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Walking with the Jewish Calendar

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THE ISRAELI NATIONAL HOLIDAYS: YOM HAZIKARON, YOM HA'ATZMAUT AND YOM YERUSHALAYIM

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INTRODUCTION

From the time my maternal grandparents migrated to Palestine from the United States in 1921, until the birth of my grandson in Rehovot in 2008, every generation of my family has lived in both the United States and in Israel. My family and I have deep roots in both countries. I am deeply connected to Israel – not only to the “people Israel,” but also to the Land of Israel and to the modern State of Israel.

FROM COURTSHIP TO REAL LIFE

The Jewish “National Holidays”: Yom HaZikaron, Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim (Israel’s Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Jerusalem Day) are all intimately connected with happenings relating to the modern sovereign State of Israel. It is obvious why Israeli Jews would celebrate these holidays. More difficult is the question of how, and why, Diaspora Jews would celebrate them as well. Yet, there are very compelling reasons for all Jews to do just that!¹

In the course of my life, I have sensed our people’s changing relationship with Israel. I see that relationship as moving from courtship to marriage, through the honey-moon period and on to the long lasting “real life” relationship in which we are currently engaged. The courtship period, when we dreamed of the reality of renewed Jewish sovereignty, came to a close with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It was then that a new and exciting reality was born, in much the same way that a marriage creates a new relationship. The honeymoon period ensued, as we were all so enamored of the newly established relationship. But, that too, is over. Now comes real life with all the advantages and disadvantages of an intimate, ongoing familiarity.

Now we are “commanded” to love, to support, to develop, to engage, to debate with and to celebrate Israel’s birthdays – as we do those of our beloved relatives. We don’t always see eye to eye. Yet we maintain a relationship and celebrate milestones together. From time to time we take stock, and we continue to refine and define the nature of our relationship. We hope together for a good future – for ourselves and for our loved ones. That is how I imagine our relationship with Israel.

GAINING GLOBAL JEWISH PERSPECTIVE ON ISRAEL

A brief review of history is in order. After World War I, Great Britain gained control of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. In 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, supporting a “national home for the Jewish people”. However, in 1939 a “white paper” issued by the British severely restricted immigration into Palestine at a time when many Jews who were fleeing the Holocaust found themselves homeless and stateless. After the end of World War II, a committee of the United Nations recommended that Palestine be partitioned into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. The Partition Plan was ratified by the General Assembly of the U.N. on November 29, 1947. On May 14, 1948, corresponding to the fifth day of the Jewish month of Iyyar in the Jewish year 5708, Israel declared its independence. Immediately, five Arab nations invaded Israel and the War of Independence ensued. Many lives were lost in defense of Israel’s right to exist – not only at that time but also in the ensuing wars which spanned the six decades of Israel’s existence.

Perhaps it is to be expected, given our recent history as a people, that it would take us some time to recall that the inception of Zionism predated the horrors of the Holocaust; that our connection as a people to the Land of Israel and to the hope of a restoration of Jewish sovereignty in Israel is ancient, a connection that was never lost throughout the centuries. Nevertheless, shortly after the trauma of the Holocaust it was common to see Israel, first and foremost, as a physical haven for Jews, created when other nations turned their backs on Jews in need.

As a child in Israel, I knew of the Holocaust from those around me, from family and friends. I recall standing at the side of a dusty road, and watching the IDF parade on Yom Ha’Atzmaut, Israel Independence Day. I recall the sense of

¹The very title of this essay invites us to explore in depth what defines Jews as “a people” or, for that matter, a “nation” with “national” holidays? I acknowledge the importance of this question, and leave its in-depth exploration for another time. For the purposes of this essay, I shall assume that, despite our differences, we do indeed see ourselves as a people, and in some sense, as a nation.



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amazement, comfort and joy that it was truly “us” marching on that road, moving in those tanks, and flying through the air. I understood that through the existence of this state whose establishment we were celebrating, we were able for the first time in centuries to defend our existence in an organized and powerful fashion; and, even as a child, I sensed that Yom HaAtzmaut was truly a celebration of what is new in the reality of Jewish existence.

Yet what I may not have realized as a child, standing beside that road, but do know now is that from ancient times, three times a day, Jews have cited the hope of return to Zion in our central prayer, the Amidah. On Sabbaths and Holidays, we sing “*Shir Ha’maalot*”² before Birkat HaMazon³ extolling the virtues of the return to Zion. Conversely, some recite “*Al Naharot Bavel*”⁴, before Birkat HaMazon on weekdays – lamenting our lack of a physical grounding in the Land which has served as our spiritual inspiration and spiritual center from the beginning of our history.

So central is our connection to the Land of Israel that we read in the Talmud:

If a husband wishes to emigrate to the Land of Israel, and his wife does not, she is compelled to emigrate; if she refuses, she is divorced without alimony. If she wishes to emigrate, and her husband does not, he is compelled to emigrate; if he refuses, he must grant her a divorce and pay alimony.⁵

It is as if the sanctity of marriage and of family life, one of the holiest aspects of Jewish living, takes a back seat when compared to the possibility of returning to the Land of Israel.

A JEWISH AND DEMOCRATIC STATE OF ISRAEL

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, things have changed, and changed yet again. Along with the relative ease of access to Israel, we now are grappling with the reality and the responsibility that goes with the existence of a Jewish and democratic State of Israel.

Israel’s Declaration of Independence states:

The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The aspirations delineated in the Declaration of Independence reveal an ambitious agenda. It takes a great deal of sensitivity and nuance – and lots of hands on trial-and-error – to develop a nation that is both Jewish and democratic, both particular and inclusive. As shifting foci demand attention, and as our understanding of the application of these principles to reality broadens and deepens over time, we are repeatedly called upon to realign ourselves with the basic values and aspirations of the Declaration of Independence.

Since 1948, Israel’s achievements at home, and contributions to the world, in fields as far reaching as economics, agriculture, science, technology, and more have gone hand-in-hand with its continued struggle for survival, as experienced in a recurrent cycle of war and peace. All this, coupled with the ongoing Palestinian conflict, has contributed to changing realities and perceptions. No longer a dream, the State of Israel is now a reality to be both celebrated and contended with. And the dynamics of this process have influenced the evolving nature of our celebration of the National Holidays.

² *Psalm 126.*

³ *The Blessing After the Meal.*

⁴ *Psalm 137.*

⁵ *Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 110b.* Thanks to Rabbi Melissa Crespy for bringing this source to my attention.



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Take, for example, the military parade on Yom HaAtzmaut. Since lasting peace has yet to be achieved in Israel, one might presume that the military parade on Yom HaAtzmaut would have remained central to the celebration. Yet, Israel has eliminated the parade, shifting the focus of Yom HaAtzmaut to cultural, communal and spiritual forms of celebration. This shift reflects the burgeoning awareness that Israel is more than a physical haven. It is a cultural and a spiritual haven, as well.

Family picnics, outings to nature preserves, visits to museums, songfests, comedians and concerts have become a more central part of the rituals. In crowded streets, a communal “game” where people randomly bop each other on the head with small plastic hammers that beep upon contact has grown to be a part of the Yom HaAtzmaut scene. What is the significance of this game? Perhaps it symbolizes the joy at our ability to be playful in a crowd of people, who share our desire to simply walk the streets of Israel, and celebrate. Significantly, the final round of the *Chidon Tanakhi Olami* (International Bible Contest), and *Prasei Yisrael* (Israel Prizes) ceremonies, honoring outstanding contributions to the culture and wellbeing of Israel, have also become mainstays of the celebration of Yom HaAtzmaut.

The Jewish people and Israel are engaged in a dynamic process of “familial” relationship. Ideally, as we grow, we also grow in understanding and in commitment. If our birthday celebrations change over the years, yet retain a basic ritual core that reflects our commitment and our love, so, too, does the celebration of our national holidays, which similarly changes over the years, retain a similar special core.

Thankfully, there is much to be celebrated, much to be proud of in regard to Israel. From the revival of the Hebrew language to the recent help Israel provided the people of Haiti following a devastating earthquake, Israel is a country of great accomplishment and tremendous potential. It is a work-in-progress, an invitation to us to be part of a historical and spiritual opportunity of immense proportions.

Yom HaAtzmaut celebrations go beyond celebrating what is new in Jewish reality. They include a sense of celebration of what *might yet become* in the Jewish homeland, a sacred embodiment of Jewish values in real time and space.

MEMORIAL AND CELEBRATION, HAND IN HAND

In Israel, the day preceding *Yom HaAtzmaut*, is dedicated to the memory of those who gave their lives so that Israel could exist. It is *Yom HaZikaron* (Memorial Day). In the Diaspora we might mark the day with the lighting of a *yahrzeit* candle, a moment of silence, or a memorial gathering for those we know who lost their lives in defense of Israel. In Israel, public and private memorial services are held. Families and friends visit gravesites and recall their loved ones. A siren is sounded throughout the land, and for one very significant moment all activity is brought to a halt.

On one of my recent visits to Israel, I was riding on a bus when the siren sounded. The bus stopped, as did all the traffic in both directions. People on the street stood still. The bus driver opened the doors of the bus, got off and stood at attention near the bus. All the passengers on the bus stood up, some in the aisles and some near their seats. When the sound of the siren faded, there was a moment, which I can only describe as “the drawing of a collective breath”, as we all silently acknowledged our connection with one another. It was a powerful moment. The sound of the siren was no less eloquent than the instant of recognition that followed.

The Israeli Masorti/Conservative prayerbook *Va'Ani Tefilati*⁶, includes a reading from S.Y. Agnon⁷ which explicates God's love for each and every one of our people. Agnon suggests that as opposed to an earthly king who does not know each and every one of the soldiers lost in battle, God knows each of us and mourns the loss of each of us. So in reciting the mourner's *kaddish* on Yom HaZikaron, we are as much comforting God as we are comforting ourselves on the losses sustained in the struggle for Israel's survival.

Immediately following Yom HaZikaron, on the eve of Yom HaAtzmaut, a central ceremony takes place in Jerusalem on Mount Herzl. This ceremony marks the official transition from the deep mourning and sorrow of Yom HaZikaron, to

⁶ *Siddur Va'ani Tefilati, Jerusalem, 5758.*

⁷ “*Melech basar va'dam... (An earthly king...)*”, *ibid.*, pp. 574-575.



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the joy and celebration of Yom HaAtzmaut. Twelve torches are lit, evocative of the twelve tribes of Israel, and expressive of the modern variety and vibrancy of life in Israel. Following the ceremony, the festivities begin.

*Siddur Va'Ani Tefilati*⁸ includes readings from Psalms, from Israel's Declaration of Independence, the recitation of full Hallel, and the recitation of the "*Shehecheyanu*" blessing, praising God for allowing us to reach this special moment in time, and the singing of "Hatikvah" ("The Hope"), Israel's National Anthem, in the evening service for Yom HaAtzmaut. Hallel, special Torah and haftarah readings are added to the regular morning service. A festive meal is suggested, and special readings from the Bible and Talmudic literature are included.

Jews in the diaspora add similar prayers in their observances and often mark this day by educational programs and social gatherings, celebrating with the foods, and cultural activities that remind us of Israel. Some communities hold Israel Day parades, with Israeli dancing and singing during the week of Yom HaAtzmaut.

YOM YERUSHALAYIM (JERUSALEM DAY)

In Hebrew, the name "Jerusalem" connotes the hope and the prayer for "*Shleymut*" (wholeness) and for "*Shalom*" (peace). Jerusalem symbolizes the belief that one day, peace and wholeness will be the portion of all the faith communities that are invested in it; that redemption is within our human grasp, if only we do not abandon the hope.

Following the War of Independence, Jerusalem was divided. Jordan retained East Jerusalem, including the site of the ancient Temple Mount. Despite the holiness of the Temple Mount to Jews, Jews were denied access to it. During the Six Day War in 1967, on the twenty-eighth day of Iyyar, a day which has since been designated as Yom Yerushalayim, Israel regained control of East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Since then, true to the values of Israel's Declaration of Independence, all the holy sites in Jerusalem have been accessible to people of all faiths. Both in Israel and in the Diaspora, Yom Yerushalayim is marked, by some, with the recitation of Hallel, and of special Psalms.

CONCLUSION

Israel is a multivalent experience. It is a Land that represents the miracle of Jewish survival as well as the tremendous potential inherent in the gift of Jewish tradition.

The Torah describes Israel as: "A land...of springs and fountains, coming out in the valleys and on the mountains."⁹ In a midrashic sense, this verse resonates with the multiple levels of the experience of Israel. Here, the depths and the heights of both the soul and the material world are accessible to us. Past meets with present and connects to the future in Israel. Israel reminds us that redemption is possible, that God invites our participation in that process in the spirit of Isaiah's prophetic words: "Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and those who return to her, with equity."¹⁰

Whether we return to Israel by living in Israel, or we return by associating ourselves with Israel, from near or far, that heightened awareness, coupled with the real opportunity to contribute to the realization of the vision of our prophets is ample reason for all of us to celebrate our National Holidays.¹¹

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 576-584.

⁹ *Deuteronomy* 8:7.

¹⁰ *Isaiah* 1:27.

¹¹ *My thanks to Rabbi Amy Levin for her invaluable editing suggestions.*



THE ISRAELI NATIONAL HOLIDAYS – TEXT 1

מגילת העצמאות

מדינת ישראל תהא פתוחה לעליה יהודית ולקיבוץ גלויות; תשקוד על פיתוח הארץ לטובת כל תושביה; תהא מושתתה על יסודות החירות, הצדק והשלום לאור חזונו של נביאי ישראל; תקיים שויון זכויות חברתי ומדיני גמור לכל אזרחיה בלי הבדל דת, גזע ומין; תבטיח חופש דת, מצפון, לשון, חינוך ותרבות; תשמור על המקומות הקדושים של כל הדתות; ותהיה נאמנה לעקרונותיה של מגילת האומות המאוחדות.

“The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

(excerpt from Israel's Declaration of Independence)

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Does your vision of modern day Israel agree with the agenda laid out in the Declaration of Independence? Explain.
- What challenges does this agenda pose?
- What unique opportunities does it offer?
- What is your vision for modern day Israel? Does the reality approximate the vision?
- If you could re-write the Declaration of Independence, what would your version look like?



THE ISRAELI NATIONAL HOLIDAYS – TEXT 2

תהלים פרק קכב

- (א) שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד שְׁמַחְתִּי בְּאֵי מְרִים לִי בֵּית ה' גִּלְגָּל:
(ב) עַמְּדוֹת הָיוּ רַגְלֵינוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ יְרוּשָׁלָּיִם:
(ג) יְרוּשָׁלָּיִם הַבְּנוּיָה פְּעִיר שְׁחֻבָּרָה לָהּ יַחֲדָו:
(ד) שְׁשֵׁם עָלוּ שְׂבָטִים שְׂבָטֵי יְהוּדָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לָהּ דוֹת לְשֵׁם ה':
(ה) כִּי שָׁמָּה יָשְׁבוּ כְּסָאוֹת לְמִשְׁפַּט כְּסָאוֹת לְבֵית דָּוִד:
(ו) שְׁאֵלוּ שָׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלָּיִם יִשְׁלִי אֶהְבִּיךָ:
(ז) הֲיִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחִילְךָ שְׁלוֹהָ בְּאַרְמְנוֹתֶיךָ:
(ח) לְמַעַן אַחֲי וְרַעֲי אֲדַבְּרָה נָא שָׁלוֹם בְּךָ:
(ט) לְמַעַן בֵּית ה' אֵל הַיְנוּ אֲבַקֶּשֶׁה טוֹב לְךָ:

PSALM 122

A song of ascents. Of David.

I rejoiced when they said to me,

“We are going to the House of the Lord.”

Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem

Jerusalem built up, a city knit together,

To which tribes would make pilgrimage,

The tribes of the Lord

—as was enjoined upon Israel—

to praise the name of the Lord.

There the thrones of judgment stood,

Thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem;

“May those who love you be at peace.

May there be well-being within your ramparts,

Peace in your citadels.”

For the sake of my kin and friends,

I pray for your well-being;

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,

I seek your good.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- How does the description of Jerusalem compare to Jerusalem of today?
- Do you still think of “pilgrimage” to Jerusalem? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?
- Do you think that walking in Jerusalem affects the way we pray for Jerusalem? In what way?
- How do you understand the concept of “praying for the wellbeing” of Jerusalem?
- Do you feel that Jerusalem “belongs” to Israel? To the Jewish people? To the world? To God? If so, in what way(s)? If no, why not?



THE ISRAELI NATIONAL HOLIDAYS – TEXT 3

תהלים פרק קכו

א) שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הֵינּוּ כָּח לְמִים:
ב) אֲזַי יִמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה אֲזַי אִמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם הַגְּדִיל ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת עִם אֲלֹהֵי:
ג) הַגְּדִיל ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ הֵינּוּ שְׂמֵחִים:
ד) שׁוֹבָה ה' אֶת שְׁבִיתֵנוּ כְּאֲפִיקִים בְּנֶגֶב:
ה) הִזֵּר רָעִים בְּדַמְעָה בְּרִנָּה יִקְצֹרוּ:
ו) הַלֹּךְ יִלְךְ וּבְכֹה נִשְׂא מִשְׁךְ הַזֶּרַע בֹּא יְבוֹא בְּרִנָּה נִשְׂא אֶלְמֵ תִּיּוֹ:

PSALM 126

A song of ascents.

When the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion

We see it as in a dream

Our mouths shall be filled with laughter,

Our tongues, with song of joy,

Then shall they say among the nations,

The Lord has done great things for them!

The Lord will do great things for us

And we shall rejoice.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,

Like watercourses in the Negeb.

They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy.

Though he goes along weeping,

Carrying the seed-bad,

He shall come back with songs of joy,

Carrying his sheaves.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Do you feel that God has in some way(s) “restored the fortunes of Zion”? Does this find expression in modern day Israel? If so, in what way(s)? If not, what would “restoring the fortunes of Zion” entail?
- Is your feeling about Israel tied to the way “the nations” react to Zion/Israel? Explain.
- The Psalm connects the dream of the “restoring the fortunes of Zion” with great emotion. What emotional reactions have you experienced in relation to Israel?



THE ISRAELI NATIONAL HOLIDAYS – TEXT 4

תלמוד בבלי מסכת כתובות דף קי עמוד ב

תנו רבנן: הוא אומר לעלות, והיא אומרת של א לעלות - כופין אותה לעלות, ואם לאו - תצא
כל א כתובה, היא אומרת לעלות, והוא אומר של א לעלות - כופין אותו לעלות, ואם לאו -
יוצא ויתן כתובה.

KETUBOT 110B

If a husband wishes to emigrate to the Land of Israel, and his wife does not, she is compelled to emigrate; if she refuses, she is divorced without alimony. If she wishes to emigrate, and her husband does not, he is compelled to emigrate; if he refuses, he must grant her a divorce and pay alimony.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- In the above source, the sanctity of marriage and of family, one of the holiest aspects of Jewish life, is apparently seen as secondary to the desire to emigrate to the Land of Israel. How do you understand the raising up of the value of living in Israel over the value of maintaining the sanctity of an individual marriage and family?
- What would you advise a family that is divided about living in Israel?
- How might we best maintain a connection to the values which Israel represents, while living in the Diaspora?



THE ISRAELI NATIONAL HOLIDAYS – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

דברים פרק ח

א) כָּל הַמְצוּוֹה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תַּחֲיוּן וּרְבִיתֶם וּבִאתֶם וִירְשֶׁתֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאֲבֹתֵיכֶם:

דברים פרק ח

ז) כִּי ה' אֵל הַיְיָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחְלֵי מַיִם עֵינַיִת וְתַה' מֵת י' צְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְקָר:

ח) אֶרֶץ חֹטָה וְשִׁעָרָה וְגִפְנוֹ וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵית שְׁמֹן וְדָבָשׁ:

ט) אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְּמִסְכַּנֹּת תֹּאכַל בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא תַחֲסֹר כֹּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבִינֶיהָ בְּרוֹזֵל וּמְהַרְרִיָּה תַחְצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת:

י) וְאֶכְלָתָּ וְשִׁבַּעְתָּ וּבִרְכַּתְתָּ אֶת ה' אֵל הַיְיָ עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ:

DEUTERONOMY 8:1,7-10

You shall faithfully observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, that you may thrive and increase and be able to possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your fathers (Deut. 8:1)...For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams (*nachalei mayim*) and springs and fountains (*ayanot u'thomot*) issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

YEHUDA, NACHSHONI, HAGUT B'FARSHIOYOT HATORAH, EKEV, BNEI BRAK, 5747 (p. 742-743)

The Rishonim explicate “*Eretz Nachalei Mayim...ba'bik'ah u'va'har*”, that those who dwelt in the mountains would not need to search for water below, and those who dwelt in the plains would not need to search for water higher up. Each one would find water wherever they were. Chizkuni explains, that the blessing in it is the need to rely on “*rachamei shamayim*” God’s mercies. There are no rivers in our land to water the fields. There are *maymot*, springs, and sources that rely on rain water, which involves only “if you will listen (obey)...[God’s word]”. However Nachmanides sees in it a natural blessing in the springs and fountains in and of themselves. Eretz Israel is a water filled garden, and is not needing of rivers to provide her with water, as Egypt. Springs and fountains come out of the plains and the mountains, and from there the rivers flow....Siftei Cohen says, that “*ayanot u'thomot*” is written without the letter vav in each of the words to point to the spring and fountain that are one, that would support Jerusalem, and that is *Mei ha-shiloach*, which would provide water to all of Jerusalem, and *Mey Gichon* that Yechizkiyahu cut off.

(translated by Gilah Dror)

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What are the various explications for the description of *ayanot u'thomot*, springs and fountains in the Land of Israel? Do they agree with one another, or are they divergent explications? In what way do they agree with one another, and in what way do they diverge? Which of the explications makes the most sense to you?
- Do you feel that the Land of Israel is blessed in a natural way? Or is it blessed in a more mystical way? Is it a place of blessing or of challenge?
- Are those who visit Israel blessed in some special way? If you have been in Israel, how would you describe the feeling of being in Israel? If you have spoken with someone who has been in Israel, what feeling did they convey to you about Israel?
- Might “springs and fountains” represent “ups and downs” associated with modern day Israel? What “ups and downs” do you perceive in relation to Israel? Would you consider them “blessings” to be celebrated? In what way?





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