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MENAHELET OF ULPANAT ORLY IN BET SHEMESH

GUEST DVAR TORAH



Dreaming of Yerushalayim

History is a subject we learn in school... until we get a taste of it in the present.

We learnt this 50 years after the Yom Kippur War when sirens rang in Shul on Simchat Torah 5784 and we too watched men walk out of Shul to fight in war. We experienced it on Shabbat Zachor as we read about remembering those who want to eliminate us and heard planes overhead heading to Iran to vanquish the greatest Amalek of our days.

This war also brought another example which can make our Yom Yerushalayim all the more meaningful this year.

For many years, I have been privileged to bring students to the Kotel- both Americans visiting for the first time, as well as Israelis. Each student is inspired by a different message. To some, it's amazing to think that Akeidat Yitzchak happened mere feet from where they are standing. Others are moved by Chaim Chefer's poem of the paratroopers who cried upon seeing and touching the stones of the Kotel for the first time. Some find it cool to think that every Jew- no matter where they are - daven facing the place where we are standing.

But sometimes, the most powerful moment is when we speak about the fact that for 19 years not a single Jew was able to daven where we are standing. For 19 years, no one imagined we could ever even have it back at all - until a daring decision was made in the

bomb shelter of the Knesset, along with bravery of our chayalim and tremendous *nissim* during the Six Day War, allowed us entry once again.

We need this reminder because history moves on and we become rooted in the present and today, who can imagine a world without the Kotel? Without Maarat haMachpela or Kever Rachel to visit when life is challenging and we need a tangible place to go and to cry? Sometimes when we are so accustomed to a privilege, we forget to appreciate it and for many, we don't always have the time to frequent the Kotel. We don't have Sundays, life is busy, there are a ton of stairs and when that elevator is built, surely it will be a sign that Mashiach has arrived.

But just like the Jews of Diaspora who got a wake up call after the Iran war began that they can't just fly to Israel whenever they want, we got our own mini wake-up call after the war began and we were told the Kotel was closed. Since making Aliyah six years ago, I've made it my practice to go to the Kotel every 30 days. It's only a 32 minute drive from Bet Shemesh and I figure that why should I need to tear kriya for not visiting if I have the ability to do so? And even so, sometimes my visits are a check on a list but missing passion. But as days of frequenting our Mamads during Iran War 2.0 stretched on and on, I started to have a glimpse of what it felt like to want to visit

a Makom Kadosh so badly and to be barred access from doing so. It made me think of friends and neighbors who were spending sleepless nights worrying about their sons fighting in Lebanon, or those who had experienced the trauma of war firsthand and how many would have loved the opportunity to go to the Kotel to spill their worries and pain at the Ground Zero of Tefillot. Of course, the reasons for the closure were for our own security but being barred access was painful nonetheless. When they finally opened the Kotel tunnels to 50 people to visit, I went to the overlook and it was glaring and shocking to see an empty Kotel plaza. Not a soul, not a sound.

The ability to go to the Kotel after the war was heartwarming and a tiny taste of the jubilation that Jews across the world must have felt in the days following the Six Day War, that first Shavout a week later, when thousands made their way to a rapidly enlarged plaza, walking over fresh rubble from a war, shell shocked like dreamers. A month before, they never could have thought they would have that zechut.

Yom Yerushalayim is our opportunity to remind ourselves what a true zechut it still is, even 59 years later. Yom Yerushalayim is our opportunity to remind ourselves to dream big, to realize that the full *geula* can happen within the blink of an eye and that by Shavuot, we could be walking over rubble to the Beit HaMikdash with the same shell shocked feelings mixed with excitement. May we be zoche to appreciate history and experience a future with the fulfillment of our dreams. ■

Ariela Davis is a passionate Jewish educator and writer, who also served as a Rebbetzin before her aliyah in 2020. She is the Menahelit of Ulpanat Orly in Bet Shemesh.

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