



SPECIAL GUEST

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# Appreciating Yom Yerushalayim - Why A Second Holiday?

Hashem has blessed me with the great privilege of being able to spend my days learning and davening at Yeshivat Hakotel, overlooking Har Habayit. I am often asked what this feels like. I would like to answer by exploring Yom Yerushalayim.

Having recently celebrated Yom Ha'atzmaut, which commemorates the miraculous founding, survival, and thriving of the State of Israel, many wonder why we need a second holiday just three weeks later.

I believe that there are two answers to this question. The first lies in the full appreciation of the 1967 salvation and the second in the full appreciation of the significance of Yerushalayim and the Kotel/Har Habayit.

## The 1967 Salvation

Military experts see the 1967 victory as possibly the most miraculous one in modern history. Through a combination of a number of amazing "coincidences" Israel went from digging tens of thousands of graves in public parks to vanquishing all those threatening

to exterminate her in a matter of six days. It was a "*v'nahafoch hu*" rivaled only by Purim. Thus, Yom Yerushalayim is an opportunity to thank Hashem for that incredible, unprecedented miracle, especially because through it, we were finally able to return to Yerushalayim.

## Yerushalayim

In 1949, Israel's Chief Rabbinate recommended reciting Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut without a *berachah* mainly because (the Old City of) Yerushalayim was not yet included in the State of Israel. Throughout our exile, Jews davened not just for a return to Israel, but "*l'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalayim*." They yearned not just for our national home, but also for the center of our religious identity.

Jews maintained their identity through thousands of years, in tens of different cultural milieus, because they saw Yerushalayim not just as part of an illustrious past, but as their immediate future.

When Natan Sharansky was convicted of treason against "Mother Russia," he was asked by the court to sum up his defense. Sharansky responded: "I have nothing to say to this court, but to the People of Israel and to my wife I say: Next year in Jerusalem."

As opposed to Rome's Pantheon, which, though prayed at in the past, is just a tourist site in the present, Har Habayit and the Kotel remain our holy sites that we seek to rebuild. Though less holy than Har Habayit, the Kotel was never usurped by any other

religion and remains a pristine remnant of the past that we envision in our future.

When we returned to the Kotel and the Kotel returned to us in 1967, we knew that Hashem was inviting us to begin reinstating our relationship with him.

At that point, once we had “*Har Habayis b’yadeinu*” once again, the Rabbanut sanctioned saying Hallel with a *berachah*.

### What We Yearn For

Yom Ha’atzmaut celebrates our sovereignty in our independent Jewish State. Yom Yerushalayim complements that by focusing on the religious significance of our return and future here.

On Yom Yerushalayim, we reflect on the full religious significance of the State of Israel — the completion of our *teshuvah* process that will fully repair our relationship with Hashem and will culminate in the

eventual rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash.

This is what learning and davening daily opposite the Kotel is all about.

You begin every morning with a full view of Hashem’s benevolence to us and the miracles he performed on our behalf.

You wake up every morning to the miraculous return of our people to our past.

You wake up every morning to the fruition of Jewish history.

On Yom Yerushalayim, we celebrate not only Yerushalayim and the Kotel’s return to us and our return to it, but also what they symbolize about us as the Jewish People. When celebrating, let’s make sure we reflect not only on what Hashem did for us, but, more importantly and with more relevance for ourselves, on how we need to respond by strengthening our relationship with Him in order to merit the continuation of the *geulah* process. ■



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