

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir



## Why Are We So Happy About Yerushalayim?

**On 28<sup>th</sup> Iyar 5727 (1967)**, during the Six-Day War, Jerusalem was united under Israeli rule. Israeli paratroopers defeated the Jordanian Legion and, visibly moved, reached the Kotel, the Western Wall. Since so many years have passed, it is perhaps worthwhile to remind ourselves what is so joyful about this day:

**1** First of all, we are not only celebrating the liberation of Yerushalayim. We are also celebrating the success of Tel Aviv. Anyone who was here during the tense waiting period before the Six-Day War knows very well that the existence of the entire young State of Israel was in danger. Our 19-year-old country was saved, gained in size, and many Biblical areas were returned.

**2** The realization of the dream. An Ethiopian immigrant told me some years ago how every time she and her siblings saw a stork in the skies above their home in Addis Ababa, they would shout up: “Stork, stork, how is Yerushalayim doing?”

Natan Sharansky told us about how when he was accused with his friends of treason against “Mother Russia,” the court asked them to sum up their arguments. Sharansky said: “I have nothing to say to this court, but to the Jewish people and to my wife I say: **לשנה הבאה בירושלים!** - “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

We are living in a 2,000-year-old prophecy coming true every day!

**3** Most importantly, we are happy today due to the enormity of our contemporary challenge. For the huge opportunity we have *davka* in our generation. We have won the

lottery, and now, what do we do with the jackpot? Our assignment is to transform all this energy – all the oaths and the yearnings and the prayers of thousands of years... into practicalities.

So that we can connect Heavenly Jerusalem with earthly Jerusalem.

So that this place will indeed herald an alternative culture for the entire world.

We’re on the way

Our great great-grandparents never imagined that we would pay municipal taxes in Yerushalayim, that we would stand in traffic on its streets, or even debate and argue about what character the city should have. We have that merit!

### Prophecies in the Headlines

28<sup>th</sup> Iyar, the day the Old City was liberated. In order to understand, it’s sometimes best to step back a moment, to what the archives say.

The day after Jerusalem was united, the Haaretz newspaper quoted the prophecy of Yeshayahu in large letters on its front page: **צהלי ורוני יושבת ציון** – “Exult and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion.” In the editorial, they wrote: “There are no words to express the emotions bubbling in our hearts at this moment. The Old City of Jerusalem is ours. Its gates are open, and the Western Wall will no longer stand silent and abandoned. The glory of the past will not be observed from afar, but from now on it will be part of the new State and disseminate its light upon the building of a Jewish society that is a link in the long chain of generations of a people in its Land. The entire Jewish people, in Israel and in the Diaspora, lauds the IDF for restoring the glory of yesteryear.”

These moving sentiments are

restrained in comparison to the next report, of Haaretz’s correspondents on the ground: “Anyone who saw Jerusalem in its joy yesterday, could perhaps imagine the joy of ancient Jerusalem, at the time of the pilgrimage on the Three Foot Festivals. And in the tumult of emotion, suddenly the concept of the Beit HaMikdash became something much more tangible. ‘Now we can build the Temple.’ That was a yearning that emanated from the heart. Yesterday, people were very serious about what they said. A university professor said it. A high school student said it. Many said it, and *davka* non-religious people. One who did not witness Jerusalem and its joy yesterday has never seen what joy really is.”

Chana Zemer, the Editor of the Davar newspaper, wrote in her publication that the day after the paratroopers entered the Kotel area: “The Redeemer had come to Zion. For 2,000 years, 80 generations, Jews turned East – *Shacharit, Mincha, Ma’ariv*. Thousands of years did not blur the national memory, with which a Jew is born just as he is born with all of his limbs. All the verses are now coming alive before our very eyes.”

A short lesson on the media, on perspective, and on Yerushalayim.

### “We were like dreamers”

I think this is one of the most moving testimonies about the liberation of the Kotel. Rabbi She’ar Yishuv Cohen, the late Chief Rabbi of Haifa, recalled: “A few days after the victory, on the first Shavuot after the liberation, I was very fortunate to walk down to the Kotel with the masses alongside the unforgettable Jerusalem *tzaddik*, Rabbi Aryeh Levin, who was happy to see me and warmly



hugged me. We walked together, silently in thought, and then he said to me, almost in a whisper, the following words: 'For my whole life, I have never understood the explanation of the verse *בשוב ה' את שבי ציון היינו כחולמים* – "When G-d will return the captivity of Zion, we will be like dreamers." Now I understand.'

'What does the Rabbi understand?' I asked.

He said: 'A dream, such is how it works. A person sees a glimpse of events that last for a long time. Sometimes, one can see in a dream something that would naturally last for many years, and yet one sees it in a moment, and in the blink of an eye the whole picture becomes clear. An entire era, an entire history, the experience of generations, flashes past your eyes in an instant. In a dream, we can capture the past, present and future in seconds. That's what's happening to us now, right here. We are entering the Old City, walking to the Kotel, and we are like

dreamers. At this precise moment we are bonding with the multitudes that prayed and wished for this moment for generations. For this very moment we are living right now. In an instant we see everything that happened in Exile, in the Holocaust, in the underground, in the wars. Every single person who ever prayed, waited, hoped. Here it is. Thousands of years flowing together into this one moment. We are like dreamers.'

### The Heart of the Heart

Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Prize-winning Holocaust survivor and author, once published a full-page ad in the American press. It was during the Obama administration, and Elie Wiesel was urging to stop the pressure on Israel regarding the issue of Yerushalayim. This is how he tried to explain the significance of the city: "For me, the Jew that I am, Jerusalem is above politics. It is mentioned more than 600 times in the Bible, and not a single time

in the Koran... There is no more moving prayer in the Jewish past than that which expresses the yearning to return to Jerusalem... It is much more than a city. It's what binds one Jew to another in a way that remains hard to explain. When a Jew visits Jerusalem for the first time, it's not the first time. It's a homecoming... I heard once, in the name of the Chassidic master Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, that everything in the world has a heart, and that the heart itself has a heart. Jerusalem is the heart of our hearts."

### Low Gear

A little story about Yerushalayim, and the feelings it is meant to arouse in us: Prof. Nechama Leibowitz, the great Tanach teacher and Israel Prize Laureate, made aliyah during the British Mandate. For the first time, the young 25-year-old immigrant traveled to the city up the hills and down the valleys we all know. On one of the bends, she and her husband saw a sign at the side of the road: "Stay in low gear." They both only knew Biblical (and not spoken) Hebrew, and Nechama understood that this was a spiritual instruction for those going up to Jerusalem: stay in low gear, i.e., keep a subdued frame of mind, humble and lowly, as you enter the gates of the city. "How beautiful," she said to her husband. "In *Eretz Yisrael* there are road signs that remind those making the pilgrimage to the Holy City to enter it with humility, in the right spirit."

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