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**COMPACT**  
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# COMPACT

## Enriching the Lives of Conservative Jews

**Jews enlightening Jews.  
Jews mentoring other Jews.  
Jews spiritually enhancing their own lives.**

COMPACT's mission is to aid in Jewish self-growth, which affirms the *brit mitzvah* -- covenant -- of the Torah's commandments within each Jew.

## IYAR 5769

### In This Issue:

1. **THE OMER CONTROVERSY**  
From the Writings of Rav Kook
2. **YOM YERUSHALAYIM: 42<sup>nd</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF REUNIFIED JERUSALEM**
3. **REGISTRATION FOR NORTH AMERICAN CHEVRA KADISHA & JEWISH CEMETERY CONFERENCE**
4. **LAG B'OMER: MAY 12, 2009**
5. **YOM YERUSHALAYIM 2009: A NEW CITIZEN'S IDENTITY CRISIS!**
6. **RECYCLING GOD'S NAME**
7. **DEDICATION OF A MIZRACH IN THE SYNAGOGUE**



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## **DVAR TORAH**

### **THE OMER CONTROVERSY** **From the Writings of Rav Kook**

During the Second Temple Period, a fierce controversy raged concerning the springtime offering of barley, called the *Omer*. (An *omer* is a measure of volume, between 2 and 4 liters; this was the amount of barley flour baked and then brought in the Temple as a *Minchah* offering.) What was the exact date for the *Omer* offering?

"When you come to the land that I am giving you, and you reap its harvest, you must bring an *omer* of your first reaping ... The priest shall make this wave offering on the day after the Sabbath." [Lev. 23:10-11]

The verse says to bring the *Omer* on the day after the Sabbath - but which Sabbath? According to the tradition of the Oral Law, the 'Sabbath' referred to is the first day of the Pesach holiday.

But the Boethusians, a heretical Jewish sect of the Second Temple period, rejected this tradition. In general, the Boethusians did not accept the Oral Torah, and they sought a more literal understanding of the text. They held that the Sabbath mentioned in the verse is the seventh day of the week; so the *Omer* must be offered on the day after the Sabbath, i.e., the first Sunday after Pesach. (This dispute also determines the date for Shavuot, since the Shavuot holiday is celebrated seven weeks after the *Omer* offering.)

The objection of the Boethusians cannot be ignored out of hand. Why indeed does the Torah speak of offering the *Omer* on the day after the Sabbath? If the verse had just used the word 'Pesach' or 'holiday' instead of 'Sabbath,' the whole controversy could have been avoided!

### **The Holiness of the Nation**

What is the root of the argument between the Boethusians and the Sages? The Talmud in Menachot 65a records that the Boethusians disagreed with another accepted Halakhah. The Sages taught that the daily Temple offering (the *Tamid*) needs to be purchased with public funds. The Boethusians - many of whom were wealthy - felt that any individual could donate the daily offering. Why did they disagree with the Sages?

These three disagreements - acceptance of the Oral Law, recognizing Pesach as the 'Sabbath' mentioned in the verse, and requiring that the *Tamid* be purchased from public funds - are all connected to one fundamental question. What is the nature of the Jewish people? Is the nation just the combined contribution of each individual Jew? Or does the Jewish people as a whole somehow have its own special holiness?

The Boethusians did not recognize the concept of "*Knesset Yisrael*" as a collective unit with its own intrinsic holiness. They viewed the Jewish people as any other people. For them, a nation is essentially a partnership, formed in order to benefit its members by way of social contract. The primary goal of this partnership is individualism - the civil rights and benefits that each individual gains from the overall

partnership.

In truth, the Torah distinguishes between two concepts: *tzibur* (the collective), and *shutafut* (partnership). We find the Talmud rules [Temurah 13a] that a "*korban tzibur*", a public Temple offering, belongs to the entire Jewish people; such an offering may not be substituted by an offering of partners, no matter how many people join in. Why not? The collective of the Jewish people contains its own intrinsic quality of holiness, beyond the combined portions of all of its individual members. The Sages insisted that public offerings be purchased through public funds, as these offerings represent the entire nation.

The Boethusians rejected this idea of national sanctity. They held that any individual may donate the daily *Tamid* offering, even though this is a "*korban tzibur*" of the entire people.

Generally, the Boethusians did not accept the authority of the Oral Torah. This stance was similarly based on their view of the Jewish people. Unlike the Written Torah, which was transmitted directly from God, the Oral Law is transmitted through the sages of Israel. This Torah emphasizes the holiness of the Jewish people. As Rav Kook wrote in the opening section of *Orot HaTorah*: "We can sense the spirit of the nation - bound to the Torah's light like a flame to a glowing coal - that shaped the unique form of the Oral Torah."

But how does this explain the disagreement of the *Omer*?

The relationship between the Sabbath and the holidays parallels the relationship between the Written and the Oral Torah. The Sabbath has a Divinely-assigned holiness "*keviya vekiyama*" - always set on the seventh day. The holidays are connected to the holiness of the Jewish people. Their dates are established according to when the Jewish court declares the new month, and whether the court introduces an extra leap month. For this reason, the holiday blessing concludes with the words, "*Who sanctifies Israel and the holidays.*" Why is Israel mentioned here? The Talmud in *Berachot* 49a explains: God sanctifies the Jewish people, who in turn sanctify the holidays.

### **Rooted in the Sabbath**

The holiness of the nation is rooted in the holiness of the Torah. Similarly, the holiness of the holidays is rooted in the holiness of the Sabbath. Thus the *kiddush* blessing refers to the Sabbath as "*the first of the holy convocations.*" All holidays originate from the holiness of the Sabbath.

Now we can understand why the verse refers to the Pesach holiday as the 'Sabbath.' The first day of Pesach is the very first holiday of the year, and the Torah wanted to teach us that the holiness of the holidays is based on the eternal holiness of Shabbat.

The Boethusians wanted to be like all other nations, with a national identity based on individualism and social contract. Therefore they could not accept the binding nature of the Oral Law, and they refused to see in the holidays the intrinsic sanctity of the Sabbath. The Sages were victorious. They succeeded in establishing for all times the Halachah regarding the public funding of the *Tamid*, as well as the date for offering the *Omer* and the holiday of Shavuot.

[adapted from Mishpat Kohen pp. 273-274]

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## OR LA YEHUDIM IYAR 5769

### A Light to Our Fellow Jews in the Month of *Iyar*

#### YOM YERUSHALAYIM: 42<sup>ND</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF REUNIFIED JERUSALEM

On the site where the ancient Temple of Jerusalem stood, legend tells us two brothers once lived. The elder did not marry, and was all alone in the world. The younger had a wife and three children. The brothers had no material possessions except a plot of land which they inherited from their father. They did not want to divide up the land, because they loved each other. Instead, they worked it together, and when the harvest was over, they counted sheaves and divided them equally between them, placing them in two piles, each beside his own tent.

One year, after the harvest, the elder brother lay down to sleep beside his pile. But he could not fall asleep, because the thought ran through his mind: "My brother has a wife and children to care for, while I am alone in the world and work only to fill my own belly. It isn't right that I should take an equal share with my brother." At midnight he got up, took some sheaves from his pile, stealthily went to his brother's pile and placed them there. Then he returned to his place and slept peacefully.

That same night, the younger brother was also unable to sleep. He thought: "My brother is all alone in the world. I have children who will look after me when I am old and unable to work. What will my brother do in his old age? It isn't fair of me to take an equal share of the produce of our field!" So before daybreak, the younger brother got up, took a few sheaves from his pile, stealthily placed them on his brother's pile, and returned to his place and slept.

In the morning, the brothers saw that their piles were as large as ever. They wondered greatly about this, but they did not say a word to each other. The same thing happened the next night and the morning that followed. On the third night, as the brothers were carrying sheaves to each others' pile, they met midway, recognized each other, embraced, and wept, for they realized what had been happening. God saw what the brothers did and blessed the spot where they met. Later Solomon, King of Israel, built the holy Temple on that very spot - the Temple from which the message of peace, love and brotherhood went out to the whole world. As it says in the Book of Isaiah: "From Zion comes forth the Torah and the Word of God from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:3)

As Jews, Jerusalem is not a city as any other. It is the Holy City, the dwelling place of the *Shekhinah* - the Divine Presence - the focal point of all that is Jewish. No words can adequately describe the profound 3000-year-old love affair of our people with this most special city. How can one capture the miracle, the mystery and the majesty of this city, when one is so confined by the limits of words. Words are a feeble instrument to describe the bond we, as a people - and hopefully as individuals - feel about *Ir Shalem*, the City of Peace.

In the 10th Century BCE, the city of Jebus was captured by King David, who made it the capital city of the United Israelite Kingdom and restored its name to Yerushalayim, proclaiming that, in accordance with

Divine Will and through God's presence in this place, the Almighty will make the world *shalem* - complete, whole, tranquil, peaceful. Yerushalayim became the Holy City with the building of the First Temple by David's son, Solomon. Ever since, Yerushalayim has been the political and spiritual center of the Jewish people.

Today, Jerusalem is a short distance away. One can get there in less than two hours from Tel Aviv by car. One can get there in nine hours from New York by plane. But it was not always that way. In 1840, a man set out from Poland to Jerusalem to see the Holy City before he died. He left just after Sukkot. He arrived in Palestine - spent, sick and exhausted, just in time for Pesach - eighteen months later. He had crossed mountains and rivers and fought off robbers and diseases in order to get there. There were many such pilgrims in the nineteenth century.

Eighteen months - that is how long it used to take to get there. Now it is nine hours away.

The profound yearning for Zion and Jerusalem its Holy City, the urge to return and reestablish the Jewish state, and the faith that the vision of the Prophets would be fulfilled, has sustained the spirit of the Jewish people in all the countries of our dispersion. Throughout history, our religious writings have stressed the sacred obligation to come home to the Land of Israel and to remember the city of Jerusalem. Psalm 137 proclaims it best when it teaches: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember you not, if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy" (Psalm 137:5-6).

As we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim which commemorates the reunification of the city during the 1967 Six Day War, let us not forget the Holy City's importance to our lives and to the psyche of our people. Let us pray that peace come speedily and in our day.

*Rabbi Geoffrey J. Haber is the rabbi of Temple Emanu-El of Closter, New Jersey. This Dvar Torah was originally shared through the UJC Rabbinic Cabinet, May 2007.*

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## **ACT AS A JEW TO IMPROVE THE WORLD**



Registration is now open for the 7th North American Chevra Kadisha and Jewish Cemetery Conference - June 7, 8, 9, 2009 in Berkeley, California.

Two full days of workshops, discussion and study on all topics related to traditional Jewish funerals, burial, and mourning. This conference is especially designed for lay people, for clergy and other professionals in the field. Workshop tracks will cover Tahara, Chevra Kadisha, Nechama and Cemetery. We'll devote one morning to a full conference discussion of cremation with the intent to develop an action plan. We'll also

have on evening focus on intermarriage issues.

The conference will open Sunday evening with a networking social. A post conference day of study is also being offered. Sunday afternoon will be an orientation session for those taking Gamliel Institute classes.

Food will be Kosher - Vegetarian option is available.

Follow this link to register: <http://www.jewish-funerals.org/conference/conferencecontents.htm> or go to our home page at [www.Jewish-funerals.org](http://www.Jewish-funerals.org) and click on "conference info" at the top left.

We look forward to seeing you.

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## **LIVE THE JEWISH CALENDAR**



### **LAG B'OMER: MAY 12, 2009**

**“And from the day on which you bring the shear (*omer*) of waver offering – the day after the Sabbath – you shall count off the weeks.”  
Vayikra 23:15**

In the Jewish calendar, Lag B'omer is considered one of the minor festivals. It has no special service and no particular ritual objects are associated with its observance. In fact, many scholars view it as more of a folk festival than a religious observance. The name Lag B'Omer is derived from the Hebrew letters “lamed-gimel” which have the numerical value of 33. Thus Lag B'Omer which falls on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of Iyar means “33 days in Omer”. In order to understand Lag B'omer, it is first necessary to know a little about the Omer. In Leviticus 23:15, we are instructed to count 49 days from the barley harvest at Pesach to the wheat harvest at Shavuot. This period is known as Omer. In ancient Israel, a omer or sheaf of barley was brought to the Temple as an offering. Two loaves of bread were prepared from this grain and eaten ritually. No one could eat bread of the new harvest until this ceremony was completed.

Although ritual offerings have long since ceased, Omer is still counted, beginning on the second night of Pesach and performed every evening at sunset. A blessing recalling the Biblical injunction is recited, and a prayer for the rebuilding of the Temple.

The period of *Omer* is also called the *Sefirah*, is a period of austerity and semi-mourning. The reason for this is has traditionally been attributed to the story that during this time, many disciples of Rabbi Akiva were struck down by a plague while they were engaged in a revolt under Bar Kochba against the Romans.

However, there are many scholars who feel that the reason for this austere time goes back much further. Its origins are grounded in the folk custom of agricultural societies which regarded the time preceding the harvest as uncertain. The old was over, the new unknown; so this feeling of suspense and uncertainty expressed itself in curtailment of normal activities.

*Lag B'Omer*, the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of *Omer*, is a break in the austerity of the **Sefirah**.

Several explanations for this day exist. One source says that the plague which decimated Akiva's students, ceased on this day and a day of celebration was declared. Consequently, *Lag B'Omer* is also known as the "Scholar's Festival". Some writers feel that this festival commemorates a victory of Bar Kochba's army over the Romans, while another source maintains that it was the occasion of an uprising of the Jews during the first Jewish revolt (66 C.E.).

On *Lag B'Omer*, Rabbi Akiva's name appears again and again and although he is not directly connected with the day, his spirit seems to be part of the holiday.

*Lag B'Omer* was adopted by the Kabbalists of the late Middle Ages as a special holy day. They feel that it is the *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. This mystic disciple of Rabbi Akiva is said to be buried at Meron, near Safed, so it is customary for a pilgrimage to be made to the site of his tomb. The Hasidim believe that the Rabbi departed this life in joy, so great bonfires are lit and night-long singing and dancing take place. It is also customary to visit the tombs of the other famous rabbis who are buried in this area.

*Lag B'Omer* is a day of respite from the mourning of the *Omer*, a day when we recall our history and our teachers, and the bond with our heritage is strengthened.

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## **LEARNING AS A JEW**



## **YOM YERUSHALAYIM 2009: A NEW CITIZEN'S IDENTITY CRISIS!**

**By Rabbi Yaacov Haber**

There is nothing that brings out an identity crisis more than living in Eretz Yisrael during this season of modern Jewish holidays. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, a large segment of Klal Yisrael will be celebrating God's gift of the millennium to the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

The modern State of Israel presents a troubling contradiction. Moving to Israel or even coming to Israel for a visit can bring about an incomparable spiritual high on the one hand, and shock and disappointment on

the other.

When Rav Chaim P.Scheinberg moved to Israel with his family and his Yeshiva in the early 1960's, he made a going away speech for a large group of his students and friends. He commented on how when he would walk through the streets of New York and see so much crime, promiscuity, and lack of respect for ideals and morals -he would ask himself on a regular basis, "What am *I* doing here?"

So he went to visit Eretz Yisrael. On that visit he toured the length and breadth of the country. As he traveled, he looked around and he saw so much crime, promiscuity and lack of respect, just like back home! - The difference was, he said, he found himself asking "what are **THEY** doing here?"

That being said it is painful to walk the streets of Tel Aviv, Netanya and even Jerusalem and see Jews that have adopted the "alien" cultures over the beautiful tradition of Yiddishkeit. It is equally painful to walk the neighborhoods and the political arenas of those that have not forsaken our tradition and yet see such a disappointing measure of division and rudeness.

On the other hand, consider the Torah giants and geniuses of Eretz Yisrael. On any given corner of Jerusalem or on the bus it is not unusual to overhear an intense discussion of some of the most complex Talmudic issues.. Mi K'amcha Yisrael.

Even in secular Israel. A while back there was an exchange of 400 terrorists for 3 dead Jews and one live one. A huge controversy broke out. On the one hand Israel must show how much they value every citizen. On the other hand 400 killers were let loose. I was listening with interest to the debate in Knesset. Tommy Lapid, a non-religious member, cited the Maharam M'Rutenberg. He explained that Rav Meir of Rothenberg, among the latest of the Tosafists, was imprisoned by Emperor Rudolf in Germany in 1286. Upon hearing of the immense ransom demanded by the emperor, the Maharam outright refused to be released. Even after his death in prison, the authorities refused to give his remains to the community for proper burial until a certain philanthropist donated practically his entire fortune for the retrieval of the Maharam's remains. The Maharam felt that paying the ransom would endanger all the scholars of Israel. A debate ensued in the secular Knesset about the comparison to the Maharam M'Rutenberg. Who is comparable to the Jews? (Even in debate secular Jews cite pious scholars).

The Torah speaks about a spiritual skin disease called tzoraat. Tzoraat is a form of spiritual leprosy which makes the afflicted one ritually impure or "tamey." The sign of impurity in Tzoraat is white. If the Kohen sees white in the blemish, the patient is tamey. The more white the more impure. As it gets whiter it gets more serious and more impure. Then the Torah presents us with a shocking law, "hafach kulo lavan" let's say that the blemish turns completely white. This should be the ultimate in impurity! Tahor - the Kohen proclaims him as pure! How can the sign of tumah become the sign of purity?

***Metzora stands for motzi ra, to exude the evil.***

What is happening with a tzoraat, probably similar to many dermatological illnesses is actually a positive process. A person has negativity in their soul. Something evil is stirring within them. They begin to do teshuva and the evil wants to leave the body. When tuma leaves the body it looks horrible. White spots of leprosy looking blotches, but what you are actually seeing is impurity leaving the body. The mess is actually a positive process! ***Motzi Ra!***

Often in psychological therapy things get worse before they get better. Negativity that has been hiding dormant for years is brought to the surface. It begins to show, it begins to hurt, however it is so positive that it is leaving the body. **Motzi Ra.**

“Rava said: *Mashiach* won’t come until the government becomes heretical! As it says: “hafach kulo lavan - tahor! If it turns completely white it is pure!” Like a tzoraat, the government must bottom out and turn completely white to be purified. Once the negativity is out of its system. Tahor! It is pure.

We are a traumatized people. The Jewish people have gone through so much during the last two millennia. So much negativity has developed within us. We all know what the Holocaust did to people’s souls. We became poisoned by torture. What we see in Eretz Yisrael is the Jewish people acting out and getting the negativity out of our system.

At the time of the founding of the State of Israel, the organizers thought that we needed a new kind of Jew. Max Nordau, a partner to Herzl in building secular Zionism, at the first Zionist Conference called for a more muscular Jew that was more intimidating and more macho. The Yeshiva Bachur became the nebechel. Tension grew and that tension became a tzoraat - **Motzi Ra!** Possibly the tension was and is part of a positive process - maybe even Messianic.

Times are changing. There are tens of thousands of people returning to Judaism (Baalei Teshuva) in Eretz Yisrael. Disdain for Torah Jews is diminishing. We are recovering from galus, “hafach kulo lavan - tahor!” We have bottomed out and we are becoming pure again.

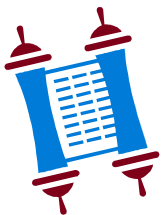
Something is happening! May we all come together in Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh and hear the entire Klal Yisrael lead the world in song, “HaKodosh Boruch Hu, Anachnu ohavim Otcha! God, we love You.

(Rabbi Jacob Haber – [yhaber@torahlab.org](mailto:yhaber@torahlab.org) - has developed Torah Lab: An Approach to Jewish Learning. He made aliyah several years ago)

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## **PERPETUATING JEWISH LIFE**



## **RECYCLING GOD’S NAME**

Our synagogues are increasingly associated with the promotion of eco-friendly activities such as recycling. What are the *Halakhic* issues involved in the disposing of sanctified material, papers, books, documents, and photo copies which contain the name of God. For a comprehensive and complete treatment, see

Techumin Volume 3: "Recycling Holy Texts," Rav Uri Dasberg p. 307-323.

The prohibition of discarding holy books has its root in the *pasuk*, verse, "Destroy the names of idolaters, *avodah zarah*. Do not do this to *HaShem*, your God" (Devarim 14:4). The *gemara* in Makkot (22a) derives that it is forbidden to erase any of God's seven names. Anything containing one of these names is commonly referred to as *sheimot* (literally "names") and has a status of *kedushah*. Such items must be set aside for *genizah*, removal from usage, either to be buried, or, according to some, respectfully burned.

Because a disgrace of God's name is at stake, the Sages, *Hazal*, urge caution in this area. The Gemara in Shabbat (61b) records that if the name of God is written on the handle of a utensil, one must scrape off God's name and dispose of it separately from the utensil. The Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles teaches that it is forbidden even to write the name of God on a lone piece of paper lest it get thrown out.

However, these stipulations apply only to the seven Hebrew names of God, which do not appear in most English publications. (Even in Hebrew articles, we should be careful not to include any of these names.) When it comes to English Torah publications, there is more room to be lenient.

One such leniency is issued by the *Minchat Yitzchak*, who extrapolates from a ruling of the Rambam regarding a case of a *Sotah* (Hilchot Avot Hatuma 9:11). The Torah states that when a woman is suspected of begin disloyal to her husband, her husband must bring her to the *mishkan*. The *kohen* writes the name of God on a piece of paper, and then washes it off into a cup of water which she must drink. According to Rambam, the *kohen* is allowed to erase the name of God in this instance because it was written for the purpose of being erased. Due to this intent, the paper never achieved a status of *kedushah*. From here, the *Minchat Yitzchak* concludes that any dvar Torah publication intended for temporary use need **NOT** be place in *genizah*. It was not written to be a lasting *sefer*, so it does not fall into the category of *sheimot*.

Another issue raised by the *Halakhic* experts, *poskim*, is the question of whether the spelling "God" requires an added level of respect over "G-d." Additionally, a publication that quotes *psukim*, verses, even in English, may take on greater sanctity. Even if a publication contains only a discussion of Torah or *Halakha*, it is a *hillul Hashem*, a desecration of God's name, to throw it in a regular garbage can.

True *sheimot*, however defined, belongs in *geniza*. Any other form of Torah, although not requiring burial, should certainly not end up mixed in with dinner's leftovers. Many argue that a recycling bin provides a respectful method of disposing of these documents, which have some level of *kedushah*, but are not quite *sheimot*. Others allow placing such Torah-related documents in the garbage in a separate bag.

Rav Moshe Feinstein rules (Igrot Moshe OC IV 39) that even *sifrei Torah sh'baal peh*, such as *mishnayot* and *gemarot*, may be recycled provided they do not contain God's name.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We encourage you to study this fascinating topic in the light of our renewed commitment to recycle, to our love of God's Name, and to the holiness of Jewish texts. Speak to your congregational rabbi. (Moshe Edelman)

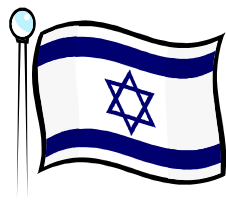
(Dvar Torah originally appeared in *Temima*, the newsletter of SAR Academy High School, Vol. 4, #7.)



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## BUILDING A BRIDGE TO ISRAEL



### **DEDICATION OF A MIZRACH IN THE SYNAGOGUE**

*Yom Yerushalayim: 28 Iyar 5769/May 22, 2009*

*The dedication ceremony can be preceded by comments on the background and tradition of the Mizrach sign in Jewish homes over the centuries. The following may serve as source material.*

#### Background

Since ancient times, Jews have turned in prayer towards the east, and particularly to the site of the Temple in Jerusalem. The earliest reference we have to this is in the Biblical book of I Kings, when Solomon dedicated the First Temple (ca. 1000 BCE) and prayed: “May You hearken to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray towards this place...” and “When Your people...pray to the Lord towards the city that You have chosen and towards the house that I have built for Your name, then may You hear in heaven their prayer...” (*I Kings 8:30, 44*). Several centuries later, the prophet Daniel is described as having “windows open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed” (*Daniel 6:11*).

This prayer custom was codified in the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE): “One should turn one’s face [towards Jerusalem], and if one cannot turn one’s face, one should direct one’s heart towards the Holy of Holies [the innermost sanctum of the Temple]” (*Mishnah Berakhot 4:5*), to which the Gemara comments, quoting verses from Solomon’s prayer as proof-texts: **‘If one is standing outside the country, one should direct one’s heart to the Land of Israel... If one stands in the Land of Israel, one should direct one’s heart towards Jerusalem...If one is standing in Jerusalem, one should direct one’s heart towards the Temple...If one is standing in the Temple, one should direct one’s heart towards the Holy of Holies...Consequently, if one is in the east, one should turn his face towards the west; if in the west, one should turn towards the east; if in the south, one should turn towards the north; if in the north, one should turn towards the south. In this way, all Israel will be directing heir hearts towards one place.’** (*Talmud Berakhot 30a*)

Seeking to apply this teaching of the Talmud, Jews have traditionally built their synagogues (or at least the wall of the Holy Ark) to face Jerusalem. A notable example of this is the Touro Synagogue (Congregation Yeshuat Israel) of Newport, Rhode Island, dedicated in 1763, which was so situated on its plot as to face the latitudinal and longitudinal point of Jerusalem on the globe. Synagogues in Israel, and especially in Jerusalem, face the Temple mount. Thus, the student congregation of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus turns southwest in prayer; congregations in the southern suburb of Talpiot turn northwards.

In Eastern Europe, the custom was to face east (in Hebrew, *mizrach*), where the sunrise might be seen.

*Mi-mizrach shemesh ad m'vo-o*, "From the rising of the sun until its setting, the name of the Lord shall be praised" (Psalm 113:3), came to refer to the location of Jerusalem. This verse was often inscribed upon a sign within the house, to indicate the direction of the prayer. To this day, *mizrach* signs (plural, *mizrachim*) point to Jerusalem to serve as reminders of the Holy Temple.

In the course of time, the simple *Mizrach* came to be decorated with symbols of the holy city or images associated with the Holy Ark of the synagogue. Lions of Judah, stars of David, the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the seven-branched menorah, and many other emblems of Jewish iconography are used to elaborate the *mizrach*. Often the words *Mi-tzad zeh ruach ha-hayim* ("from this direction comes the spirit of life") are included as play on the letters *mem, zayin, resh, het = mizrach*. This tradition is said to be based on a Kabbalistic identification of *mizrach* with *kadim*, the eastern wind (*ruach*); the source of life is associated with the Temple mount, the legendary starting point – and pinnacle – of Creation.

Materials used in *mizrachim* were primarily paper and cloth, with scribes and folk artists utilizing their talents in painting, paper cuts, embroidery, collage and appliqué. Since most of these media are quite fragile, we have few if any surviving examples earlier than the eighteenth century.

Contemporary artists have revived the art of paper cuts and raised it to new heights, particularly in creating *mizrachim* for the home. New forms are constantly being experimented.

### **DEDICATION OF A MIZRACH IN THE SYNAGOGUE**

*Responsive reading for leader and congregation:*

From time immemorial, the hearts and eyes of Israel have been turned to Jerusalem.

*Listen to the supplication of Your people Israel when they pray towards this place. (1 Kings 8:30)*

Zion is our meeting point, the spiritual compass of our prayer.

*They who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion which cannot be moved, but abides forever. (Psalm 125:1)*

We are in the West, but our hearts are in the East.

*I will save My people from the east and from the west and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. (Zechariah 8:7)*

The source of blessing, the depths of our being derive from Jerusalem.

*From the rising of the sun to its setting, the Lord's name is to be praised. (Psalm 113:3)*

With this *mizrach*, we seek with new eyes a message from Zion.

*For the sake of my brethren and friends, I would say, "Peace be with you."  
For the sake of the House of the Lord our God, I would seek your good. (Psalm 122:8-9)*

May hope and deliverance, peace and security reside within her.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they who love you shall know security.  
Peace be within your walls, security within your palaces. (Psalm 122:6-7)*

And spread the canopy of peace and well-being over Israel.

*May the Lord bless you out of Zion and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. And may you see your children's children with peace over Israel. (Psalm 128:5-6)*

For this we turn ever hopeful to the East – the *Mizrach* – to Jerusalem.

*Our hope has ne'er been lost: to be a free people in our own land, in Zion and Jerusalem. (From Hatikvah, Israel's National Anthem)*

*(Conclude with the singing of Hatikvah, or a selection of Psalms of Ascent, especially "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122), "Those who trust in the Lord" (Psalm 125), or "The Lord bless you out of Zion" (Psalm 128).*

Hatikvah

*Kol od ba-leyvav p'nima  
Nefesh yehudi homi-ya  
U-l'fa'atey mizrach kadima  
A-yin l'Tzion tzofiya.  
Od lo avada tikvateynu  
Hatikva bat sh'not alpa-yim  
L'hiyot am hofshi b'artzeynu  
B'eretz Tzion u-virushala-yim.*

Translation:

As long as a Jewish soul still beats in our hearts  
And our eye is turned expectantly forward to Zion,  
Our two thousand-year-old hope has not been lost:  
To be a free people in our land, in Zion and Jerusalem.

(This material is adapted from a publication of MERCAZ, the Zionist organization of Conservative Judaism, Shevat 5759)

## TIME TO GO

This is the 89th COMPACT, *Iyar* 5769. Enrich your life as a Jew. Transformation is a step- by-step process of learning and questioning, of doing and inquiring, of participating and asking.

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