

נִרְצָח NIRTZAH



IN A NUTSHELL

Nirtzah means parting, and with this passage we reach the concluding section of the Haggadah. We pray that next year we may be able to celebrate it in a rebuilt Temple according to the original biblical rituals (which we can no longer fulfil). This passage is taken from a liturgical poem (*kerova*) composed by Rabbi Joseph Tov Elem in the eleventh century CE. Originally it was said in the synagogue on *Shabbat haGadol*, the Shabbat preceding Pesach, to conclude a detailing of the laws of Pesach, and it was transferred to the Haggadah in the fourteenth century.

Commentary on 'The Pesach Service is Finished',
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada



DEEP DIVE

As at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, so here – at the two supreme moments of the Jewish year – we pray *Leshanah haba'a biYerushalayim habenuya*, "Next year in Jerusalem rebuilt." Nothing in the imaginative life of peoples throughout the world quite compares to the Jewish love for, and attachment to, Jerusalem. A Psalm records, in unforgettable words, the feelings of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia two and a half thousand years ago: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept as we remembered Zion... How can we sing the Lord's song on foreign soil? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy" (Tehilim 137:1–6).

Wherever Jews were, they preserved the memory of Jerusalem. They prayed toward it. They spoke

of it continually. At weddings they broke a glass in its memory. On Tisha B'Av they sat and mourned its destruction as if it were a recent tragedy. They longed for it with an everlasting love.

The French historian Chateaubriand, visiting Jerusalem in the early nineteenth century, was overcome with emotion as he saw for the first time the small Jewish community there, waiting patiently for the Messiah. "This people," he wrote, "has seen Jerusalem destroyed seventeen times, yet there exists nothing in the world which can discourage it or prevent it from raising its eyes to Zion. He who beholds the Jews dispersed over the face of the earth, in keeping with the Word of God, lingers and marvels. But he will be struck with amazement, as at a miracle, who finds them still in Jerusalem and perceives even, who in law and justice are the masters of Judea, to exist as slaves and strangers in their own land; how despite all abuses they await the King who is to deliver them." Noting how this "small nation" had survived while the great empires who sought its destruction had vanished, he added, "If there is anything among the nations of the world marked with the stamp of the miraculous, this, in our opinion, is that miracle."

Next Year in Jerusalem,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Why do you think that both of these important days in the Jewish calendar (Yom Kippur and Seder night) finish with these words about Jerusalem?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

Jerusalem is a place, but it is more than a place. It became a metaphor for the collective destination of the Jewish people. A city is what we build together, individually

through our homes, collectively through our public spaces. So Jerusalem became a symbol of what Jews were summoned to build by creating a city of righteousness worthy of being a home for the Divine Presence. Its stones would be good deeds, and its mortar, relationships of generosity and trust. Its houses would be families; its defensive walls, schools and houses of study. Shabbat and the festivals would be its public parks and gardens. For Jews believed that, even in a violent and destructive world, heaven could be built on earth. It was their most daring vision. The architect of the city would be God. The builders would be ordinary men and women. It would be a Jewish city, but it would be open to all, and people from all faiths would come and be moved by its beauty.

So Jerusalem, the "faithful city" (Yishayahu 1:27), became the destination of the Jewish journey, which began with Abraham and Sarah and will be complete only at the end of days. This is how the prophet Yishayahu envisioned it, in words that for millennia have captured the human imagination:

In the last days

The mountain of the Lord's Temple will be established

As chief among the mountains;

It will be raised above the hills,

And all the nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

To the house of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us His ways,

So that we may walk in His path."

For the Torah shall come forth from Zion,

And the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem.

He will judge between the
nations

And settle disputes for many
peoples.

They will beat their swords into
plowshares

And their spears into pruning
hooks.

Nation will not take up sword
against nation,

Nor will they train for war
anymore. (Yishayahu 2:2-4)

These words, among the most influential ever written, sum up much of Jewish faith. They epitomise what it might be like to “perfect the world under the sovereignty of God” (*Aleinu*). And as they journeyed through the centuries and continents, Jews carried this vision with them, believing that their task was to be true to their faith, to be loyal to God, to exemplify His ways to humankind, and to build a world at peace with itself by learning and teaching how to respect the freedom and dignity of others.

An Afternoon in Jerusalem,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

**What must the Jewish people do
when they reach their final desti-
nation, Jerusalem?**



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Do you think Jews in Israel should still say this at the end of their Seder?
2. What does Jerusalem have to do with the Exodus story and Seder night?
3. Has anyone around your Seder table celebrated Pesach in Israel? Was it special or different?



EXPERIENCING THE SEDER

Take a moment. Close your eyes and imagine what celebrating the Pesach Seder in Jerusalem would be like with a rebuilt Temple.



A STORY FOR THE NIGHT OF STORIES

Rabbi Sacks: “It happened in Jerusalem, one Shabbat afternoon toward the end of the Gulf War. Our family had gone to the Holy City to find peace. Instead we found ourselves living in the midst of war. Within weeks of our arrival it became clear that the Middle East was yet again about to be engulfed in conflict. Yet as we stepped out into the Jerusalem sunlight that day, there was peace. The city breathed the stillness of Shabbat. The late afternoon sun was turning the houses of Jerusalem stone into burnished gold. As we looked across the valley to the walls of the Old City we could understand why, long ago, people had called this the city of peace and why, even when it lay in ruins, Jews were convinced that the Divine Presence had never left Jerusalem.

“We had been invited by our neighbours to *Se’udah Shelishit*, the third Shabbat meal. When we arrived we discovered that they had also invited a group of Romanian Jews who had recently come to make their home in Israel. They had made the journey together, as a group, because they were a choir. In Romania they had sung the songs of Jewish hope and longing. Now, in Jerusalem, they began to sing again for us around the Shabbat table.

“Then a rather moving thing happened. As the sounds of the choir reverberated around the alleyways of our quiet corner of Jerusalem, people from the neighbouring houses began to appear, drawn by the music. One by one they slipped in through the open door and stood around as, hesitantly at first, then

with growing confidence, they joined the singing. Here was an Israeli artist, there a new arrival from Russia, here an American investment banker, there a family from South Africa, and in the doorway a group of tourists who happened to be walking by and had stopped to see what was happening and then found themselves drawn in by the warm atmosphere. No one spoke; no one wanted to break the mood. We continued to sing the songs of Shabbat afternoon. As the sun began to set behind the hills, I could feel the Divine Presence among us, joining our words to those of a hundred generations of Jews, uniting them into a vast choral symphony, the love song of a people for God, and I sensed something of the mystery and majesty of the Jewish people, and I knew that it was this that I had come to Jerusalem to find.

“We had come together, each of us as the result of a long journey, in some cases physical, in others spiritual, and in many, both. We each had stories to tell of how we came to be in Jerusalem that afternoon. But just as our individual voices had united to sing the words of our ancestors’ songs, so our stories were part of a larger story. Our personal routes were stages on the most remarkable journey ever undertaken by a people, spanning almost every country on the face of the earth, and four thousand years of time. If we had been able, then and there, to trace back the history of our parents and theirs across the generations, we would have been awestruck at its drama and scope. Was there anything that could remotely compare to the long Jewish journey to Jerusalem? Was this, I thought, not the most vivid testimony imaginable to the power and endurance of faith?

“As the singing ended, and Shabbat drew to a close, I understood that to be a Jew is to join the journey of our people, the story of Pesach and the long walk across centuries and continents from exile to homecoming. There is no story like it, and the journey is not yet complete.”