.

The appendix to these guidelines contains the sources referred to in the discussion of each site, together with some ideas and pointers for clear understanding and use of the texts.

Those are just recommendations of three different sites in Israel, you can use the same method in any site you visit. It is important to include all the elements and questions related to the site in order to make every site significant and relevant.



## **The “Site as Text”**

### **Background**

The following Site Guidelines reflect Melitz’s educational approach known as “Site as Text”. This approach sees a site-visit as part of a holistic learning experience for Jewish people visiting Israel. During a site-visit participants undergo a process of personal exploration, confronting their Jewish identity, their connection to the Jewish people, and their relationship with Jewish history, culture, tradition, values, and the Land and the State of Israel.

### **What is a “site”?**

A site is a physical, substantial entity that can be touched, felt and experienced by using all of the senses.

A site is also a place that we can try to interpret, decoding and analysing its meanings in the same way we would approach a more conventional type of text, whether it be an article, song, picture, poem or story.

A site does not exist in a vacuum but rather in a particular cultural context; it is a physical embodiment of collective national, social and cultural symbols and values. The meeting between visitors and a site can shed light on their culture and values and, likewise, can bring the visitors face to face with new cultural values and provide new insights about their beliefs and positions.

Sites should be used as an educational resource that enables participants to explore themselves as individuals and as members of the Jewish people.

### **Which sites are suitable?**

It’s possible to utilise the “site as text” method anywhere. However, we have chosen sites that reflect the following principles:

1. Relevancy to the participants’ lives and to the questions of values and identity that are important to them,
2. A combination of historical depth and cultural breadth; this enables participants to connect to diverse aspects of meaning,



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3. Each site represents an encounter between people and places, the aim being to involve the participants on a personal level,
4. The sites are interactive and participative; they require the participants to enter into a dialogue with the site and with each other.

### **What's the guide's role?**

The role of the guide in “site as text” is vital. The goal is to combine the two methodologies of tour guiding and group facilitation. On the one hand, the guide presents information, sets the sites in their historical, geographical and cultural framework, and literally leads the group through the sites. On the other hand, his or her job is to encourage the group to interact with the site, to ask questions, to interpret what they can see for themselves, and to discuss the issues that the site raises. The successful “site as text” facilitator will need to give attention to three key techniques:

#### ***1. Encouraging active participation***

by allocating tasks (eg. readings) using Socratic method (asking leading questions even when trying to present information), and developing discussions by asking open questions and listening actively to what the group has to say.

#### ***2. Enabling meaningful discussion:***

finding appropriate places to stop and talk – enabling the group to sit down so that they can see each other (eg in a semi-circle), remaining at stations long enough for participants to get into the issues, rather than rushing through in order to get through the material.

#### ***3. Connecting the sites to contemporary issues***

and making them as relevant as possible to the participants. Use the discussion topics and questions in the site guidelines to help you.



## **A. The Kotel**

### **1. As a symbol of Klal Israel**

To many Jews the Kotel symbolises *the unity of the Jewish people* – both today and throughout history. The participants' first visit to the Kotel often arouses strong feelings. The combination of these two facts can be used to enable participants to explore the concept of Klal Israel and their place within it.

***The visit to the Kotel can be connected to this theme in the following way:***

Participants should be prepared for the visit. They should understand what the Kotel is (its historical background as a wall of the Temple Mount – including some background on the Temple and its importance in Judaism – and its contemporary significance as the most important site of prayer in the Jewish world).

The group's arrival at the Kotel is an emotional experience and should be treated as such. Alongside factual explanations of the site and its history – in particular pointing out the antiquity of the stones themselves – a more spiritual aspect can be introduced with the use of readings and/or stories (see appendix). In addition, the guide should discuss with the group the kinds of people they can see, what they are doing, what the Kotel means to them.

Next, the group should be given time to approach the Kotel, place notes between the stones, say private prayers, and so on.

When the group reconvenes – preferably still at the Kotel Plaza – the participants are invited to share their feelings with the group. The guide should focus them on the specific questions:

- What does the Kotel symbolise to you?
- How does it make you feel as a Jew?

In conclusion, the guide should sum up the participants' reactions – many of which will no doubt relate to the idea of Jewish unity – and suggest that perhaps above all the Kotel reflects the idea of *Jewish Peoplehood*, combining the factors of history, land and religion in a common focus for the thoughts and feelings of the Jewish People.



## 2. The centrality of Jerusalem and the Temple

Jerusalem is the conceptual centre of the Jewish world, as we learn from the Talmud:

*Jerusalem - directs his thoughts towards the Temple... One who stands in the Temple - directs his thoughts towards the Holy of Holies.... One who stands in the East - faces West. In the West - faces East. In the South - faces North. In the North - faces south. All Israel direct their thoughts in prayer towards one place.*  
(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 30a).

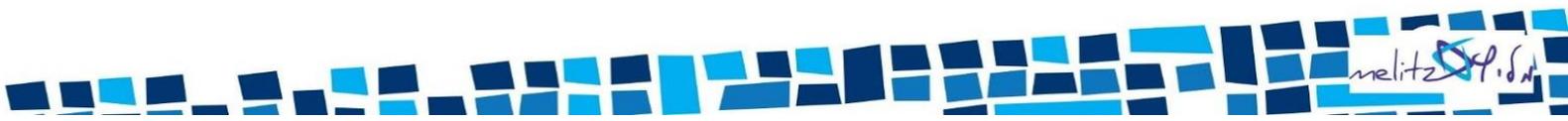
היה עומד בחוץ לארץ - יכוין את לבו כנגד ארץ ישראל... היה עומד בארץ ישראל - יכוין את לבו כנגד ירושלים... היה עומד בירושלים - יכוין את לבו כנגד בית המקדש... עומד בבית המקדש - יכוין את לבו כנגד בית קדשי הקדשים... עומד במזרח - מחזיר פניו למערב. במערב - מחזיר פניו למזרח. בדרום - מחזיר פניו לצפון. בצפון - מחזיר פניו לדרום. נמצאו כל ישראל מכוונים את לבם למקום אחד.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ל"א

*One who stands outside the Land of Israel - directs his thoughts while praying towards the Land of Israel.... One who stands in the Land of Israel - directs his thoughts towards Jerusalem.... One who stands in*

This text is particularly pertinent in that it connects the site (the Kotel) to the experience of being Jewish in the Diaspora. Following an experiential and informative introduction to the Kotel and its significance (see the previous section), this text can be used as a trigger for a discussion of the nature of the Jewish People. Below are some suggested questions that can be used to develop a discussion:

- Why is it important for a group to have a place that acts as a centre or a focus? Give examples of places that act as foci in your life and your community's life.
- Is it important for the Jewish people to have such a focus? What should this focus be? Need it be physical/geographical, or could it be more spiritual and abstract (God, or the value of peace, for example)?
- How do you react to the idea that there should be one focus for all Jews – and that this should be Israel and Jerusalem?
- How do you relate to Israel in your home in the Diaspora? When (if ever) does it cross your mind? Are there any activities (like prayer in the talmudic text) that you do with your mind on Israel?
- In what ways have your views and feelings changed as a result of the visit to the Kotel?



### **3. Whose Kotel?**

As a unique site that represents the values of *Klal Israel* and *Jewish unity*, the Kotel is also the focus of controversy and conflict among different groups of Jews. The “site as text” methodology provides an opportunity to discuss several issues of conflict in the Jewish world and in Israeli society. How can these conflicts be resolved so as to preserve the value of *Klal Israel* and to maintain the Kotel as the joint heritage of all Jews?

Below are several suggested areas for discussion. Guides and group staff should think carefully about whether and how to address these issues. Some participants visiting the Kotel for the first time might find the contrast between the symbolism of Jewish unity and the reality of Israeli social conflict very difficult to deal with. At any rate, the issues should be approached gently and sensitively.

#### **i. Religious and secular**

The vast majority of people praying at the Kotel are usually Ultra-Orthodox Jews. This is in contrast to the situation in 1967 when Jews of all persuasions flocked to the Kotel to express their joy and emotion at its liberation. See the poem, “The Paratroopers’ Cry”. These days, as we can see, religious (particularly ultra-orthodox) Jews dominate here. Many secular Israelis feel disconnected from the site and do not wish – or feel able – to come here.

#### *Discussion questions:*

- Who do you see praying at the Kotel? What kind of Jews do you see here?
- How do you feel about the predominance of Haredi Jews at the Kotel? How do you explain this phenomenon?
- Why might secular Jews feel disconnected from the Kotel or reluctant to come here?
- How do you feel now as we sit at the Kotel? Connected? Disconnected? To what extent do you feel you belong here, and to what extent are you an outsider?
- How can we ensure that the Kotel belongs to all of us and is accessible to all Jews? Are there changes that we need to make – either in ourselves or in the way the Kotel is run?



## **ii. The place of women and non-orthodox Jews**

The Kotel is the heritage of the entire Jewish People. At the same time, it is run along the lines of an orthodox synagogue, and the religious authority over what goes on here lies with the orthodox Rabbi of the Kotel, appointed by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate.

As such, the Kotel plaza is divided by a mechitza between men's and women's sections (the women's section is much smaller). Women are not allowed to form public prayer groups, wear tallitot or read from the Torah, even in the women's section. Similarly, non-orthodox (Reform and Conservative) Jews are not allowed to hold mixed prayer groups. In recent years, when women have attempted to hold public prayer groups in the women's section, and when Conservative Jews have tried to hold services – even at the back of the plaza – they have met with opposition, intimidation and even violence.

One solution has been a compromise in which the Conservative movement has agreed temporarily not to hold services in the main plaza, and instead has received permission to pray in the area under Robinson's Arch, at the south-western corner of the Temple Mount. However, the movement still asserts the ultimate right of all Jews to pray at the Kotel in the manner in which they see fit.

### *Discussion questions:*

(The participants' notice should be drawn to the mechitza, the fact that the Kotel Rabbi is Orthodox, and the situation regarding women's' and non-orthodox prayer groups at the Kotel).

- Who should be allowed to pray at the Kotel?
- Who should have the authority to make decisions about what is acceptable and unacceptable here?
- On the issue of non-orthodox and women's prayer groups, which side should give in or compromise – them or the Rabbinate? Why?
- What kinds of compromise solutions can you imagine to the conflict?
- How does the conflict over the Kotel reflect on the concept of Klal Israel?
- How does it make you feel as an individual Jew?



## **B. Massada**

### **1. Masada vs. Yavneh**

To many Jews, Masada epitomises the value of Jewish heroism. Here, Elazar Ben Yair and his Zealot followers were ready to fight to the death for the sake of freedom. Ultimately, when the struggle was lost, they chose suicide rather than surrender and slavery to the Romans. Yet the Talmud entirely omits to mention the heroism of the defenders of Masada. This omission hints at the controversial nature of the Zealots' stand – a controversy that began in the second Temple period and continues until our own time.

The roots of the controversy are in the conflict between the Zealots and their more moderate Jewish opponents. The Zealots prized political independence as a supreme value, and were ready to resist Roman domination at any price. Their opponents – led by Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai – held that Jewish life and Torah were the supreme values, and were prepared to compromise with the Romans in order to defend them. As related in the Talmud (see appendix), when Ben Zakkai escaped from the siege of Jerusalem, his request to the Roman Emperor was to establish a school of Jewish learning and autonomous rule at Yavneh – under Roman sovereignty.

If Masada became the symbol of Jewish pride and uncompromising heroism, Yavneh developed as a metaphor for Jewish survival through compromise and the spiritual values of Torah. The debate between Masada and Yavneh carries on into our time, Masada representing the traditional Zionist values of Jewish political and military independence, and Yavneh reflecting a more Diaspora-oriented Jewish identity based on learning and culture.

During the visit to Masada, the following texts can be used to stimulate discussion on this topic (see appendix)

- Ben Yair's speech on Masada
- The story of Ben Zakkai's flight from Jerusalem
- Opinions on the roles of Israel and the Diaspora



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### *Points for discussion:*

- How do participants relate to each of the symbols (Masada and Yavneh) as *models for Jewish identity*?
- How can each model be interpreted in modern terms? (e.g. Masada can relate not only to military fighting, but also to an uncompromising attitude over intermarriage, a belief in aliyah, the value of Jewish pride; Yavneh can be interpreted as the value of learning and compromise, the de-emphasis of the need independence and sovereignty, a belief in co-existence with non-Jewish culture...)
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- In which situations/contexts might each model be appropriate?
- What should be the basis – the common denominator – of *Jewish Peoplehood* today: one of the models, or something else entirely?
- Which of the models – if any – inspires the participants and why? What does this model have to say to them in terms of their responsibilities to the Jewish people?



## **2. Groundless hatred and sectarianism**

Masada – as the symbol of the Zealots' revolt – is also an appropriate place to discuss the issue of **groundless hatred** and sectarianism in Jewish life.

The Second Temple period witnessed the flowering of Jewish sects – Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots. Relations between the sects (and within them) were sometimes harmonious, but often characterised by hostility and conflict. The Talmud teaches that whereas the First Temple was destroyed because of the three most serious sins in Judaism (idolatry, bloodshed and sexual crimes – incest and adultery), the Second was destroyed as a result of *groundless hatred* between Jews. From this we learn two things: firstly, that intra-Jewish conflict and hatred is considered on a par with the most repugnant sins in Judaism, and secondly, that the consequences can be catastrophic.

Discussion of this topic can be stimulated by using the texts on Groundless Hatred and the Culture of Controversy (see appendix), and can relate to the following questions:

- Drawing on personal experiences of conflict (with friends, family members, colleagues etc.), the participants can be asked
  - \* how do they feel in such situations?
  - \* what are some of the constructive and destructive ways it's possible to solve such conflicts?
  - \* is it possible to argue while maintaining a good relationship with your opponent?
  - \* what are their aims in situations of conflict: to win the argument, to find common ground, to maintain their relationship with the other person...?
- How important is it to achieve consensus/agreement among the Jewish people on important issues? Is diversity simply a fact, or also a value?
- If agreement cannot be achieved, how should we relate to Jews who disagree with us?
- What personal examples do the participants have of conflictual (or other) interactions with other kinds of Jews?
- How do participants relate to the idea that groundless hatred is lethal? What personal lessons can we draw from this idea? What lessons can the Jewish people draw today?
- Drawing contemporary parallels: religious and political controversy in the State of Israel. How do the participants feel about this, and what can be done to resolve the situation?



## **C. Har Herzl**

### **1. At Herzl's grave**

#### **i. Herzl: the rediscovery of connection with *peoplehood***

Herzl's grave provides the opportunity to tell the life story of the founder of political Zionism and discuss some of the issues of identity that it touches upon. Herzl's life is the story of an assimilated Jew who rediscovered a connection to the Jewish people. At one stage in his life, Herzl went so far as to propose the solution of the "Jewish Question" and the integration of Jews into European life by means of mass conversions to Christianity. By the end of his career he realised that the Jews were "One People", and devoted all his efforts to achieving national independence from the non-Jewish nations.

Using these issues, the following discussion questions can be explored:

- In what situations do participants feel strongly Jewish, or that they stand out as Jews?
- How do they feel in such situations – proud, embarrassed, nervous, belonging...?
- Do they feel Jewish as a result of something inside them or as the result of outside factors/other people? What, exactly?
- To what extent does antisemitism or hostility against Jews or Israel make them feel Jewish? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?
- How do the participants feel about Herzl's conversion plan? And what about his statement that the Jews are One People? What made him change his mind? What factors shaped Herzl's rediscovery of Jewish peoplehood?
- Is it possible to achieve Jewish peoplehood and solidarity if the only unifying factor is antisemitism? Herzl did not believe that a common language was necessary, for example. How do participants react to this idea?
- What unifying factors are necessary for Jewish peoplehood? What motives are there for membership of the Jewish people, aside from antisemitism?
- Is there a way of achieving Jewish peoplehood in the Diaspora, while remaining integrated into non-Jewish society? What dilemmas might this challenge involve?



**ii. The centrality of the State of Israel in *jewish peoplehood***

Herzl believed that the Jewish problem could not be solved in the Diaspora, and argued that any Jew who did not wish to assimilate entirely should make aliyah to the Jewish State. In our time, it is clear that the majority of Diaspora Jews do not wish to live in Israel. Does this mean that the State of Israel no longer has a role in the creation and renewal of Jewish peoplehood, or does it imply that the State has taken on new roles and levels of significance for Diaspora Jews? Herzl's great critic, Ahad Haam, was aware that the Diaspora would not disappear and argued that the Jewish community in Eretz Israel would function as a spiritual centre for the Jewish people, strengthening Jewish life in the Diaspora. Has his vision been realised, or does the contemporary State play a different role in the life of the Jewish people?

Herzl's grave (and Mount Herzl as a whole) can be used to explore the various ways the participants relate to the State of Israel and in what ways it is important to the concept of Klal Israel. Participants can be encouraged to explore the issue by focusing on several views of Israel's significance to Jewish peoplehood:

- As a source of military strength and security
- As a source of pride
- As a focus of common concern
- As a focus of joint effort – fundraising
- As a storehouse of history and a place of pilgrimage
- Of no real significance
- As a liability – Israeli policies damage the image of the Jewish people

Which of these ideas ring true in the participants' experience? With which do they identify and with which do they disagree?



## **2. The military cemetery**

### **i. The anonymous graves: Ingathering of Exiles and Self Sacrifice**

The anonymous graves from the War of Independence (the battle for the Kastel) raise two issues connected to the theme of Klal Israel: **Ingathering of Exiles** and **Self Sacrifice** for one's people. The participants can explore these issues through the story of the new immigrants from the Holocaust who landed in Israel, had a rifle put in their hands, and were sent off to fight. They were so new that no-one knew the names of several of the dead – hence the anonymous graves.

Two issues for discussion can be raised here:

#### ***"Ingathering of Exiles"***

- The State of Israel was established with the aim of encouraging aliyah and absorbing new Jewish immigrants. What responsibilities does the State/the People have for new immigrants?
- How can new immigrants be integrated into Israeli Society?
- To what extent should new immigrants be expected to take on the values of Israel (e.g. Military service, Jewish identity)?
- Does the State of Israel have obligations to its immigrants that other countries (eg. The United States) do not? What are they?

#### ***Self-Sacrifice***

- To what extent should an individual be expected to sacrifice him/herself for the good of the nation?
- How do the participants feel about military service and people who risk their lives for the State/the Jewish people?
- What are their feelings when they hear about Israeli soldiers killed in terror attacks, kidnapped, and so on?
- How do they feel as Jews who do not fight in the Israeli army?
- Do they feel the need to make another sort of contribution? How?



## **ii. Uniformity and diversity: the debate over the gravestones**

The military cemetery at Har Herzl has historically been marked by uniformity: only soldiers who die or are killed during their military service may be buried here. The gravestones and monuments are all the same shape and size and all contain the same information:

- name (can include a nickname), rank and military number
- dates of birth and death
- unit/brigade symbol
- a short description of how the died or was killed ("during his/her military service" for soldiers who die during their service but not as a result of training or combat; "while performing his/her duty" for soldiers killed while on exercises, training etc., but not in battle; "in battle" for those killed while engaging enemy forces)

In recent years this uniformity has become a matter of controversy. On a number of occasions, families of the deceased have asked to add personal inscriptions to the gravestones, and in certain circumstances the army has agreed - or been compelled to agree by decisions of the High Court. For example:

- Following the "Helicopter Disaster" in which 72 soldiers were killed, the High Court ordered the army to accede to the families' request to have the details of the disaster itself inscribed on the gravestones
- In the wake of a recent terrorist attack, a young woman was buried on Har Herzl next to her brother, despite the fact she was not in the army at the time she was killed. The army explained their decision on humanitarian grounds - sensitivity to the needs of the family - and denied any connection to the fact that the deceased was a victim of terror
- After pressure from many families, the army began allowing the inscription of short personal messages on the gravestones - of a certain, prescribed size and length.

The controversy surrounding the gravestones raises the issue of unity vs. diversity, national solidarity vs. individual needs. These issues can be discussed using the following questions:

- Is uniformity important as an indicator of national solidarity and commitment to the State of Israel and the Jewish People?
- What is the main aim of the cemetery: to remind us of important values, or to commemorate the dead?
- How would the atmosphere of the cemetery change if all the gravestones were different shapes and sizes and bearing unique inscriptions?



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- How would the cemetery and the gravestones look if it was up to you to design the cemetery? What principles would your design reflect?

### **iii. The monument for soldiers in the Red Army**

At the time of the massive wave of immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union, a large monument was erected at Har Herzl in memory of the Jewish soldiers of the Red Army who fell fighting the Nazis in the Second World War. Here it is possible to discuss the issue "ownership" and "belonging" in relation to Israel's war dead: is it a purely Israeli issue, or does it involve the entire Jewish people?

#### *Discussion points:*

- How do the participants feel as Diaspora Jews among all the Israeli war graves? Connected? Proud? Alienated? Excluded? Sad? ....
- Have they ever commemorated Yom Hazikaron (Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers) in their communities in the Diaspora? How would people in the Diaspora feel about marking this day? In what way might they connect (or fail to connect) with it?
- What difference does the presence of a memorial to non-Israeli Jewish soldiers make to the way they feel?
- Do any of the participants have grandparents who fought in the Second World War? Does this affect how they feel here?
- What significance is there in the fact that this memorial relates to the Shoah?
- Are Har Herzl and Yom Hazikaron Jewish or Israeli phenomena? Why, and what is the difference between the two definitions?
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#### **iv. Death and mourning as a unifying factor in Israel**

One of the striking features of Israel for visitors from abroad (assuming it is brought to their attention) is the depth of public feeling that surrounds deaths of soldiers or civilian victims of terrorism. The national obsession with listening to the news, the echoing of events in the type of music played by the radio stations, the bereavement notices in the newspapers, the tangible changes in national mood - all these attest to a level of solidarity that is hard to find anywhere else.

At Har Herzl this aspect of Israeli society can be raised for discussion in the context of the value of Klal Israel. The following points and questions might be helpful:

- How do people react to, and feel about, deaths in the news in your country (due to terrorism, natural disasters, etc)?
- How do you feel about the people who have died (assuming you don't know them personally)?
- To what extent do such events affect the public mood? - give examples.
- How do you imagine the situation in Israel is similar or different?
- (At this point it is appropriate to talk to the participants about the ways in which the Israeli public is affected by such events)
- How does the Israeli public's "togetherness" make you feel as a Diaspora Jew? What positive and negative feelings does it raise in you?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of mourning and death's dominant place in the nation's consciousness?
- How do you feel about Klal Israel (our sense of togetherness) being focussed on death? What might the implications be for our self image and identity as Jews?



## APPENDIX - SOURCES

### The Kotel

***From Foe to Friend***  
***by S Y Agnon***

Before Talpiot was built, the monarch of the four winds reigned there in the land and his ministers and servants, fierce and mighty winds all, lived there in the hill and valley and mountain-side and acted according to the caprice of their hearts as though the land was theirs and theirs alone.

Once I chanced upon the place and I was that the spot was pleasant and the air clear and the sky pure blue and the earth broad and smiling, so I strolled there at my ease. Then the wind struck me: "What are you doing here?" he said. I answered, "I am taking a walk." "Taking a walk?" he said, and he thumped me on the head and tossed my hat away. I bent to retrieve it. Whereupon he thrust my clothes up over my head and made me a laughing stock. I rose to take my garments from my head. And the wind pushed me and flung me down to the ground and laughed a wild laugh. I raised myself and stood up. Pelting me, he shouted, "Go, begone, begone!"

I saw that there was no arguing with someone so much more aggressive than I, so I went on my way.

I returned to the city and went into my house. But my soul was restless and I came forth again. Knowingly or unknowingly my feet brought me once more to Talpiot. And I remembered all that the wind had done to me. So I took a large canvas cloth and some pegs and set me up a tent, a refuge from the wind and storm.

A long night through I sat there. Suddenly the light went out. I went outside to see who had extinguished my light. And I found the wind standing there. I asked him, "What do you want?" He slapped my mouth and boxed my ears. I turned and went back into my tent. Then he pulled out my pegs and cut my ropes and turned my tent over and sent it flying. His hand even struck at me and almost brought me to earth.

I saw that I could not prevail against him, so I lifted my feet and returned to the city.

I returned to the city and sat there between the walls. But my soul grew impatient and I longed to go forth to where the air was pleasant. And since there is no place in all the land with air so fragrant as at Talpiot, I went to Talpiot. Wary, however, of the wind's frenzy, I took some boards with me and built a little



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hut. I thought that I had found some rest, but the wind thought otherwise. The day hardly passed before he was pounding on my roof and shaking the boards. One night he carried my whole hut away and left me without shelter. So I lifted my feet and returned to the city.

That which had occurred to me once and twice happened a third time. I came to the city and my stay in it was fretful. And my heart, O my heart, drew me to the place from which I had been driven.

I said to my heart, "Don't you see that it's impossible to return to a place where we are chased out. And what's impossible is, of course, quite impossible." But my heart it seems had a mind of its own. And if I were to tell him a thousand times that it was impossible, my heart would keep telling me, a thousand and another thousand times, that it was, it was possible.

I brought wood and stoned and built me a house.

I will not praise my house, because in truth it was small, yet I will not be ashamed of it either, though there are bigger and better ones. My house was small, yet there was room in it for a person like myself who does not ask for too much.

The wind saw that I had built me a house. He came and asked me, "What is this?" I said, "It's a house." He laughed and said, "Upon my life, never have I seen anything so ridiculous as this thing you call a house." I also laughed and said to him, "Now then you see what you have never seen before." At which he laughed and asked, "But what is a house?" I laughed and said, "A house is a house." Which only made him laugh again and he replied, "I'll take a look for myself." Whereupon he stretched out his hand and examined the door. The door broke and fell. He stretched out his hand and examined the windows. The windows broke and fell. Finally he stretched himself and climbed up onto the roof. With his weight on the roof, the roof collapsed. Laughing at me, the wind said, "This house that you built, where is it?" I asked myself the same question. Where was my house? But I didn't laugh.

At first when the wind used to chase me away, I used to return to the city. Finally things happened that did not permit me to return to the city. And I hesitated and did not know what to do. To go back to the city was impossible because of what had happened there. To return to Talpiot was out of the question because of the wind that kept driving me away. As for putting up a tent or a hut, why, they had not a chance. Also I had built me a little house and this too had failed to stand up before the wind. Or perhaps, to put it otherwise, why had it not stood up before the wind? Because it had been small and frail, and had it been large and strong it would have stood. So I took me some planks and timber and heavy stones and lime cement and I hired some good working men and I watched over them night and day. I was even farsighted enough to dig the foundations deep.

The house was built and it stood on the hill.



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Since the house stood on the hill, the wind came and knocked on the shutters. I asked, "Who knocks there on my window?" He giggled and said, "A neighbour." I said to him, "What does a neighbour want on a dark and stormy night?" He laughed and said, "A neighbour comes to welcome his neighbour in his new house." I said to him, "Is it neighbourly of a neighbour to come through the window like a thief?" He then came and knocked on the door. I said to him, "Who knocks on my door?" "The wind," he said. "I am your neighbour." I answered, "As you are my neighbour, come in." And he said, "But the door is locked."

To which I said, "The door is locked? Apparently I locked it." The wind responded, saying, "Open." And I said, "I am afraid of the cold. Wait for me till the sun comes out and I'll open for you."

When the sun came out I opened the door for him and went out and didn't find him. I stood before my house and saw that the entire land was barren, no tree and no garden, nothing but dust and stones. I said to myself, "I'll plant me a garden."

I took a hoe and I hoed the ground. And the ground being broken up I brought me some plants and set them in. Rain came and watered the plants, dew came and fertilised them, the sun came and made them grow. Not too many days passed before the plants I had planted became trees with spreading shade.

I made me a bench and sat in their shade.

One night the wind returned and struck at the trees. What did the trees do? They struck back at the wind. He turned and hit again at the trees. And the trees hit back again at the wind. After which the wind lost heart and turned away and went.

Henceforth the wind's spirit was humbled and he became well-behaved. And since he now behaves so well with me, I treat him well. When he comes, I go forth to meet him and ask him to sit with me on the bench in the garden among the trees. And he comes and sits down. And when he comes he brings with him a good fragrance from the mountains and the valleys and he fans me like a fan. Seeing how he behaves like a thorough repentant, I do not remind him of his first encounters with me. And when he takes leave of me and departs I ask him to come again as is want to ask of a good neighbour. And in truth we are good neighbours, and I love him with a complete love, and it may be that he loves me too.

\* \* \*



***The Paratroopers' Cry***

***by Haim Hefer, translated by Michael Graetz***

This Wall has heard many prayers  
This Wall has seen the fall of many other Walls  
This Wall has felt the touch of mourning women  
This Wall has felt petitions lodged between its stones.  
This Wall saw Rabbi Yehuda Halevi trampled before it  
This Wall has seen Caesars rise and fall  
But this Wall had never seen paratroopers cry.

This Wall saw them tired and wrung out  
This Wall saw them wounded, mutilated  
Running to it with excitement, cries, and silence  
And creeping as torn creatures in the valleys of the Old City  
As they are covered with dust and with parched lips  
They whisper "If I forget thee, if I forget thee, Jerusalem"  
They are as swift as eagles and strong as lions  
And their tanks – the fiery chariots of Elijah the Prophet  
They pass by with noise  
They pass by as a stream  
They remember the two thousand awful years  
In which we had not even a Wall to place our tears before –  
And here they stand before it and breathe in dust  
Here they look at it with sweet pain  
And tears run down and they look at one another perplexed.

How does it happen that paratroopers cry?  
How does it happen that they touch this Wall with great emotion?  
How does it happen that their weeping changes to song?  
Perhaps because these boys of nineteen, born at the same time as the State,  
Perhaps because these boys of nineteen carry on their shoulders two  
thousand years.

\* \* \*

***The Centrality of Jerusalem***  
***Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 30a***

One who stands outside the Land of Israel - directs his thoughts while praying towards the Land of Israel.... One who stands in the Land of Israel - directs his thoughts towards Jerusalem.... One who stands in Jerusalem - directs his thoughts towards the Temple... One who stands in the Temple - directs his thoughts towards the Holy of Holies.... One who stands in the East - faces West.



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In the West - faces East. In the South - faces North. In the North - faces south.  
All Israel direct their thoughts in prayer towards one place.



## ***The story of two brothers***

### ***Traditional***

Once, a very long time ago, there were two brothers who were very much alike. These two brothers loved each other very much. They were both farmers and they both grew wheat. They lived very near each other, on the opposite sides of a hill. In fact, the only real difference between them was that one brother was married and had children, while the other brother lived alone.

Both brothers worked very hard in their fields and raised much wheat, which made them very happy. They lived this way for many years, and each one was satisfied in his own way.

One day, right after the harvest, the brother who lived alone began to think about his married brother. He thought to himself how difficult life must be for his brother who had many family members to feed, and he worried that they might not have enough wheat. He wanted to share some of his harvest but knew his brother would never accept his help. So he waited until night and then gathered several bundles of freshly harvested wheat and climbed the hill between their two farms. He added his wheat to his brother's, and silently returned to his home. He was smiling when he fell asleep.

That very same day his brother was gathering his own wheat when he began to worry. He thought how difficult life must be for his brother who lived alone with no children and wife to help him, and he decided that he would help him. But he knew his brother would never accept his help, so that night he gathered several bundles of his freshly harvested wheat, climbed the hill between their two farms, and left his bundles with his brother's wheat. He then silently returned home. He was smiling when he went to sleep.

The next morning each brother woke up happy with what he had done the night before. Then each brother went to his own storage place to check on the wheat, and each stopped short, not believing his eyes. Each stared at his bundles of wheat. On each pile there was exactly as much as there had been the day before. Neither could understand how that could be.

The next night the same thing happened - each brother secretly climbed the hill between them carrying bundles of wheat, then returned home, sure that this time he had succeeded. And the next morning - well, you can imagine their dismay to find their piles full again.

The third night each brother was determined to succeed. The married brother took even more bundles than before, and started out. His brother also took as many bundles as he could carry and began to climb. But this time they had each set out at exactly the same time, and when they came to the top of the hill, they found themselves face to face.

The two brothers immediately realized what had happened. They sat for a while and rested, and then each returned to his farm.

When God saw how much the brothers loved each other, God decided to make the hill between their farms the place where King Solomon would build the



Holy Temple. Many years later, that is exactly what happened, all because two brothers loved each other.

## **Masada**

### ***Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai leaves Jerusalem***

#### ***From the Talmud and the Midrash - according to Sefer ha-Aggada***

When Rabban Yohanan be Zakkai went out to walk in the marketplace and saw men of Jerusalem stewing straw and drinking its water, he said to himself: Can men who are reduced to cooking straw and drinking its water withstand the Roman troops? Matters cannot be remedied unless I go from the city and attempt to make peace with the Romans.

Abba Sicara ben Battiah, head of the Zealots in Jerusalem, was the son of Rabban Yohanan be Zakkai's sister. Rabban Yohanan sent word to him: "Come to visit me in secret." ... Rabban Yohanan said to him: "Devise a scheme for me to leave the city. Perhaps the saving of a few lives will still be possible." Abba Sicara: "We have agreed among ourselves that no man may leave the city except as a corpse." Rabban Yohanan: "Then let me be taken out as a corpse"

...

Rabban Yohanan sent for his disciples Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua and said to them, "Bestir yourselves my children, and have me taken out of Jerusalem. Make a coffin for me, and I will lie down in it." Presently Rabbi Eliezer took hold of the upper part of the coffin and Rabbi Joshua of its lower part, and they carried it slowly along until the setting of the sun, when they reached the gates of Jerusalem. Some Zealot guards asked, "Who is this?" The disciples: "A dead body. Don't you know that dead bodies may not be kept overnight in Jerusalem?" Some of the Zealots wanted to drive a dagger through the body, but Abba Sicara restrained them: "It will be said of you, 'They pierced their master'.... So they opened the gate for the coffin and it left the city.

The disciples continued to carry the coffin until they got to Vespasian (the Roman general). When they opened the coffin, Rabban Yohanan stood up before him and said, "Peace to you, O King!".... At this point a messenger came from Rome to Vespasian and said: "Arise! Caesar is dead, and the notables of Rome have decided to make you head of the state." ....

Then Vespasian said to Rabban Yohanan: "I am now going away from here and will send someone else to take my place. You may, however, make a request of me, and I will grant it." Rabban Yohanan: "Give me Yavneh and its sages...."

\* \* \*



***From Elazar Ben Yair's speech on Masada  
From The Jewish War by Josephus***

As we were the first of all to revolt, so are we the last in arms against them. Moreover, I believe it is God who has granted us this favor, that we have it in our power to die nobly and in freedom - a privilege denied to others who have met with unexpected defeat. Our fate at break of day is certain capture, but there is still the free choice of a noble death with those we hold most dear....

Let our wives thus die undishonored, our children unacquainted with slavery; and, when they are gone, let us render a generous service to each other; preserving our liberty as a noble winding-sheet. But first let us destroy our property and the fortress by fire! For the Romans, I know, will be grieved to lose at once our persons and the wealth. Our provisions only let us spare; for they will testify, when we are dead, that it was not want which subdued us, but that, in keeping with our initial resolve, we preferred death to slavery....

Is a man to see his wife led off to violation, to hear the voice of his child crying "Father!" when his own hands are bound? No, while those hands are free and grasp the sword, let them render an honorable service. Unenslaved by the foe let us die, as free men with our children and wives let us quit this life together! This our laws enjoin, this our wives and children implore of us. The need for this is of God's sending, the reverse of this is the Romans' desire.... Haste we then to leave them, instead of their hoped for enjoyment at securing us, amazement at our death and admiration of our fortitude.

\* \* \*



## ***Contemporary opinions on Masada/Yavneh***

### **Jacob Neusner:**

"It's time to say that America is a better place to be a Jew than Jerusalem. Here Jews have flourished, not only in politics and the economy, but in matters of art, culture and learning. Jews feel safe and secure here in ways that they do not and cannot in the State of Israel."

### **Ze'ev Chafetz**

"A generation ago, David Ben-Gurion stated a simple truth: the difficult tasks of state-building belong to the people who live in Israel. Real Zionists are those willing to shoulder a part of the burden. Anything else is, from a Zionist point of view, not good enough."

### **Eliezer Schweid**

"Exile is the condition of dispersion in countries which are the national property of other peoples. A people in Exile resides among other peoples in minority groups... unable to bring to bear on its environment its scale of values, symbols and modes of living, its languages and institutions.... The Jewish people is in Exile everywhere except in its State.... The [Diaspora] Jewish communal entity is disintegrating, and this process is extremely rapid."

\* \* \*

## ***On groundless hatred*** ***Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b***

Why was the first Temple destroyed? Because of three offenses committed: idolatry, sexual immorality and murder. But why then was the second Temple destroyed, given that the Jews of that time studied Torah, kept the commandments and performed acts of charity? Because of groundless hatred. This teaches us that the offense of groundless hatred is the equivalent of the three sins of idolatry, sexual immorality and murder.



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