

"Yerushalayim: Then and Now"
By RZA Aryeh Fellow Shimon Niren

“The value of Jerusalem cannot be measured, weighed, or put into words. If a land has a soul, Jerusalem is the soul of the Land of Israel.” - David Ben Gurion

On 28 Iyyar 5777 (May 23, 2017), we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Yerushalayim on a day called Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day). In this article we will explore many questions including: Why is Yerushalayim of upmost religious and cultural significance to the Jewish people? How did Jerusalem become reunited during the 6 Day War in 1967?

In the times of Shlomo Hamelech’s Bayit Rishon, Yerushalayim was the center of the world, both spiritually and financially (Melachim Alef 5:1-5,14). The Talmud Yerushalmi (Taanit 24b) recounts that so many people came to live around Yerushalayim, that 10,000 Jewish villages established in the surrounding Judean mountains.

Once again, following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the reunification of Yerushalayim in 1967, this holy city has renewed its former glory. Once again, it has a hustling real estate market, diverse population, and modern system of transportation. It is world renowned for its cultural offerings including Shuk Machane Yehudah; museums like the Israel Museum and Yad VaShem; culinary destinations near Rechov Ben Yehudah and Rechov Emek Rifaim; leading hospitals like Sha’arei Tzedek and Haddassa Ein Karem.

Thousands of students learn Torah in Batei Midrash (House of Religious Study) sprinkled throughout the city, thereby fulfilling another prophecy from Yishayahu HaNavi:

For from Zion, Torah will go forth, as well as the word of God from Yerushalayim.
(Isaiah 2:3)

כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה, וְדָבַר ה' מִירוּשָׁלַיִם
(ישעיהו ב:ג)

Yerushalayim’s renewal to her glory fulfills another prophecy from the book of Zecharyah:
“Thus said Hashem, Master of Legions: old men and old women will once again sit in the streets of Yerushalayim, each with his staff in his hand because of advanced age; and the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in the streets.”
(Zechariyah 8:4-5)

{ד} כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת עַד יָשׁוּבוּ זְקֵנִים וְזָקֵנוֹת בְּרַחֲבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעֲנָתוֹ בְּיָדוֹ מִרְבַּב יָמִים: {ה} וְרַחֲבוֹת הָעִיר יִמְלְאוּ יְלָדִים וְיִלְדוֹת מְשֻׁקָּיִם בְּרַחֲבוֹתֶיהָ:
(זכריה ח:ד-ה)

This renewal reflects Yerushalayim’s capacity for diversity and religious vibrancy. She unites all within her, thus encouraging us to flock to her. Some come to enjoy her museums. Others come to tour archeological sites. And others come to experience the shichna (presence of G-d). Thousands flock to her when they visit or at special occasions, most especially -- Berkat Kohanim and slichot. Everyone has a place within Yerushalayim.

The built Jerusalem is a city knit together
(Psalms 122:3)

יְרוּשָׁלַם הַבְּנוּיָה--כְּעִיר, שֶׁחֲבָרָה-לָהּ יַחְדָּו.
(תהלים קכב:ג)

Celebrations for Yom Yerushalyaim take place in communities around the world, by hosting parades, guest speakers, and extra prayers, in some communities. Some communities plan hikes, parties, special meals, and ceremonies dedicated to all of the soldiers involved in the Six Day War.

In America, many bakeries sell blue and white cookies, and Jewish day schools will invite Israeli Rabbis, shluchim, and former soldiers, to speak to students.

In Yerushalayim, people gather from around the country to march in the annual Yerushalayim Day Parade. The parade fills the famous streets of Ben-Yehudah, Yaffo, and Keren Hayesod. The large parade moves through the streets of the Old City, and culminates kotel, where hands join in tremendous music and dancing.

Yerushalayim 1517-1967

Following the exile of Bayit Sheni, there was always a small presence of Jews living in Israel, though under the rule of other nations. From 1517 until 1914, the Turkish Empire were the ones controlling Jerusalem at the time. Jewish life flourished inside the walls of the Old City despite cramped living space and inherent challenges with complying with the rules imposed by the Turks.

With the end of WWI and fall of the Turkish empire, Britain assumed control over Israel. Britain maintained most of the Turks rules and limited Jewish access to the Kotel to a very small portion of the wall.

In 1948, following Israel's declaration of independence from the British mandate, Israel effectively defended itself against enemy attack from Arab armies, thus resulting in Israeli control of large portions of Israel including Tel Aviv, Haifa, and most of the western side of Jerusalem. However, the Old City, including Har HaBayit (The Temple Mount), fell into the hands of the Jordanians. Sarah Rigler, writer for Aish Hatorah remarked: "For the first time in three millennia, the Old City of Jerusalem was *Judenrein*." For this short time in history, Jewish access to the Old City was nearly impossible but Jews deeply yearned to return.

The Six Day War, June 1967

During the month of May, 1967, tensions rose in the areas surrounding Israel. The Arab nations of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, had begun taunting Israel by firing guns and mortars from the north and east. Additionally, they began to work on a plan which would unite forces to attack Israel from all three of its borders simultaneously. Egypt activated naval ships to the south of Eilat to cut off Israel's access to the straits of Tiran, an act of war according to the United States of America. Additionally, Egyptian President Abdul Nasser also removed the UN peace soldiers from the Sinai Desert, making his access to Israel much easier. During this time, all three Arab nations mobilized hundreds of tanks, fighter planes, and infantry units.

It was clear that if Israel would not act first, then the Arab Legion would, and the results would be devastating. In a last attempt of peace, Israel sent Ambassador Abba Eban to meet with many world leaders. In a meeting with U.S. President Johnson, Mr. Eban was told that Israel should wait a few days for the tensions to die down on their own. However, Israel knew that that waiting was not an option.

In Abba Eban's address to the United Nations' Special Assembly United Nations, on June 19, 1967 (a week after the war), he spoke of the events leading up to Israel's situation:

"In recent weeks the Middle East has passed through a crisis whose shadows darken the world. This crisis has many consequences but only one cause. Israel's right to peace, security, sovereignty, economic development, and maritime freedom- indeed its very right to exist- has been forcibly denied and aggressively attacked..."

"In three tense weeks between May 14, and June 5, Egypt Syria, and Jordan, assisted and incited by more distant Arab States, embarked in a policy of immediate and total aggression...On May 18, Egypt called for total removal of the United Nations Emergency Force. The Secretary-General of the UN acceded to this request... On May 25, Cairo radio announced: 'The Arab people is firmly resolved to wipe Israel off the map and restore the honor of the Arabs of Palestine'. On the following day, the 26th of May, Nasser spoke again: 'The Arab people wants to fight...we will not accept any possibility of co-existence with Israel'. There are various ways in threatening Israel's liquidation. Few ways could be clearer than this."

The decision was made; Israel was forced to fight.

On June 5th, 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike against the Egyptian army, and simultaneously sent troops in from the ground. The Israeli fighter planes completely annihilated the Egyptian air force. The fighter planes also eliminated the large force of Egyptian tanks and transport trucks which were en-route to the southern border of Israel. Within a mere four days, Israel won the entire Gaza Strip and Sinai Desert.

Shortly after the air attack on Egypt, Israel launched a second attack against the Syrian air force, crippling their planes as well. Within the same four days, Israel expelled the entire Jordanian force out of Yerushalayim and Gush Etzion. The final two days of the war were spent pushing back the Syrian forces in the north. The Syrian forces were not able to defend against the Israeli forces, and Israel successfully took control of the Golan Heights. During the war, Israel captured Judea, Gush Etzion, Hebron, and Bet Lechem. In the span of a short six days, not only did Israel defend itself against the joint force of three larger forces, it also doubled the amount of land it had previously owned.

The capture of Yerushalayim took two days of intense close combat fighting with the Jordanians. Although Defense Minister Moshe Dayan had originally opposed to attacking the Old City, after taking Ammunition Hill and other areas south of the city, he changed his mind. He realizing how close they were and that the UN was getting ready to call for a cease-fire. The Paratroopers were ordered to enter the city for the south, and to their surprise, they were encountered with minimal resistance- most of the Jordanians had already fled. *Har Habayit*, the Temple Mount, and the Kotel (Western Wall), were quickly located. Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren led a tearful prayer service which included the blessing of Shehechyanu -- "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion". The moment was coupled by the sounding of Rabbi Goren's shofar. For the first time in nearly two thousand years, control of the Old City and the Temple Mount was in the hands of the Jews.

"This morning, the Israel Defense Forces liberated Jerusalem. We have united Jerusalem, the divided capital of Israel. We have returned to the holiest of our holy places, never to part from it again...To our Arab neighbors we extend, also at this hour - and with added emphasis at this hour - our hand in peace. And to our Christian and Muslim fellow citizens, we solemnly promise full religious freedom and rights. We did not come to Jerusalem for the sake of other peoples' holy places, and not to interfere with the adherents of other faiths, but in order to safeguard its entirety, and to live there together with others, in unity." -Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, 1967

Jerusalem in our Prayers

1,500 years ago, the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah (The Men of the Great Assembly) composed the text for Jewish prayer including the Shmoneh Esrei. In it, they composed the powerful prayer for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the return of the Davidic Dynasty:

To Jerusalem Your city may You return with mercy and dwell in the midst of it as You have spoken, and build it soon and in our day as an eternal structure. The throne of David quickly establish. Blessed are You, G-d, the builder of Jerusalem.

יְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִירְךָ בְּרַחֲמִים תָּשׁוּב. וְתִשְׁכֵּן בְּתוֹכָהּ כְּאֲשֶׁר
דִּבַּרְתָּ. וּבְנֵה אוֹתָהּ בְּקִרְוֹב בְּיָמֵינוּ בְּנֵן עוֹלָם. וְכִסֵּא דָוִד
מְהֵרָה לְתוֹכָהּ תִּכְוֵן. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם:

Not a day of our lives goes by without thinking about and praying for the full return to Yerushalayim. It is in our hopes and dreams that we will soon see the full redemption with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. May it happen speedily in our days. Amen.