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The Heart of Yerushalayim

There are cities you visit, cities you admire, and cities you dream about. And then there is ירושלים — the city that does not merely live in your memory, but in your bloodstream. The Old City is not just stone and alleyways, not just history and holiness. It is a living conversation between past and future, prophecy and reality, longing and fulfillment.

Every Jew who walks through the gates of the Old City feels it differently, yet somehow the feeling is shared. The uneven stones beneath our feet carry the whispers of prophets, kings, exiles, and dreamers. The air itself feels heavy with תפילה. And every step toward the Kotel is not only movement through space, but movement through thousands of years of yearning.

The words of Zechariah feel ever so alive today. The prophet envisioned ירושלים once again overflowing with Jewish life:

DOES YOUR CHILD STRUGGLE WITH WEIGHT CONCERNS OR PICKY EATING?

I'm Batya Kenner, a clinical nutritionist specializing in children with picky eating, weight challenges, and feeding difficulties. With years of experience working with children on the autism spectrum, I provide gentle, personalized one-on-one Zoom guidance for families.

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”עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלים... ררחובות העיר ימלאו ילדים וילדות משחקים ברחובותיה.”

Old men and women sitting peacefully in the streets of Jerusalem. Children laughing and playing in her courtyards. Jewish life restored not merely physically, but spiritually and emotionally.

For centuries, those words sounded impossible. Dreamlike. Exilic Jews repeated them with tears, clinging to visions they could scarcely imagine seeing fulfilled. Yet we-right now - are blessed to be living them. We walk through neighborhoods bursting with children's laughter. We see בתי מדרש overflowing late into the night. We witness Jews from every corner of the world flocking home to ירושלים. Prophecy is no longer confined to parchment. It breathes before our eyes.

This was precisely the vision Rabbi Akiva understood at the moment others could not. The Gemara tells us that after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, the sages ascended Har HaBayit and saw a fox emerging from the מקום קודש הקדשים. The others wept. Rabbi Akiva laughed. How could he laugh at devastation?

Rabbi Akiva explained that the prophecy of destruction, spoken by Uriah, had come true in full detail. If so, then certainly the prophecy of redemption spoken by Zechariah would also come true. If the fox could walk through the ruins, then one day Jewish children would once again fill the streets of Jerusalem.

The destruction itself became proof of

future redemption.

And perhaps that is what it means to live in prophetic times — to hold both pain and promise simultaneously. To stand amid incompleteness while already tasting redemption.

This year, I felt that tension more deeply than ever.

During the forty-day war with Iran, I was privileged to come to the Kotel to pray. But it was not the Kotel as we normally know it. We prayed from inside the tunnels or only from distant rooftops in the Old City. The plaza was empty. I was left gazing toward those beloved stones from afar. There was longing even in proximity. We were close, yet not there.

Then came the first Shabbat following the ceasefire of *שביעי של פסח*.

I needed to see the Kotel *תפארתה* — in her full glory. So we went up to Yerushalayim for Shabbat.

And what unfolded that Friday night is difficult to describe with ordinary words. Thousands upon thousands streamed toward the plaza with a joy that was almost physical. The excitement was beyond palpable; it vibrated through the stones themselves. One woman walked around greeting everyone with “*חג שמח! ברוכות הבאות!*” as though we had all returned home after a long exile.

Maybe we had.

Shabbat morning at *netz* was even more overwhelming. Workers, policemen, and Kotel plaza organizers embraced one another after not seeing each other for six weeks. There was a radiance to the morning that felt supernatural. The sun reflected so brightly off the *ירושלים* stone that even sunglasses were useless.

And for a fleeting moment, one could not help but wonder:

ותחזינה עינינו בשוכך לציון ברחמים?

Is this it? Are we witnessing the Divine Presence return to Zion before our eyes?

But then another realization emerged.

The Kotel feels like everything. To those who stand before it — and to those who ache to — it feels like the destination itself. The place where yearning ends.

Yet the Kotel is only one wall. In fact, a piece of a wall. One surviving remnant of something infinitely greater.

And that realization carries both comfort and responsibility. We are meant to rejoice in what we have while still yearning for what is missing. To feel gratitude without complacency. To praise Hashem endlessly, yet still demand more with holy audacity.

A kind of sacred *chutzpah*.

It is not enough.

We want *ירושלים שחזרה לה יחדיו*. We want the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash. We want a world where Divine Presence is no longer hidden behind remnants and ruins.

That tension lies at the heart of Yom Yerushalayim itself.

When paratroopers cried out “*הכותל בידינו!*” in 1967, the Jewish people experienced something almost unimaginable after two thousand years. Jews could once again touch the stones they had dreamed about through exile, persecution, crusades, pogroms, and the Holocaust. The liberation of the Old City was not merely military victory; it was a spiritual homecoming. A nation returned to the beating heart of its soul.

And yet, the deeper story remains unfinished.

Yom Yerushalayim is not only about what we regained. It is about what we are still reaching toward.

The generation of 1967 taught us that

Jewish destiny and prophecy are real. That history can turn in an instant. That tears recited for centuries can suddenly become tangible reality. Our generation must now learn the next lesson: not to become spiritually comfortable in partial redemption.

We cannot stop at the wall.

The stones of the Kotel awaken longing precisely because they whisper of something beyond themselves. They remind us that if this much beauty exists in one remaining wall, what must ירושלים השלמה look like? What will it mean when the city is truly united — spiritually, nationally, and divinely?

Perhaps that is the deepest meaning of Rabbi Akiva's laughter. He was able to see not only what was destroyed, but what destruction itself was preparing for. He understood that Jewish history is never random. That prophecy unfolds in stages. That redemption

can begin in tears and continue through yearning.

And so we stand today in the alleyways of the Old City, in the glow of ירושלים stone, living inside prophecies our ancestors only dreamed of. We kiss ancient walls, hear children laughing in Jerusalem's streets, and watch the Jewish people return home from the ends of the earth.

But we also continue asking for more.

With gratitude.

With longing.

With holy chutzpah. ■

The **Airleys** have built **Beit Binyamin**, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. Soldiers, Zaka members, security forces, bereaved families and widows can come for respite, relaxation and rejuvenation. For more information and to donate, visit Beitbinyamin.org



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