



The City of One Gate

Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria, a student of Rav Kook and noted author and educator, posed the following question shortly after the Old City of Jerusalem was liberated in 1967:

Why is it that only *now* we merited conquering the Old City? Why did our efforts during the 1948 War of Independence fail?

The Psalmist describes Jerusalem as a “city that was joined together” (122:3). What is this ‘joining’ quality of Jerusalem? The Jerusalem Talmud (*Baba Kama* 7:7) explains that Jerusalem “joins each Jew to the other.” Jerusalem is meant to be a focal point of unity and cohesion for the Jewish people.

The Sages in *Zevachim* 114b used a peculiar phrase when teaching that the Pesach offering may only be brought in the city of Jerusalem. For this offering, the Talmud explains, it is necessary that “*all of Israel enter through one gate.*” This unusual expression of unity – ‘entering through one gate’ – rings with an amazing prophetic resonance.

During the 1948 War of Independence, the Palmach forces broke through Zion Gate, while the Etzel forces were ready to break through Damascus Gate. At that point in time, we were divided and disunited. Had we succeeded then in conquering the city, there would have been arguments about who had captured the city and whom she belongs to. Jerusalem would have become a cause for conflict and dissension.

But Jerusalem was given to the entire Jewish people. As the Talmud (*Yoma* 12a) says, the city was not apportioned to any particular tribe. For this reason, it was only in 1967, when we approached the Old City united, with one army – and entering through one gate – that we merited regaining the city. The IDF, an army representing the national unity government of Israel, and the Jewish people all over the world, entered via Jerusalem’s Lions Gate and liberated the city.



Interestingly, we find a similar idea when the Jewish people first conquered Jerusalem. Jerusalem – our holiest city, the eternal home for the Holy Temple – was not conquered during Yehoshua’s conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Nor was it secured during the time of the Judges, a period lasting 400 years. Nor did King Shaul capture it. Only when the Jewish people were united under the permanent

dynasty of King David was Jerusalem delivered.

The medieval biblical commentator, Rabbi David Kimchi, noted that the text supports this idea. Immediately following David’s coronation in Hebron by the elders of Israel, it emphasizes:

“Then David and **all** of Israel went to Jerusalem” (I Chronicles 11:4).

A Pragmatic Reason

In a footnote, Rabbi Neria added a second, political explanation for delaying the liberation of the Old City until 1967. According to the UN Partition Plan, Jerusalem was meant to be an international city under UN control. Had Jerusalem been captured in 1948, the newly formed state would have been forced to bow to pressure from the UN. (During the 19 years that the Old City was under Jordanian occupation, for some reason no such pressure was placed on Jordan.)

By 1967, the situation had changed significantly. The State of Israel was much stronger and less susceptible to international pressure. The UN was a weaker institution, and it was difficult to suddenly initiate a diplomatic effort for the internationalization of Jerusalem after the issue had lain dormant for 19 years.

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