

Behar Bechukotai 2015

Delivered by Rabbi Krupnick May 16th, 2015

This morning's Torah reading famously lists both blessings and curses because Jewish history is a mixture of both. A total of four Jewish holidays were added to our calendar in the 20th century, and one of them will be celebrated tomorrow. Those blessings and curses of the portion are balanced two by two in the new holiday calendar. What are the four? The 20th century saw Yom Ha-Atzmaut - Israel Independence Day added to our calendar. But we also added Yom Ha-Shoah - Holocaust Memorial Day. Those two are intertwined, as is the third holiday - Yom Ha-Zikaron - Memorial Day for Fallen Israeli Soldiers. But the sadness of that day is balanced out by the holiday that we celebrate tomorrow - Yom Yerushalayim. It was on the 28th of Iyar in 1967 that the Ancient City of Jerusalem was unified under Jewish sovereignty, 48 years ago.

If you have ever spent Shabbat in Jerusalem, you know what a blessing that is. Jerusalem is the beating heart of the Jewish People. It is mentioned 600 times on our Holy Bible. And when you stand near the Kotel on Shabbat you can understand what the Sages meant when they said, "THIS is the place from which the Holy Presence has never departed." When you are there in Jerusalem you really do get the feeling that heaven and earth are very close.

But what makes Yom Yerushalayim so powerful, what makes the message of this holiday so very poignant for Jews, is that it was not always that way. We'd love to say that there has always been a strong Jewish presence in Jerusalem, but that's just not true. We tried, believe me we tried to keep Jews in Jerusalem, but there were times in our history when that was just not possible. The Romans forbade any Jews from living in Jerusalem when they conquered and renamed it. A thousand years later Crusaders killed every last Jew who lived in Jerusalem. When Ramban, Nachmaindes came to Jerusalem in 1250 he wrote that there were not enough Jews there for a minyan. But he rebuilt the Yishuv and Jews returned, only to be expelled years later. Many of you here can still remember the 19 years that the Jordanians forbade Jews from entering the Old City, and that did not end until Yom Yerushalayim 1967. Our people wanted so very desperately to know the blessing of davening at the Kotel, but the curses of history kept us away. Still, the curses of historical circumstance could not erase our hopes and dreams; they could not take away the potential. And on that day in 1967, when Moti Gur led his unit into the Old City, and shockingly found little to no resistance, that potential became reality. So today we can daven in the place where heaven and earth seem so very close. We can truly feel that the Divine Presence never departed because we Jews never gave up hope, we never lost sight of the potential.

This past December, I danced with the boys of our Confirmation Class at the Kotel in Jerusalem. And we were loud and proud, too. Within a short time, dozens of other Jewish guys were also dancing with us. Soldiers in uniform, Chasidim in fur hats, light skin, dark skin, young, old - all singing and dancing up a storm. It was a huge crowd - a diverse group of Jews all with dreams, and hopes, in their hearts - the kind of dreams that drew them to Jerusalem just like me. And I thought about then, and I share with you now, the blessing that one says when he or she sees a large crowd of Jewish people. That Talmud teaches: T'Noo Rabanan: The Rabbi's teach: One who sees a large mass of Jews together says - BARUCH CHACHAM RAZIM. This literally

means "Blessed is the Wise Knower of Secrets." But what I take it to mean is "Blessed is the One who knows our hidden potential."

To me, Jerusalem, and Yom Yerushalayim are great Jewish symbols of the power of potential - the great power of hope and faith. Jerusalem resonates with all of us because when we have hope and faith, we can regain control of our lives and find the unity in our spirits that the Holy City represents. We all have times of blessings, and times that seem more cursed; but we also have more potential than we know. It is in our Jewish DNA to never lose hope, to never give up; to truly believe in our hearts that all of us will one day danced in Jerusalem, if not in body, then at least in spirit, with joy in our Jewish souls.