



Rabbi Andrew Shaw



The People Who Forgot How to Dance

To me, Yom Yerushalayim is one of the greatest days in the last 2000 years, a day which transformed our people, a day which had been prophesied for centuries and then, on the 28th of Iyar 5727, the prophecy came true – G-d brought us back to Yerushalayim. We came home.

The most watched TED talk of all time is by Sir Ken Robinson. There he tells a powerful story, so relevant to Yom Yerushalayim.

The story is about Gillian Lynne, a world-famous choreographer of works such as “Cats” and “Phantom of the Opera.” How did she become a dancer? When she was at school, she was hopeless. Her school, in the 1930s, wrote to her parents to tell them that Gillian had a learning disorder. She couldn’t concentrate; she was fidgeting. Today we might call it ADHD.

Gillian went to see a specialist with her mother and sat on a chair for 20 minutes while the man spoke to her mother about all the problems Gillian was having at school – she was disturbing people, her homework was always late, and so on.

In the end, the doctor went and sat next to Gillian and said, “I’ve listened to all these things your mother’s told me. I need to speak to her privately. Wait here. We’ll be back. We won’t be very long,” and they went and left her.

But as they went out of the room, he turned on the radio that was sitting on his desk. And when they got out of the room, he said to her mother, “Just stand and watch her.” The minute they left the room, she was on her feet, moving to the music. They watched for a few minutes, then the man turned to her mother and said, “Mrs. Lynne, Gillian isn’t sick. She’s a dancer. Take her to a dance school.”

And she did. She went to dance school, full of people like her – people who couldn’t sit still, people who had to move to think.

Gillian eventually auditioned for the Royal Ballet School. She became a soloist; she had a wonderful career at the Royal Ballet. She eventually graduated from the Royal Ballet School, founded the Gillian Lynne Dance Company and met Andrew Lloyd Webber. She’s been responsible for some of the most successful musical theatre productions in history and she’s given pleasure to millions.

Somebody else might have put her on medication and told her to calm down.

The Jewish people were born to sing and dance. We danced out of Mitzrayim as we crossed the sea. The Leviim sung in the *Mishkan* as we built a home for G-d. David danced the *aron* into Yerushalayim as he made it his capital. The nation danced at the *Simchat Beit Hashoeva* in Yerushalayim during the first and second Temples.

And then the Babylonians came and destroyed *Bayit Rishon*. And then the Romans came and destroyed *Bayit Sheni*. The Romans murdered millions of us and exiled us from Yerushalayim. And then we stopped dancing. We began wandering, crying, praying, hoping.

However, wherever they were in the world, the Jewish people did not forget their homeland. In every prayer, every blessing, at every event, whether joyful or sad, we remembered the Land of Israel and Yerushalayim – we remembered how we used to dance.

And then it happened: first in 1948, we began to feel the energy returning to our aching limbs, and then in 1967, 250,000 marched to the *kotel* on that first Shavuot after its liberation to sing and dance – we had returned as our prophets had foretold.

We need to wake up and realise the incredible blessing G-d has given us, to thank G-d and realise that we are a rejuvenated people, that we are living in an era of *reishit tzmichat geulatenu* – the beginning of our redemption.

Rabbi Akiva told us 2000 years ago that we would return, that there would be centuries of darkness and storms but that G-d would be with us throughout till we came back to Yerushalayim *shel zahav*.

It’s time to dance.

Get to know the author:

Rabbi Andrew Shaw is the CEO of Mizrachi UK and his love of music and theatre led him to create several musical productions including ‘Haim Potter’ and ‘Grease – the Jewish Version’. Today he is the writer of ‘Dreams of a Nation’ – a show that tells the story of the Jewish people from Avraham Avinu to the present day as well as writing and narrating several films with Chazan Jonny Turgel. He lives in the UK with his wife Gila and two boys, Yoni and Daniel.