

Behar 2017 - Yom Yerushalayim

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 5/20/17

Imagine, if you can, a place in our fragmented world where Muslims and Jews and Christians can all pray together in peace and security. There haven't been that many places like that in history, but for the last 50 years - yes only 50 years - Jerusalem has been that place. This Wednesday, May 24, the 28th day of Iyar is Yom Yerushalayim, the 50th anniversary of Jerusalem's becoming a city of worship for Jews, Christians and Muslims as well.

You know that today you can get on a plane and go see Jerusalem for yourself. Birthright has sent over 600,000 Jewish twenty-somethings already for free. For free! And many of them/of us don't realize what a miracle that is! Imagine saying to a Jew living in a shtetl in 1880, "You can go to Jerusalem and see it for yourself - for free! And, moreover, you will be totally safe there throughout your visit because it's a JEWISH country." That Jew would have told you, "You're crazy! That's impossible!" And for nearly 2,000 years he would have been right. That's the proper context for us to view this special anniversary. For most of our history this was at best a dream. And yet, the reason we now have a safe and open Jerusalem is precisely because we Jews never stopped dreaming about Jerusalem.

Yes, it's a holy city to three religions. But Christians have Rome, Muslims have Mecca and Medina. We only have Yerushalayim and we have kept it in our prayers, in our rituals, and in our dreams for thousands of years. The climax of Jewish wedding is the 7th of the Sheva Berachot - a prayer that reads, "O Lord our Gd, may there ever be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem voices of joy and gladness, voices of brides and grooms, the voices of young people feasting and singing..." That's what we say to a bride and groom: "May you know joy in your life like those who sing and dance in Jerusalem." But what's truly amazing about this blessing is that it's been said for countless centuries even when there was NO singing and dancing for joy in Jerusalem. For most of our history that was a dream for the future, something to work towards and to hope for. And so it is an appropriate prayer for young couples. We tell them, "Dream about the future and work to build it, for the best is yet to be." You see, the words "Jerusalem" and "hope" are virtually synonymous. You know, of course, how we comfort mourners - with a vision of Jerusalem. We say "Ha-Makom Yinachem..." May Gd comfort you among all mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." Who exactly ARE the "mourners of Jerusalem? Every Jew up until 50 years ago. And so we say to the mourners, "Just as our People never lost hope for the future, you shouldn't either. Times look rough now. Sadness is your reality. But there is a future for those who never stop hoping, never stop looking for a path forward, even in the darkness."

The reality is that 50 years ago the threat of darkness loomed over Israel. It had only been 22 years since the Nazi crematoria had been closed. 22 years - that's all! That's a minute in the timeline of Jewish history. And here it was, 1967 and troops from both Syria and Egypt (thousands and thousands) were amassed on Israel's border. Another Shoah, this time in the fledgling Jewish State, looked like a real possibility. Today that's hard to imagine, but it was reality in 1967. But to go from the threat of annihilation to the unification of Jerusalem in just 6 Days in June of '67 - that was nothing short of a miracle!

This week we read the Torah portion "BeHar" - which means "on the mountain." And 50 years ago this week Jews around the world heard the almost unbelievable words, "Har Ha Bayit B'Yadenu," - "The Temple Mount is in our hands." That's what this anniversary means. For two thousand years we Jews prayed for Jerusalem, about Jerusalem and towards Jerusalem, and to have it in our hands was, and is, a first rate miracle.

I see, we see, Jews have always seen, Jerusalem as the portal for prayer. It is as if the prayers of all Jews everywhere in the world pass through Jerusalem on their way to heaven. Prayers of hope and healing, prayers of thankfulness and gratitude; prayers of young and old - all come together and are channeled through this sacred city. And that is something we all need; an understanding that our prayers matter. That even though fulfillment of our dreams might still be a way off we do not stop hoping, praying and moving forward. And so, this week in particular, I hope that you feel the magnetic pull of Jerusalem in your heart, that your spirit is enriched knowing that dreams really do come true; that with prayer, and hope and patience we can see ourselves with lives full of joy and gladness like those who dance in the streets of Jerusalem. May the glow of the Golden City be reflected in your hearts as we bring prayers to our lips and optimism and hope into our lives.