



## My Jerusalem

I was born and raised in the city of Jerusalem. My childhood years were spent in a divided Jerusalem, with a wall between the New and Old City. I remember those days fondly, riding our bicycles past the wall, going on walks near the wall, stopping at certain points along the way that looked out over portions of the city that were controlled by the Jordanians. Over *Chol HaMoed* we would go to Mount Zion and look out over the ruins of the Temple Mount.

During the Six-Day War, the city was bombarded and we spent our days in bomb shelters. The war resulted in the liberation of the city and several days later, the two halves of the city were united. On Shavuot of 5727 (1967), the road to the Kotel was opened and the residents of Jerusalem, together with many visitors who had arrived from around the country, streamed to the Old City to pray at the Kotel.

A year after the Six-Day War, I was blessed to be one of the first students to study in Yeshivat HaKotel in the Old City. I studied there for six years and lived opposite the Kotel. The Yeshiva was housed in abandoned and decrepit buildings in the Jewish Quarter, which had yet to be restored. The *beit midrash*, in shelters above the road leading to the Kotel, produced the sound of Torah study for long hours into the night. These sounds of Torah and prayer were music to the ears of those who came to visit the Old City or those on their way to the Kotel.

In Tehillim, King David wrote that “The built-up Jerusalem is like a city

united together.” This verse was explained in the Jerusalem Talmud, as well as in the Midrash, as meaning “a city that creates fellowship among all Jews.” The Babylonian Talmud, however, explains the verse differently: “I will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until I can enter the earthly Jerusalem. Is there a heavenly Jerusalem? Yes, for it is written, “The built-up Jerusalem is like a city that is united together.” The earthly Jerusalem parallels the heavenly Jerusalem from the perspective of the city itself, not that of its residents.

The two explanations seemingly differ; however, a deeper understanding of the sources shows that both address the same point. Every capital city in the world connects and unites the citizens of that country. Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people, is different. It is the Holy City and the home of the Temple and thus produces a unique internal connection. The earthly Jerusalem parallels the heavenly Jerusalem. A Jew who travels to Jerusalem is not only traveling to the earthly Jerusalem, but also to the heavenly Jerusalem.

When one travels to Jerusalem, he cleanses himself of his personal issues, from his here and now, and connects to an eternal reality. In this way, the earthly Jerusalem parallels the heavenly Jerusalem in that it brings all of Israel together in a bond of brotherhood.

Our Sages expounded on the duty of every Jew to strive for the betterment of Jerusalem: “Any generation that does not see the rebuilding of the Temple is considered to have

destroyed it.” Asks the *Sefat Emet*: it would be understandable if the Talmud had said that the “Temple had not been built,” but why does it say that the generation “is considered to have destroyed it”? He answers that the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple is not a one-time event, but rather an extended and ongoing process. Every generation adds its own layer to the structure until the construction is complete and stands as a whole. When understood like this, it is clear that any generation that does not add its own layer is considered to have destroyed its share of the process.

This week, as we all celebrate the day of the liberation and unification of the holy city of Jerusalem, we shall add our layer to the rebuilding of our capital city. We will strive to spread brotherhood and kindness amongst ourselves, to bring peace between brothers and sisters and thus merit the realization of the words of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi in Tractate *Derech Eretz*: “G-d said to Israel: You caused the destruction of My House and the expulsion of My sons. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and I will give you peace.”

**Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman** is Head of the Center for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora at the World Zionist Organization and one of World Mizrachi's representatives in the National Institutions