Facing Jerusalem

In the town of Radin about 100 years ago, a family came to speak with the Chafetz Chaim. They were desperate. Their son was being conscripted into the Russian army and when Jewish boys were conscripted, it meant complete separation from the community, and an end to their Jewish practice and identity. One couldn’t even bring a yarmulke, let alone observe Shabbat, keep kosher or marry a Jew.

The father begged the Chafetz Chaim to intercede, to daven, to make a miracle, to give them a beracha that they would be spared. The Chafetz Chaim, with a tear glistening in his eye, responded, “My dear friends, I’ll do what I can do. As you know, this is the gezeira, the harsh decree of our generation. But of course I will pray.”

The family fell into a dark silence.

With a voice filled with fear and pain, the son spoke up, “Rebbe… is there anything that I can do?”

The Chafetz Chaim took his hand and placed it on the boy’s heart.

“My dear son, do you feel your heart beating? Every morning, no matter what happens to you or wherever you may be, when you wake up, face Yerushalayim and feel your heart beating. And know that the heart of a Jew beats to the pulse of Yerushalayim.

As long as your heart is beating, it will beat to the rhythm of Yerushalayim, Ir haKodesh, the City of Holiness. Even without tefillin, a siddur or yarmulke… face Yerushalayim, and know you will never be separated from kedusha.”

Chazal assure us, מפורם של יד שיצרה את הירח, "The Divine Presence never left the Western Wall.” Even without Torah and mitzvot, chas veshalom, even when we live in a far away land or are far from spiritual observance and Jewish life, G-d’s presence is openly manifest and accessible. On the outside it may have seemed as though the holy place that awakens (from the same root as the word ירושלים, city), our yearning for kedusha. For a feeling Jew, every day is Yom Yerushalayim.

Wherever a Jew may be and whatever may happen, our hopes and prayers, thoughts and dreams are bound up with the fate, status and wellbeing of our Holy City. In the near future, our collective heart, the heart of the world, will again manifest in physical form as the Beit HaMikdash HaShlishi, the eternal Third Holy Temple. And therefore, – “as long as the Jewish heart beats,” wherever we are, we are always facing Yerushalayim, with great expectation and love.

Rabbi Judah Mischel is Executive Director of Camp HASC, the Hebrew Academy for Special Children, Mashpiiah of OU-NCSY and founder of Tzama Nafshi.