Next Year in Jerusalem
Study Guide

I. Introduction:

This study guide aims to provide material to help in the preparation of a lesson, unit, or book-club discussion about the story and folktale anthology *Next Year in Jerusalem* by Howard Schwartz. Studying this collection of *midrashim*, legends, and stories expands the exploration of the concept *anavah* (humility) addressed in the Shevat issue of BABAGANEWZ.

Next Year in Jerusalem is a collection of stories that evoke the unique spirit of Jerusalem. The stories span countries and generations; there are Jewish folk tales, fairy tales, and Rabbinic and Hasidic legends. The stories capture the holiness of the city and reinforce the centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish soul. These stories are a testament to Rabbi Yohanan's teaching that, "Wherever you find the greatness of God, there you find God's humility"; it is in the characters' encounters with this holy city that they exhibit true humility. Something about the sacredness of Jerusalem and God's presence in the city awes the characters in the story and helps them recognize God's grandeur. Reading these stories is, therefore, not only a lesson in Jewish history and lore, but also an exploration of key *middot*, personal attributes.

To help plan for the study of the stories, this guide offers:

- Questions for study and discussion
- Lesson ideas
- Writings activities
- Projects

Combine any components of the guide to help shape your lessons on the stories. You may also want to use the ideas as a means of offering enrichment and extra credit to students who wish to read the *Next Year in Jerusalem*.

II. Questions for Study and Discussion **(organized by story title)**

The Bird of Happiness

1. What did the king's vizier see when he followed Aaron to the shack? Why did seeing this convince him, "that heaven had truly blessed them with a wise young king?"
2. How are Aaron's actions representative of the value of *anavah*? Why is humility an important element in his kingship? How does he demonstrate humility in his kingship?
3. According to the sidebar, what might the glowing stone represent?

The Mountain that Moved
1. What is a *re'em*? How is the *re'em* introduced in the story?
2. What is the significance of the *re'em* bowing to the lion and the lion bowing down to David? How might this chain of actions relate to *anavah*?

The Language of the Birds
1. Why did Solomon want to dress as a beggar? How might the experience of dressing as a beggar change the way he looked at things? How is changing one's perspective on the world an exercise in *anavah*?
2. From whom did Solomon learn the language of the birds? Describe the scenario in which he used this newfound understanding.
3. What were King Solomon's key achievements as king? (Refer to sidebar).

How the Walls of the Temple Were Built
1. What is King Solomon's reasoning for including all the people in the building of the Temple?
2. Why was it only the Western Wall that was saved? What lessons can we learn about work, intention, and humility from this story?
3. According to Jewish tradition, what are the two types of Jerusalem?

The Vampire Demon
1. Who was Asmodeus?
2. Why did the demons want to punish the king?
3. How does Solomon's ring figure in the story? What do you think made the ring so powerful?

The Story of Serah, Who Lived Longer Than Methusaleh
1. Where are the two places that Serah appears in the Torah? What is the reason the Rabbis give for why she lived so long? (Refer to page 29)
2. How did Rabbi Yochanan answer the question of what the walls of the Red Sea looked like? How does Serah describe the Red Sea walls?
3. How does this story relate to Jerusalem and the sacredness of the city?

The Princess of Light
1. Why does the Princess of Light decide to go into exile?
2. According to the king, what's the reward for finding the princess?
3. How does the prince's studying of Torah allow him to find the princess? What can we learn from this story about the importance of Jewish study?
4. What does this story contribute to your understanding about the mystique of Jerusalem?

Challahs in the Ark
1. Why did Yosef put two *challot* into the ark?
2. What did the Shamash do with the *challot*?
3. What does it mean that, according to the Rabbi, "The gifts from Yosef and his wife were being directed by God to those poor people"?
4. How is this a Jerusalem story?

The Miracle at King David's Tomb
1. Why did the evil man want Miriam to enter King David's tomb? What would happen if Miriam were discovered inside the tomb?
2. Who comes to Miriam's rescue?
3. What are the central emotions of this story?
4. Why is King David's Tomb such a powerful symbol in Jerusalem?

Rabbi Nachman's Chair
1. Who was Rabbi Nachman?
2. What is the parable of the great stone? How do the Hasidim apply the lessons of the parable to the problem of the chair?
3. Where in Jerusalem is Rabbi Nachman's chair and how did the chair get to Jerusalem? Why is it significant that it is there?

Milk and Honey
1. How does Joshua first come to Jerusalem?
2. How do the sites and sounds of Jerusalem compare with the Jerusalem of Joshua's dreams? How is Jerusalem different than Poland?
3. Describe Joshua's experience at the Western Wall.

III. Lesson Plans

1**. Exploring *anavah*:**
The purpose of this activity is to:
- explore the importance of *anavah*
- introduce students to the layout of a page of *Talmud.*
- provide opportunities for students to discuss the concept of *anavah* as it appears in ancient and modern Jewish texts

Start by showing the class a page of *Talmud* and describe to them its layout (i.e., text in the center of the page with commentaries surrounding it). Inform students that in this activity, they too will be creating pages of "Talmud."

To do so, divide students into three groups and give each group a piece of chart paper or poster board with one of the following texts in the center. In groups, students should discuss the provided questions and write their responses around the text. Afterwards, students should read their text to the rest of the class and provide a brief description of some of the insights and ideas that arose from their discussion.

Texts:

a)

Proverbs 16:18–19 Pride goes before ruin; arrogance, before failure. Better to be humble and among the lowly, than to share spoils with the proud.	משלי טז:יח-יט לִפְנֵי שֶׁבֶר גָּאוֹן וְלִפְנֵי כִשָּׁלוֹן גֹּבַהּ רוּחַ׃ טוֹב שְׁפַל רוּחַ אֶת־עֲנָיִים [עְנָוִים] מֵחַלֵּק שָׁלָל אֶת גֵּאִים׃

Questions:
According to the text, with what are pride and arrogance associated?

In your opinion, what's the difference between arrogance and self-confidence?

How can pride and arrogance lead to failure? Can you think of an example of this?

Why do you think it would be, "better to be humble and among the lowly?"

How does this text relate to the story, *How the Walls of the Temple Were Built*?

b) Rabbi Bunim taught: Every person should have two pockets. In one pocket should be a piece of paper saying: "I am but dust and ashes." When one is feeling too proud, reach into this pocket and take out this paper and read it. In the other pocket should be a piece of paper saying: "For my sake was the world created." When one is feeling disheartened and lowly, reach into this pocket and take this paper out and read it. We are each the joining of two worlds. We are fashioned from clay, but our spirit is the breath of [God]. (*Tales of The Hasidim Later Masters*, Martin Buber)

Questions:
Describe a situation when someone would reach into one pocket and a situation where someone would reach into the other pocket.

How do those sayings balance the concepts of humility and self-confidence?

c) "Ever let a person be humble in Torah and good works, humble with parents, teacher, and spouse, one's children, with all persons in the household, with relatives near and far, even with the heathen in the street, so that that person becomes beloved on high and desired on earth." *(Tanna Devei Eliyahu*)

Questions:
What kinds of actions would show one's humility in these relationships?

Why do you think humility would cause a person to be beloved on high and on earth?

How does this teaching relate to themes in the stories “The Bird of Happiness” and “The Language of the Birds”?

2. Jerusalem has always been considered to be the heart of Israel, and for Jews worldwide. For example, Jews face Jerusalem when they pray; Jerusalem features prominently in the three daily Jewish prayer services and *birkat hamazon*; at Jewish weddings, a glass is broken to symbolize the Jewish people’s mourning over the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, Holy Temple. The following texts and accompanying questions are intended to give students a more in-depth understanding of Jewish teachings about Jerusalem. As a culmination, students can use these texts to create an appropriate mural, *mizrah*, or other piece of Judaic art to display on the eastern wall of your school’s prayer space.

a)

Psalms 137:5–6 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember you not; if I set not Jerusalem above my greatest joy.	תהילים קלז :ה-ו אִם אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ יְרוּשָׁלִָם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי: תִּדְבַּק לְשׁוֹנִי לְחִכִּי אִם לֹ֫א אֶזְכְּרֵכִי אִם לֹ֫א אַעֲלֶה אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלִַם עַל רֹאשׁ שִׂמְחָתִי:

Questions:
What is the meaning of this Psalm?

Why do you think the text compares forgetting Jerusalem to losing strength in one’s arm?

What happens when one’s tongue sticks to the roof of the mouth? Why does the psalmist say this should be the effect of forgetting about Jerusalem?

Why do you think the psalmist used images from the human body in this psalm?

b)

Midrash Tanhuma Kedoshim 10 Just as the navel is placed at the center of the human body, so too is the Land of Israel placed in the center of the world…. The Land of Israel is the center of the world and Jerusalem is in the center of the Land of Israel.	מדרש תנחומא קדושים י כְּשֵׁם שֶׁהַטַּבּוּר הַזֶּה נָתוּן בְּאֶמְצַע הָאִישׁ כָּךְ אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל נְתוּנָה בְּאֶמְצַע הָעוֹלָם... אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹשֶׁבֶת בְּאֶמְצָעִיתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם וִירוּשָׁלַיִם בְּאֶמְצָעִיתָהּ שֶׁל אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Questions:
Why do you think, like the Psalms text we studied, an image from the human body is used? What is the belly button and how is it similar to Jerusalem? (Remind students that the belly button is essentially a scar caused at birth by the removal of the umbilical cord—the life cord connecting mother to child.)

How might you illustrate this text?

c) *Avot d'Rabbi Natan*, an early collection of Rabbinic teachings written as a commentary to *Pirkei Avot*, writes about Jerusalem:

There are ten portions of suffering in the world: Nine in Jerusalem and one in the rest of the world.
There are ten portions of wisdom in the world: Nine in Jerusalem and one in the rest of the world.
There are ten portions of hypocrisy in the world: Nine in Jerusalem and one in the rest of the world.
There are ten portions of Torah in the world: Nine in Jerusalem and one in the rest of the world.

Questions:
What are the different elements described in this text?

How can Jerusalem contain so much of these conflicting elements?

How might this teaching relate to the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem and earthly Jerusalem described on page 19 of *Next Year in Jerusalem*?

3. At several key points in the Jewish year it is traditional to exclaim "Next Year in Jerusalem." Identify those points with your students (the end of the Yom Kippur service of *ne'ilah*, the end of the Pesach Seder, and the end of festive services for Yom Ha'atzmaut) and ask them why they think this affirmation/hope/prayer/exclamation is recited at these times. Given their thoughts and ideas about the line, ask students why the collection of short stories was so named. How does the emotion behind the phrase, "Next year in Jerusalem" resonate in the stories?

VI. Writing Activities

1. As a class, discuss some of the common literary features of these stories (e.g. an obstacle to overcome, a journey, a symbolic object, etc). Once you've compiled a list, instruct students to write their own story of Jerusalem using at least two of the elements discussed.

2. Study the timeline of Jerusalem found on Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (http://www.israelmfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts%20About%20Israel/State/Jerusalem%20through%20the%20Centuries). Assign each student a key event or time period in Jerusalem's history. Students should then write an autobiography, as if they were Jerusalem, describing the period they studied. Compile all of the students' writings into one complete *Autobiography of Jerusalem*.

3. Design a brochure for Jerusalem using pictures, slogans, and Jewish texts. In presenting the guide to the class, explain why you chose the images and phrases you did.

VII. Projects

1. Los Angeles had its angels, Chicago had its cows, and Jerusalem had its lions. Different artists were asked to paint a large scale lion as a tribute to the city and its unique identity. Photos of some of these lions can be seen at http://www.jr.co.il/pictures/israel/jerusalem/jer001.htm.

To begin the activity, engage the class in a discussion about why the lion would be a symbol of Jerusalem. Afterwards, give each student a blank lion coloring page (http://www.coloring.ws/t/animals/lion3.htm) and tell them that it's now their turn to design one of the lions of Jerusalem. Students should think about the stories they've read and their own thoughts about or encounters with Jerusalem when designing their lion.

2. Divide students into small groups. Assign each group one of the stories to act out. As an alternative to drama, ask students to choose one of the stories and create a comic strip retelling.

3. On a large piece of butcher paper, ask students to draw or write their hopes for or thoughts about Jerusalem. Hang the finished banner on the eastern wall of your school's prayer space or classroom.

For more lesson plans about Jerusalem, see the IYAR 5764/May 2004, Knowledge of the Land of Israel issue of Babaganewz. Lesson plans for this issue can be found at http://www.babaganewz.com/teachers/pdfs/84tg.pdf.