



APPRECIATING YOM YERUSHALAYIM

Why a Second Holiday?

Hashem has blessed me with the great privilege of being able to spend my days learning and davening at Yeshivat HaKotel, overlooking Har HaBayit. I am often asked about what this feels like. I would like to answer within the context of Yom Yerushalayim.

Having recently celebrated Yom HaAtzmaut, which commemorates the miraculous founding, survival, and thriving of the State of Israel, many wonder why we need a second holiday just three weeks later.

I believe there are two answers to this question. The first lies in a full appreciation of the 1967 salvation and the second in the full appreciation of the significance of Yerushalayim and the Kotel/Har HaBayit.

The 1967 Salvation

Military experts see the 1967 victory as possibly the most miraculous one in modern history. Through a combination of a number of amazing 'coincidences,' Israel went from digging tens of thousands of graves in public parks to vanquishing those threatening to annihilate it in a matter of six days.¹ It was a "*veNahafoch hu*" rivaled only by Purim.

Yerushalayim

In 1949, Israel's Chief Rabbinate sanctioned saying Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut without a *bracha* mainly because (the Old City of) Yerushalayim was not included in The State of Israel. Throughout our exile, Jews *davened* not just for a return to Israel, but *LeShana HaBa'a BiYerushalayim*. They yearned not just for our national

home, but also for the core of our religious identity.

Jews maintained their identity in dozens of different cultural milieus because they saw Yerushalayim not just as part of an illustrious past, but as part of their immediate future.

When Natan Sharansky was convicted of treason against "Mother Russia," he was asked by the court to sum up his defense arguments. Sharansky responded: "I have nothing to say to this court, but to the People of Israel and to my wife I say: Next year in Jerusalem."

In contrast to say, the Parthenon in Greece, which was once an ancient temple and is now just a tourist site, Har HaBayit and the Kotel have always remained holy sites that we sought to rebuild. Though less holy than Har HaBayit, the Kotel was never usurped by any other religion and remains a pristine remnant of the past we envision in our future.

In 1967, when we returned to the Kotel and the Kotel returned to us, we knew Hashem was inviting us to a full reinstatement of our relationship with Him.

Thus the Chief Rabbinate sanctioned saying Hallel with a *bracha*.

What We Yearn For

Yom HaAtzmaut celebrates our self-rule in our independent Jewish State. Yom Yerushalayim is an important and necessary complement to that, because it focuses on the religious significance of our return and future here.

On Yom Yerushalayim, we reflect on the full religious import of the State of Israel – the completion of our *teshuva* process that will fully repair our relationship with Hashem and culminate in the eventual rebuilding of the Beit Mikdash.

This is what learning and davening daily opposite the Kotel is all about.

You wake up every morning in full view of Hashem's benevolence to us and the miracles He performed on our behalf.

You wake up every morning to the miraculous return of our people to our past.

You wake up every morning to the fruition of Jewish history.

On Yom Yerushalayim, we celebrate not only Yerushalayim, the Kotel's return to us and our return to it, but also what it symbolizes about us as the Jewish people. When celebrating, let us make sure we reflect not only on what Hashem did for us, but more importantly, on how we need to respond by strengthening our relationship with Him and meriting the continuation of this glorious *Geula* process.

¹ For a brief review of these miraculous coincidences, I highly recommend this Mizrahi video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i3uIz7hoYs&t=4s>.

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