



REACHING SEVENTY AND BEYOND

We are approaching two amazing moments in modern Jewish History – celebrating Israel’s 73rd birthday on Yom Ha’atzmaut, and 54 years to the reunification of Jerusalem on Yom Yerushalayim.

What does it mean to us that Israel is now over 70 years old? That number has great significance in Tanach and our tradition – 70 members of Yaakov’s family descended to Egypt; there were 70 elders appointed to help Moshe lead the Jewish people in the desert; according to our tradition, there are 70 nations and 70 languages, 70 “faces” or ways to interpret the Torah, and 70 years of exile after the destruction of the first Temple. I’d like to use three of these directions as prisms through which to discuss life in Israel at this stage.

The 70 elders and 70 faces of Torah signify the incredible Torah learning opportunities that we have in Israel.

Rav Ovadia Yosef *zt”l* in a responsum (Yabia Omer, OH 6:41) describes with wonder the explosion of Torah learning that has occurred in the modern state of Israel.

I’d like to add the incredible expansion of women’s Torah learning as well, which I am blessed to see every day in the Midreshet Lindenbaum *beit midrash*. The more men and women study Torah, the more committed they are to living Torah, and to serving as leaders of the Jewish people, enriching our families, our communities and our nation.

The 70 members of Yaakov’s family represent the sense of connection we feel to our fellow Jews – the sense that we are a family. On a mundane level, when

I’ve had flat tires on the road over the years, in Israel multiple random strangers stop and insist on helping to change the tire.

More profoundly, the IDF brings together Jews from every background, to serve together to protect our homeland. And when a lone soldier is being buried in a small funeral on Mount Herzl, hundreds who never knew him come to pay their respects, comforting his family by showing that we are really all one family.

Finally, 70 has significance on the national level – those 70 years of exile in Babylonia that ended with the invitation to come home and to build the second Temple. *Galut* is the absence of a home and the absence of Jewish pride, as Yechezkel says in Chapter 36: We became a *chilul Hashem*, as people referred to us as “G-d’s nation that was exiled.”

Galut can also be forgetting that we are waiting to go home in the first place! In *tefillat Musaf* on *chagim*, we say that because of our sins we have been exiled, and then we add, “And we have become far from our Land.” Isn’t that redundant? Perhaps this second phrase is referring to an emotional distance – not only are we not there, but we don’t even feel like we’re away from home. As we say in our *tefillot*, the modern State of Israel is *ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו* – the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption. We are seeing prophecies fulfilled before our eyes – elderly men and women with their canes, sitting along the streets of Yerushalayim, children laughing and playing – these images are straight from the prophet Zechariah Chapter 8 and were once unthinkable, especially just

80 years ago when the elderly and the children were sent to cruel deaths.

Now, those children put on uniforms and protect their elders and their people. Our children’s hearts pulse with hope and a desire to serve and contribute. Living for the other. As one nation in the Land.

Israel is 73. The 70 faces of Torah are being revealed and cherished by those learning in Israel. Those 70 children of Yaakov who went down to Egypt have become a family-nation who sticks together and takes care of each other.

And after the 70 years of the Babylonian exile, which stretched into two thousand for us in the Roman exile, we are back in Israel, back to a united Yerushalayim, where those laughing children grow up to be brave soldiers and volunteers who build our country and nation and take it forward.

May G-d bless and protect the State of Israel, and may the coming years bring peace, health and prosperity to all its inhabitants.

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