

Beit Ha'am

Z-Talks

Pray for the Wellbeing of Jerusalem

A Special Edition in the Wake of the Western Wall Plan Turmoil

“A dispute that is for the sake of Heaven is destined to endure; one that is not for the sake of Heaven is not destined to endure.” (Ethics of the Fathers, 5:17)

The decision to put a freeze on the Western Wall plan was made on Rosh Hodesh – the first day of the month of Tammuz. According to the Jewish calendar, later this month, on the 17th of Tammuz, the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Romans is commemorated in a fast day. That event led to the destruction of the Temple. This is an opportunity for us to delve into the disputes: those which are “for the sake of Heaven” and those which are “not for the sake of Heaven” that have accompanied the Jewish people for generations.

A bit of background: The Western Wall plan is a groundbreaking agreement that establishes an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall, which was approved by the Government of Israel at the beginning of 2016. The present status quo at the Wall maintains a separation between men and women. The women worshippers cannot perform religious rituals which the Orthodox denomination regards as the exclusive domain of men (such as putting on tefillin [phylacteries] and wearing a talit). Based on the approved plan, an additional section was supposed to be created where every individual would be allowed to come and pray as he or she sees fit. The intention was to construct it to the south of the existing plaza, namely as a continuation of the same western wall of the Temple Mount. The large prayer space that was planned would have become an integral part of the Western Wall complex, where men and women could pray together like they do in the Reform and Conservative denominations.



As noted above, on the first day of Tammuz, Sunday, June 25, 2017, the Government of Israel decided at its weekly meeting to suspend the Western Wall plan and not implement it, and that every request to reinstate it would require a new government decision. The Prime Minister adopted the position of the heads of the ultra-Orthodox parties that called for perpetuating the status quo at the Western Wall plaza.

The heads of the ultra-Orthodox parties welcomed the decision and said that it reflects the desire of the majority of the people to preserve the sanctity of the Wall and its status since ancient times.

The Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency (the body that sets the policy of the organization and consists of representatives of all the religious and political factions from Israel and around the world), which convened the very same day, responded in the following terms: "The Government of Israel's decisions have a deep potential to divide the Jewish people and to undermine the Zionist vision and dream of Herzl, Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky to establish Israel as a national home for the entire Jewish people...we call upon the Government of Israel to understand the gravity of its steps and reverse its course of action accordingly."



“The Wall of all the Jews – The Decision of Israel” – Haim Shine, Israel Hayom, June 26, 2017

“50 years ago, on the holiday of Shavuot, I was among the masses that flocked to the Western Wall after Israeli soldiers liberated it from foreign hands. Among the crowds there were religious and secular Israelis, ultra-Orthodox and young people from the espresso generation, native Israelis and Jewish tourists from overseas. We all felt that history was unfolding before our eyes. Sadly, this site which God's divine presence has never left, has now become the center of polemic, dispute and controversy. The polemic involves religion, politics, extraneous considerations and, most of all, the age-old and all too familiar Jewish inclination to squabble.

The Western Wall is within the jurisdiction of the State of Israel and, as such, is an internal Israeli matter. Israeli citizens, through their representatives in the Knesset, have the full right to decide which arrangements should be in place at this holy site. The nation's martyrs and heroes are buried in the military cemetery on Mount Herzl and it is unthinkable that American Jews could have a say in the funeral arrangements and ceremonies held there. By the same token, Israelis are unable to decide which visitation arrangements are established at the Lincoln Memorial. That is the essence of the territorial application of democracy. Any Jew in the world who wants to influence the rules of procedure and the decisions made by the government and the Knesset pertaining to any matter, including conversion and religion and state, is entitled to exercise his immediate right pursuant to the Law of Return, immigrate to Israel and vote in the Knesset elections for the party of his choice. As long as they choose to live overseas, they must behave with a degree of humility and not with the assertiveness of masters. The ethos of Jewish solidarity and the support of American Jews for Israel have already become less impressive, especially since the vast majority of them preferred to support Hillary Clinton in the last elections - not out of concern for the future and security needs of the Jewish state, but rather out of their own neo-liberal worldview...”



Haim Shine makes his point loud and clear:

- "The Western Wall is within the jurisdiction of the State of Israel and, as such, is an internal Israeli matter" – Is that in fact the case? Who does the Western Wall belong to? And who is entitled to make decisions pertaining to it? Why?
- "Any Jew in the world who wants to influence...is entitled to exercise his right...to immigrate to Israel and vote in the Knesset elections. As long as they choose to live overseas, they must not behave as masters..." – How do you feel about this issue? Do Jews who don't live in the State of Israel have a right to influence decisions made in the country? All of them/ some of them?
- Which tools are available to Diaspora Jews if they want to influence decisions made by the Government of Israel that affect them? Is it right that they make use of them?

Following the decision to suspend the Western Wall plan, Minister Uri Ariel from Habayit Hayehudi (the Jewish Home faction) expressed his satisfaction and said:

"Around 18 months ago I warned that changing the prayer arrangements at the Western Wall would adversely affect Israeli society and what is most holy to the Jewish people...I'm glad the government approved a decision today that restores the status quo to the Western Wall. Consequently, we have managed to prevent an unnecessary division in the Jewish people and have not compromised the social and religious fabric of Israeli society and the Jewish people."



On the other side of the fence - in response to the government decision, leaders from the Reform Movement and Conservative Movement initiated a protest rally across from the Prime Minister's residence. When calling on people to attend the rally, they wrote: "The Israeli government has sacrificed the Western Wall to extremists and has withdrawn from the Western Wall agreement, in a step that will divide the Jewish people."

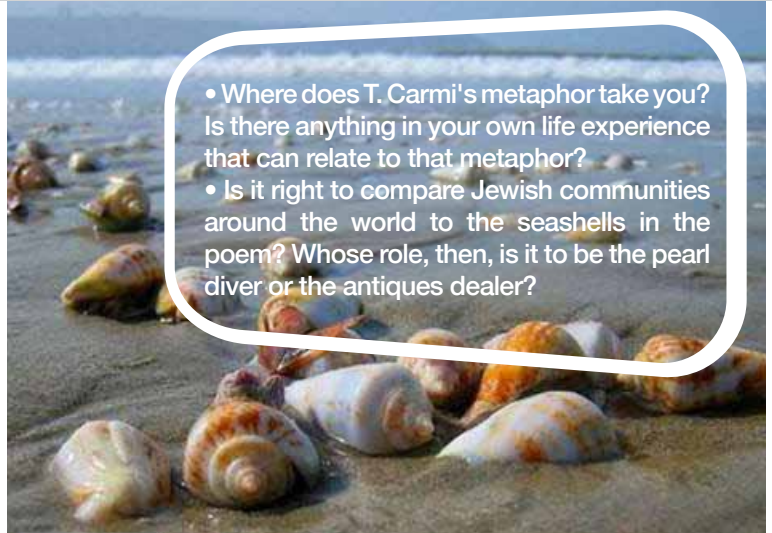
- Both parties to the controversy believe that the 'other side' will divide the Jewish people. Who, in your opinion, is right?
- And if the Jewish people do in fact split in the future into a 'religious law' camp and a 'non-religious law' camp, or into an 'Israeli' camp and a 'Diaspora' camp, what then? Can you imagine that actually happening?



Attention / T. Carmi*

It's hard for two seashells to have a real conversation.
 Each listens to its own sea.
 Only the pearl diver or antiquities dealer
 Can determine without fear: it's the same sea.

* T. Carmi is the pen name of Karmi Tsherni (1925-1994), who was a Hebrew poet, translator and Israeli editor. His poetry is characterized by a lyrical, but not sentimental, style and is replete with irony.



- Where does T. Carmi's metaphor take you? Is there anything in your own life experience that can relate to that metaphor?
- Is it right to compare Jewish communities around the world to the seashells in the poem? Whose role, then, is it to be the pearl diver or the antiques dealer?

"The people of Israel are responsible for one another. And to what may this be compared? To a ship in which one cabin has a hole in it. We do not say one cabin has a hole in it, but rather the entire ship has a hole in it. (Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah 11)

Tanna Hezekiah (taught, said): "The people of Israel may be compared to a lamb – when it gets hit on the head or on some other part of its body, the entire body feels it. The people of Israel are the same – when one of them commits a sin, all of them feel it." Tanna Rabbi

Shimon bar Yochai (taught, said): "This may be compared to people sitting in a boat. One of them took a drill and began making a hole beneath his seat. His companions said to him: What are you doing? He replied: What concern is it of yours? I am not drilling beneath you. They said to him: But the water will rise and flood the boat for all of us." (Leviticus Rabbah* 4:6)

- What is your interpretation of the midrash?
- As you see it, is the midrash still relevant today?
- Is it important that Jews in the Diaspora and Jews in Israel be responsible for one another? How would that mutual responsibility be articulated?

* Leviticus Rabbah is an ancient midrash aggadah (non-legalistic rabbinic commentary) on the Book of Leviticus, which was compiled in the Land of Israel in the 5th or 6th century. It is considered part of the Midrash Rabbah – which are commentaries on the books of the Bible.



I'm a Jew

Lyrics: Fishy Hagadol, Kobi Oz, Aksom and Lenny Solomon; Music: Lenny Solomon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Zw7Kico7Oo>

When I ask myself 'who am I?'
 I'm a bit Sephardi, a bit Asheknazi,
 A bit Israeli, a dash galuti (exiled).
 Maybe religious and maybe secular,
 but between me and me,
 I'm a Jew and we're just a few.
 Not better nor worse than anyone else
 Simply a Jew.

Nothing will manage to break me, brothers,
 My soul is part of an eternal exalted light.
 To repair the world – that's my essence,
 That's the way I was born, I'm a Jew.

Simply a Jew like in the other religions
 With holidays, Sabbaths, customs and commandments.
 Although everyone is certain of their rightness
 In the end we're all Jews, facing the throne of God.

I'm really scared of baseless hatred,
 I love my land and love the people.
 I've been here and there the world over.
 I have two opinions about whatever
 you ask and a third one too,
 Because I'm a Jew and we're just a few.
 Not worse, not better, a bit different,
 Simply a Jew.

- The song I'm a Jew was written by contemporary Israeli musicians. How do you feel about it? Can you relate to its message?



As mentioned above, the decision to put a freeze on the Western Wall plan was made on the first day of the month of Tammuz. Later this month, on the 17th of Tammuz, there is a fast day which commemorates the fall of Jerusalem. On that day, the walls of the city were breached by the enemy Roman armies following a long siege. The 17th of Tammuz also marks the start of a three-week mourning period – known as the "Three Weeks" – which lasts until Tisha B'Av and is characterized by mourning rituals that become stricter the closer they get to the end of the period. The Three Weeks reaches a climax on the Tisha B'Av fast day, which is the major fast day of the four fast days that commemorate the destruction of the Temple. The purpose of the fasts is to evoke a sense of loss over the destruction of the Temple – and over the exile that followed it.

Jewish tradition talks about the Temple being destroyed as a result of baseless hatred. It is said that in the decade preceding the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the relations between the Jews living in Jerusalem were replete with controversies and sectarianism that derived from unexplainable baseless hatred. It reached a height when Jews informed on each other to the Roman emperor, who then destroyed the city.



'Baseless' Hatred, Really? (A Discussion for the 17th of Tammuz) by Rabbi Shlomo Gabbay

"But there is a great difficulty here. The concept of 'baseless hatred' is not sufficiently clear and that explains why it is also hard for us to deal with it. The seemingly simple meaning of the word 'baseless' in the context of hatred is 'without reason.' And we would like to equate hatred without reason with 'baseless hatred' – the one that led to the destruction of the Temple. However, that simplistic explanation is inadequate because a person who hates someone else 'without reason' is actually a utilitarian person and all his actions have an objective. Therefore, he certainly does not hate without reason..."

Consequently, the lack of a clear definition of 'baseless hatred' makes fixing it a more remote possibility, and that is why we need to clarify the concept through the eyes of our sages.

The key to explaining what 'baseless hatred' is can be found in the realization that even if hatred has a reason, it could still be defined as 'baseless' hatred. In such a case, the concept 'baseless' does not mean 'without reason,' but rather it signifies 'without a justifiable reason.' Even if the hatred has a reason, as long as that hatred is prohibited by the Torah, it is baseless hatred – forbidden hatred, hatred which is not justified according to the moral standards of the Torah.

So we must try and understand what some of the reasons for the hatred are and examine whether that particular hatred is defined as baseless hatred."

• What is baseless hatred in your opinion? Have you ever experienced that form of hatred? Why do you define it as baseless hatred?

• And, on the contrary: what form of hatred is not baseless hatred? Have you ever experienced or witnessed that form of hatred? Which moral value justified it?



Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

The story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza is a formative theme of Jewish heritage. It usually serves as an example of the social depravity of a nation whose members are divided and are at odds with each other, who eventually bring catastrophe and destruction on themselves. The story describes the last days of feasting in Jerusalem prior to the city's destruction by the Roman emperor Nero.


"There was a Jew (a landlord) who had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza. The landlord decides to hold a feast and tells his servant to go and invite his friend Kamtza. But by mistake the servant invites Bar Kamtza instead (who was the host's enemy). The host arrives at the feast, sees Bar Kamtza sitting there and says to him: 'You and I detest each other. What are you doing here? I demand that you leave!' Bar Kamtza replies: 'Since I'm already here, let me stay and I'll pay for whatever I eat and drink.' And to that the host says: 'Absolutely not!' And then Bar Kamtza says: 'I'll pay for half the cost of the entire feast.' But the host still refuses. And Bar Kamtza says: 'I'm willing to pay the full cost of the feast.' To which the host replies: 'Absolutely not!' The host then grabs Bar Kamtza and throws him out.

Once outside, Bar Kamtza says: 'Because the rabbis who were present at the feast did not stand up and protest, it means that they approved of the host's actions. I'll go and inform on them to the emperor.'

Bar Kamtza goes to the emperor and tells him: 'The Jews are rebelling against you!' The emperor asks him for proof. To which Bar Kamtza replies: 'Send a sacrifice to the Jewish rabbis and see if they offer it.' And the emperor sends a choice calf with Bar Kamtza. En route, Bar Kamtza makes a blemish on the calf's upper lip (Jews were prohibited from offering a sacrifice that was imperfect) – and some say he blemished the white of the calf's eye (which Jewish law considers a blemish, but non-Jews do not).

The rabbis in the Temple were inclined to offer the sacrifice despite the blemish for the sake of peace in the kingdom (to avoid arousing the anger of the emperor). Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas (one of the most prominent leaders at the time) said to them: 'If we sacrifice the calf, people will say that we offer blemished sacrifices on the altar!' So they thought about killing Bar Kamtza so he wouldn't go and inform on them (to the emperor for not offering the sacrifice he had sent). Rabbi Zechariah then said to them: 'If we do that, people may say or think that someone who blemishes a sacrifice must be put to death.'

The emperor found out that they had not offered the sacrifice, became furious and dispatched a very large army to Jerusalem, who burned down the Temple and destroyed the entire city."

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- "Because of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, Jerusalem was destroyed" – is a well-known expression in Jewish texts. Can a petty argument between two Jews really lead to the destruction of the Temple?
 - Which negative emotions does the story evoke?
 - With which of the protagonists is it easier for you to identify? What can you learn about yourself based on the choice you made?
 - Can we find similar cases of baseless hatred in this day and age which resulted or could have resulted in destruction and devastation?

חורבן בית המקדש.
ציורו של ארקול דה רוברטי



Hatred / Wislawa Szymborska

See how efficient it still is,
how it keeps itself in shape –
our century's hatred.
How easily it vaults the tallest obstacles.
How rapidly it pounces, tracks us down.

It's not like other feelings.
At once both older and younger.
It gives birth itself to the reasons
that give it life.
When it sleeps, it's never eternal rest.
And sleeplessness won't sap its strength; it feeds it.

One religion or another –
whatever gets it ready, in position.
One fatherland or another –
whatever helps it get a running start.
Justice also works well at the outset
until hate gets its own momentum going.
Hatred. Hatred.
Its face twisted in a grimace
of erotic ecstasy.

Oh these other feelings,
listless weaklings.
Since when does brotherhood
draw crowds?
Has compassion
ever finished first?
Does doubt ever really rouse the rabble?
Only hatred has just what it takes.

Gifted, diligent, hard-working.
Need we mention all the songs it has composed?
All the pages it has added to our history books?
All the human carpets it has spread
over countless city squares and football fields?

Let's face it:
it knows how to make beauty.
The splendid fire-glow in midnight skies.
Magnificent bursting bombs in rosy dawns.
You can't deny the inspiring pathos of ruins
and a certain bawdy humor to be found
in the sturdy column jutting from their midst.

Hatred is a master of contrast –
between explosions and dead quiet,
red blood and white snow.
Above all, it never tires
of its leitmotif – the impeccable executioner
towering over its soiled victim.

It's always ready for new challenges.
If it has to wait awhile, it will.
They say it's blind. Blind?
It has a sniper's keen sight
and gazes unflinchingly at the future
as only it can.

- Which lines in Szymborska's poem could you relate to in particular? Why?
- Can you come up with a description of your own for the emotion of hatred? Is it a straightforward description or one that makes use of images/metaphors?

Wislawa Szymborska (1923-2012) was a Polish poet, essayist and translator of French literature. She won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1996. Szymborska's style is direct and communicates with the reader. In her poems, she refrained from artistic decoration, metaphor, rhyme or anything else. Consequently, the content stands out and even the cadence seeks to expose the surprising meaning inherent in her words.



For the group leader:

When planning an activity using this Beit Ha'am Special Edition – The Western Wall Turmoil, we suggest that you start or finish with a film made by a student from the Ma'aleh School of Television, Film & the Arts, and then hold a discussion about it as proposed below.

Wall, Crevice, Tear – A Film by Tehila Raanan*

Wall, Crevice, Tear is a short film (about 10 minutes long) that contains no words.

Shot patiently, with the masterful, sensitive and lyrical touch of an artist, the film captures women in the women's section at the Western Wall: Jews and Christians – both religious and non-religious - during the day and at night, in the rain and in the sun. Thanks to the stylized and mesmerizing photography, the camera lens immortalizes moments of passion, missed opportunities, intimacy, despair and soul searching.

The film has no plot. It simply allows the images to speak for themselves.

- Is there a certain image in the film that made a lasting impression on you? Why? Can you explain why that particular one?
- Which emotions could you identify in the faces of the photographed women?
- What kind of feelings did a visit at the Western Wall evoke in you?
- Can you try and guess why Tehila Raanan chose to film only women?



<https://goo.gl/V8yGUb>

* The Women of the Wall organization is one of the interesting issues that can be discussed after watching Wall, Crevice, Tear

Background
 Women of the Wall is an organization of women whose declared primary goal is to "enable freedom of worship at the Western Wall." The organization was founded at the end of the 1980s after a group of women asked to pray on the Western Wall plaza, but were not allowed to wear prayer shawls or use the Torahs stored at the Wall or bring their own. Since its establishment, the group has gathered at the Western Wall on every Rosh Hodesh for the morning service and to read the Hallel prayer, while doing so in the women's section. In the past, and further to a decision by a government committee that was sanctioned by the Israeli Supreme Court, the women would go to Robinson's Arch where they would read from the Torah. Also, those who wanted to could wear prayer shawls and put on tefillin. However, since 2013, the Torah is also read in the women's section.

A significant share of the Orthodox community, and in particular the ultra-Orthodox, have strongly, and sometimes even violently, opposed the nature of the service held by the Women of the Wall on the Western Wall plaza – and especially in those cases where they wear prayer shawls, put on tefillin and read the Torah in the women's section. On the other hand, the women's right to do is supported by Reform Jews and some Conservative Jews as well. However, a large part of the Israeli public is indifferent to what goes on there.



- Had you ever heard about the Women of the Wall before now? What did you know about them?
- Is this the right way to conduct this struggle? Or, perhaps, can you suggest a different – better way – to conduct it?
- Have you ever encountered struggles of a similar nature surrounding different approaches to Judaism? How were they resolved / how did they end?
- Have you ever taken part, in the past or in the present, in a struggle for a social cause? What was or is it? Why did you choose to be involved in it?
- What can we do in order to encourage more young people to be active in causes that are consistent with their worldviews, for the benefit of the community / the Jewish people?

To learn more about the Women of the Wall you can watch:



A 5-minute promotional video made by the Women of the Wall that describes their worldview and faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vaaj8INViDQ>



A 2-minute video that focuses on a confrontation between the Women of the Wall and the security forces and Orthodox worshippers at the Wall:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJvCbWVcyvU>





ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
World Zionist Organization
המחלקה לפעילות בתפוצות
Department for Diaspora Activities



• What does King David's vision for the city of Jerusalem have in common with the reality of Jerusalem in 2017?

Psalms 122

A song of ascents of David.

I rejoiced when they said to me "Let us go to the house of the Lord."

Our feet were standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

The built-up Jerusalem is like a city knit together.

To which tribes would ascend, the tribes of God, a testimony to Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

There the thrones of judgment stood, thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the wellbeing of Jerusalem; may those who love you enjoy peace.

May there be peace within your walls, tranquility in your palaces.

For the sake of my kin and my companions, I shall pray for your wellbeing.

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I shall seek goodness for you.

