

The story of shofar blowing by the Beitar movement during the period of the British Mandate –

bravery in Jerusalem



I was a child living among courtyards and stone houses in a small Jerusalemite neighborhood. In our neighborhood one could hear Hebrew, Arabic, Ladino and Yiddish spoken interchangeably. But the most moving sounds were heard during the month of Elul, when the shofar blowing blasted from every corner, creating sounds that tugged at your heartstrings...

My father had a special role during the Rosh Hashanah prayers. He was the 'ba'al tokeah' (lit. 'master of the blast'). Every year, at the time of the High Holidays, my father would let me practice the shofar as if he was preparing me for something serious.

These days, the soldiers of the British Mandate roamed every corner of Eretz Israel. We called them by a code name: 'Kalaniyot' (Hebrew: 'anemones'), because their military berets were red.

The bans regarding the Western Wall were especially painful for us. When the Arabs claimed that the prayers of the Jews were harming them, the officers of the British Mandate hurriedly enacted all sorts of laws, which severely restricted our movements. Although they allowed us to pray near the Western Wall, at the same time they forbade us to bring in Torah scrolls, to sit on chairs and benches, and above all, unfortunately ... they did not let us bring in our shofars ...

The month of Tishrei arrived and with it my Bar Mitzvah year.

I loved adventure, and I would often think about a way I could win back the honor that has been stripped of my people. I imagined I add national pride to the people of Israel in their land. Now, I felt mature and responsible and waited for the opportunity to prove it.

Together with my friends from the youth movement, we met in our secret yard, behind white clotheslines. We talked quietly about the new restrictions, feeling insulted and humiliated. We felt ashamed that we could not do as we would like to, with the remains of our temple, the Western Wall.

Suddenly the guide asked: 'Who knows how to blow the shofar?'

I raised my hand and said, 'I'

I felt that the moment I had been waiting for had finally arrived.

Yom Kippur had arrived. A day of pardon and forgiveness. I did not reveal to anyone at home about the task I had undertaken. In my heart I apologized to my parents for the grief that might be inflicted on them if I were to be caught and thrown into 'The Kishla', the infamous British prison. Towards the end of the holy day prayers, I ran to the Western Wall while trespassing unto rooftops and into courtyards. I found refuge among the crowds of worshipers who stood squeezed in, covered with prayer shawls, singing and begging in prayer. I had secretly transported the shofar to the Western Wall, with the help of a young girl I did not know, who agreed to hide it in her clothes.

The shofar was in my hand. The tension was great and I tried to disguise my worried face with the expression of someone who was praying with all their might. And here came the moment. I was petrified. I took a deep breath ...

I stood upright with my head high and blew the shofar in a clear, pure voice, tekiah gedolah ("great tekiah"). Within moments, undercover British police officers were jumping on me from all directions. They grabbed me and dragged me along with my face turned to the Western Wall as I was carried away from my friends. My vision dimmed, I was still fasting and felt like I was about to faint. I heard a group following us while singing the national anthem 'Hatikvah' and it made me feel stronger. In my mind's eye, the Western Wall stones seemed to me for a moment like squares in a huge, endless photo album of great-grandparents, and many more great-great grandparents from all generations and places, from all over the world, blowing the shofar and praying: "Next year in the built-up Jerusalem."

The story you read is based on the story of Avraham Elkayam who blew the shofar on the evening of Yom Kippur in 1947. On the eve of the establishment of the state, but still with Jerusalem under British rule. He was the last person to blow the shofar before the fall of the Old City during the War of Independence. Before him were 17 boys who had all taken turns blowing the shofar to preserve tradition and national pride.

longing and yearning for Jerusalem



If you have not yet read the poems of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, now would be the right time to do so. One of the greatest poets in Jewish culture and one who dreamed constantly of coming to Eretz Israel and Jerusalem. Let's try to get to know him a little bit ...

- Rabbi Yehuda Halevi was a Jewish philosopher and poet. He was born in Tudela, Spain at the end of the 11th century, and died after 1140. He also studied medicine and Arabic and philosophy.
- Rabbi Yehuda Halevi began writing poetry at an early age.
- At the age of sixty he decided to leave Spain and immigrate to Jerusalem. He wanted to be in the place where the Spirit of God dwells and to breathe the holy air.

He expressed his longing for the land of Israel in many poems, notably in the following one:

Tsion, Ha'lo Tisch'ali le'shlom Asirayich,
Dorshei Shlomech ve'hem yeter
Adarayich?
Mi'Yam u'Mizrach u'Mi'Tzafon Ve'Teimn
Shalom
Rachok ve'karov se'i mi'kol avarayich,
Ou'shlom assir Ta'ava, noten Dema'av
ke'tal
Hermon ve'nichsaf le'ridetam al
ha'rarayich!
Livkot enoutech abh tanim, ve'et echlom
Shivat Shevoutech – ani kinor le'shirayich.
Libi le'Beth El ve'lifniel meod yeheme
Ou'lemachnayim ve'kol pigey te'horayich,
Sham Ha'shechina Shecheina lach,
ve'hayotsrech
Patach le'moul shaarei shachak
she'arayich,
Ou'kvod Adonai Le'vad haya me'orech,
ve'ein
Shemesh Ve'sahar ve'kochavim
me'irayich.

Zion! Do you wonder how and where your
captives
Are now, and if they think of you, the far-
flocked remnants?
From north and south, east, west, and all
directions,
Near and far, they send their greetings
As I send mine, captured by my longings
To weep like Hermon's dew upon your
mountains.
Mourning your lowliness, I am the wail of
jackals;
Dreaming your son's return, the song of
lute strings.
My heart stirs for Peniel, and for Bethel,
and all those places
With their pure traces of G'd's presence,
where your gates,
Facing the portals of the higher heavens,
Stand open by your Maker. You He illumines
Not with the sun, or moon, or stars, but
with the rays.

Letter by Esther Tseilingold –

Mesirut Nefesh (Martyrdom) in Jerusalem

About Esther Tseilingold - From the Yizkor website:



Esther, daughter of Jewish parents, was born in London, the capital of England. She finished high school and became a teacher. Prior to immigrating to Israel, she volunteered in refugee camps for children in England. Her parents' home was steeped in traditional and national Jewish culture and this is why Esther decided to immigrate to Israel. Immediately after the declaration of the state, she enlisted in a religious battalion of girls in Jerusalem. She was sent to the Haganah base in Tzova and worked there as a cook. Later she participated in a training course in Jerusalem. Esther was very successful in everything she did. She took advantage of her native language and broadcasted in English for Haganah underground radio and actively participated in committees and organizations she closely identified with. She also published articles in English in the "Igrot La'Achim" (letters to my brothers) and in the "Gesher" newspaper.

During the siege and the difficult battles in the besieged old city she managed after many efforts to get into the old city disguised as a teacher. Upon her arrival there, she was appointed secretary of a section and was assigned welfare duties. However, she also participated as a fighter in enemy pushbacks. She was injured more than once and also had surgery.

A day before the surrender of the Old City, she was fatally wounded by a shell. Until her last moments she cared for friends and was able to warn them of coming danger. Esther died on May 29, 1948, a few hours after the evacuation of the Old City. Much has been written about Esther's heroism in the Israeli press, as well as in England and America and in various books

Here is the letter Esther wrote to her parents six days before her death:

"Dear Mom and Dad, and everyone,

If you receive this letter, I suppose it will be not be different from all my frightened and confused letters. I am writing this letter to beg you: make an effort to accept everything that has happened to me, in the sense that I want you to accept it - and understand that I have no regrets. We had a bitter struggle and it has been literally hell over here - but it was worth it because I am absolutely convinced that in the end a Jewish state will be established and our aspirations will come true.

I will be just one of many who have sacrificed their lives. I had an urge to write this, because today a person who was very important to me was killed. Because of the grief I felt, I want you to treat it differently - to remember that we were soldiers and we had a great and noble cause to fight for. God is with us, I know, in His holy city, and I'm proud and willing to pay the price it might cost me.

Do not think I have taken 'unnecessary risks'. There is no choice when your power is limited. I hope you

will have the opportunity to meet each of my co-fighters who will survive the battle, if I do not make it, and also - that you will be pleased and not sad when they remind you of me. Please, please, do not be sad. It will not help.

I have lived my life to the fullest, even if briefly, and I think that is the best way - 'short and sweet'. The 'very sweet' taste is here in our country. I hope Mimi (Esther's sister) and Asher (the sister's husband) will give you great joy, something I have not been able to do. Leave it behind you without regrets, and then I'll be happy too. I think of all of you, each and every one of you in the family, and I take great comfort in the thought that you will come, one day, very soon I hope, you will come and reap the fruits of our labor, of what we fought for.

Much, much love, be happy and remember me fondly

So long and goodbye

Your loving Esther.

The departure from the walls –

settlement in Jerusalem

**Have you ever heard the phrase "the departure from the walls?"
If not here is a short explanation for you!**

The "departure from the walls" is the process of the expansion of buildings, roads and residential neighborhoods in Jerusalem outside the walls of the Old City. The process began in the 19th century and happened after thousands of years in which the inhabitants of Jerusalem lived within the walls of the Old City, and even locked their gates at night for fear.

**Now let's get to know a very important family in
Jerusalem, the Meyuchas family!**

The original name of the Meyuchas family was 'Bachar', but due to the status of the family, the name 'Meyuchas' (Hebrew: privileged) was added to it. The family members immigrated with Zerubavel during the days of the Return to Zion.

With the departure from the walls, a departure that was perceived as a brave and daring act, the Meyuchas families emerged from within the walls. The family members purchased the first Jewish house built in the Shiloah village. Miraculously, the purchase of the house marked the resettlement of the family in the Judah tribe territory as in ancient times.

The Arabs nicknamed the Meyuchas "Dar Abu Manhas." Relations between the Jews and the Arabs were very good, and the Arabs even provided kosher food for their Jewish neighbors on various occasions. Until the 11th century, the city gates were closed in the evening and opened after dawn. Members of the Meyuchas family, who traded in grain imported from across the Jordan river, came to the city often in the evening and were forced to sleep outside the walls and enter it only at dawn.

The family members were groundbreaking leaders, heading the Jewish community and writing halachic rulings and books of Halacha. Two of their Jerusalemite sons served as "Rishon Lezion" (the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel). Others led the committee of the Spanish community and engaged in the purchase of lands and the development of settlements and construction work in Jerusalem. Some served as heads of yeshivas, teachers and educators. They wrote Halachic books, folklore and language, were public activists and their work benefited the Land of Israel in general and the city of Jerusalem in particular.



"Jerusalem turns all Jews into friends" - the meaning of the word 'friend' in this Mishnah.-

Social solidarity in Jerusalem

Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together"
(Psalms 122: 3)

And what is a city that is closely compacted together? "Said Rabbi Yehoshua Ben-Levi - a city that turns all Jews into friends"
(Yerushalmi Hagiga, 2: 6)

**Try to think for a moment what the word friend means to you?
What comes to mind when you think of a city closely
compacted together?**

When the phrase "friend" appears in the Talmud, it refers not only to a comrade or pal, but to a Talmid Chacham (student of a sage) who understands and observes the Halachic law and therefore others trust him and eat his food. The antonym of a friend is an ignorant man. This is a person who does not know the Halacha and therefore, should he offer me food, I will have to make sure it is indeed kosher before I can eat it.

**In Jerusalem, everyone is equal! There are no social classes in
Jerusalem! No ranks! No degrees of popularity!**

Everyone is regarded as equal and seen as friends. Everyone can be trusted and everyone can be relied upon. And it may be that this is where the phrase "friend" comes from - a person I can trust and put my faith in. In Jerusalem, we will avoid issues that can cause division and I highlight individual differences, but instead strive to be friends!



mutual solidarity in Jerusalem

**Are you familiar with the saying:
"No one (in Jerusalem) ever said: this place is too
cramped for me to stay in"?**

It can be found in the following Mishna: "No one in Jerusalem ever said to his friend : "I cannot find a bed to sleep on in Jerusalem. No one in Jerusalem ever said: this place is too cramped for me to stay in." (Avot d'Rabbi Natan, version A, chapter 35)

Do you see how beautiful this is? The pilgrims who came to Jerusalem were accommodated in the homes of the city's residents within near vicinity for free! This in accordance with the perception that Jerusalem belongs to the entire Jewish people, and not only to its residents, and with the aim of maintaining good relations between the guests, who came as pilgrims, and the hosts, living in Jerusalem.

Imagine you are residents living in Jerusalem. How would you react to the noise, chaos and overcrowding brought about by the three pilgrim festivals? Would you open up your homes or rather choose to close them?

Despite the large number of pilgrims - it seems that there is a place for everyone in the city or in one of the surrounding villages. Written evidences, by Jews and non-Jews, from the Second Temple period, show the huge impression made by the many pilgrims coming to Jerusalem and the Temple.



For My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples –

Universalism in Jerusalem

"I will bring them to My sacred mount and let them rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices Shall be welcome on My altar; for My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

Did you know that the Temple is meant to be a house of prayer not only for the people of Israel but also for gentiles?

At the dedication ceremony of the Temple, King Solomon delivered words of prayer and blessing, including a long description about the designation of the Temple as a house of prayer. Surprisingly Solomon did not mention the sacrifices in the Temple, which has been a major component of Jewish ritual throughout its years of existence.

On the other hand, King Solomon chose instead to put an emphasis on the role of the Temple as a house of prayer - in any event of tragedy or disaster to come upon the people of Israel.

But not only as a house of prayer for the people of Israel, but as a place that will be universal and open to prayer for all peoples!

