

"O JERUSALEM!"

Three localities play roles of importance in the festival of Shavuot: Egypt, because every holiday is zekher li'yetziat mitzrayim, in memory of the exodus from Egypt; Sinai, because this festival commemorates the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai; and Jerusalem, because, as one of the three major festivals, Jews throughout Israel and throughout the world would perform the aliyat reggel, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, on Shavuot.

It is interesting that all three of these places have taken on added significance in our lifetime. Egypt was foremost amongst the Arab countries that attacked Israel at its birth in 1948 and which was soundly defeated. Sinai is a desert in which Israel scored great military successes in 1956; indeed, this was repeated last week, and over Mt. Sinai there today flies the blue and white flag of the State of Israel. And now, in this past week or two, Jerusalem has risen to prominence: Jerusalem is once again in Jewish hands! After 1,897 years, the ancient Holy City has been reclaimed by her loyal children. Jerusalem is the symbol par excellence of the astounding events of these past two weeks, and I propose to discuss them and to attempt to view them in perspective using Jerusalem as our symbol.

In doing so, I ask you not to allow your vision to be blurred by the details of these past weeks, but to strive for an over-view, for a broader horizon and wider perspective. All of us have been

reading voraciously this past while; now is the time to put aside all that we have read, to forget our political sophistication, our military knowledge, our amateur Realpolitik, our ability to follow the labrynthian diplomatic twists and turns. Today let us try to see the forest and not only the trees.

If we will do so, we will realize that a revelation has taken place! Before our very eyes there has unfolded a miracle of a very special kind: a true giluy shekhinah, revelation of the Presence of God. How else can one explain the extraordinary events which we have witnessed? The burden of proof is now on the cynics and the agnostics. It is for them to explain what has happened from the point of view of a naturalistic philosophy and a materialistic view of history. I believe that such explanations as may be offered will be as tortured and as incredible as to make the most far-fetched doctrines of faith sound much more realistic.

Hard-boiled Israelis, even supposedly non-religious ones, have understood the religious dimension and significance of these events better than American Jews, even religious ones. Indeed, it had to be so; they were ready to, and did, give their lives, while we gave support. And, somehow, faith has closer ties to blood than to cash, no matter how plentiful, how abundant, how generous. No wonder that a radio correspondent told us over the airwaves that though he was never religious and hardly recognized his Jewishness, when he approached the kotel maaravi, the Wailing Wall, he rubbed

his cheek against it in affection and cried uncontrollably. A visitor, recently returned, told me that the day after the capture of the Wall, Jews who had never in their lives made a blessing stayed three hours in the hot sun in order to be able to pray in teffilin at the side of the kotel maaravi. And the press informed us today that yesterday, the first day of Shavuot, tens of thousands of Jews made the pilgrimage to the Wall. Another visitor informed me several days ago that the first, or one of the first Jews to enter the me'arat ha-makhpelah, the burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs (with the exception of Rachel), in some 800 or 900 years, was General Mosheh Dayan. When he entered, he did not know exactly what to do. But instinctively he straightened up, offered a snappy salute, and said "Shalom" to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...

Now this places a great burden upon us, greater than we realize. Even observant religious people usually possess an element of doubt within their faith. We use this doubt to excuse many of our transgressions, and we excuse the existence of this doubt by saying that had we lived in the age of the prophets or the age of miracles or the age of revelation, we would be sufficiently persuaded and convinced to be able to live according to the highest precepts of our faith, but that the absence of any such evidence justifies this seed of doubt. Were we exposed to the same wonders as was Israel of old, "and Israel saw the Egyptians dead at the shore of the sea," then we too would react as they did: "and they believed in

the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Ex.14:31).

Such was the justification we offered ourselves for our doubt and our laxity heretofore. Now, we can no longer avail ourselves of that luxury. For we have seen, as did Jews in very special moments of history, ha-yad ha-gedolah, the "great Hand of the Almighty." Through electronic eyes and ears, each of us has been a personal witness to the great miracle, the great revelation of 1967. How our parents and grandparents and theirs before them, through all the ages, would have thrilled to this singular experience -- not only because of the victory that would have given them relief from the humiliation of exile, but because this liberation of Jerusalem in our times is a vindication of their faith throughout all times. For centuries they have had to put up with an arrogant Christian church that promulgated a cruel doctrine known as "triumphalism," which declares that Christianity must be true because it has triumphed in the world, a church that condemned the Jew as a stiff-necked and obstinate deicide whose sufferings were the result of his refusal to acknowledge the truth of Christianity. The Jew, in an environment of this kind, nevertheless believed -- sometimes against his own senses; it was a faith that was often irrational, sometimes even absurd -- yet the Jew believed and hoped for the day that his faith would be vindicated against his oppressors, against history itself. That has now come to pass in our time!

For indeed the giluy shekhinah of the past two weeks is a

vindication of ancient promises, the fulfillment of hoary prophecies. Read carefully all of Isaiah from Chapter 40 and on, especially Chapter 52. Ponder the words of Zechariah, Chapter 8 -- and you will see how the past two weeks have fulfilled these old promises.

Just as an example, take the following verses from Isaiah, Chapter 52, which for over 2500 years was just one chapter from ancient prophetic books -- it had not even attained the status and dignity of a Haftorah!

"Awake, awake, show thy strength, O, Zion;

Put on thy beautiful garments, O, Jerusalem, the Holy City;

For henceforth there shall no more come into thee the

uncircumcised and the unclean" (Is.52:1) --

neither Christian nor Moslem can lay claim to Jerusalem, for it is now altogether Jewish, and so it shall remain.

"Shake thyself from the dust;

Arise and sit down, O, Jerusalem;

Loose thyself from the chains of thy neck, O captive

daughter of Zion" (ib.,2).

"Therefore My people shall know My name;

Therefore they shall know that in that day that I, even he

that spoke -- to Abraham, the promise of redemption --

Behold, here I am.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger

of good tidings, that announceth peace,

The harbinger of good tidings that announceth salvation;

That saith unto Zion: 'thy God reigneth!'

Hark, thy watchmen -- the prophets of old -- lift up their
voice, and together -- with us -- do they sing!

For they shall see -- through the centuries -- eye to eye --
the Lord returning to Zion.

Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of
Jerusalem;

For the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed
Jerusalem.

The Lord hath bared His holy arm, His might -- in the eyes
of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth
shall see the salvation of our God" (ib.6-10).

"Behold, My servant -- Israel -- shall prosper, He shall be
exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high"
(ib., 13).

"So shall He startle many nations, kings shall shut their
mouths -- in amazement -- because of Him;

For that which has not been told them shall they see, and
that which they have not heard shall they per-
ceive" (ib., 15).

"Who would have believed our report? And to whom hath the
arm of the Lord been so revealed?" (Isa. 53:1).

"Thus saith the Lord; I return unto Zion and will dwell in

the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth,

And the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the Holy Mountain.

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: there shall yet sit in the

broad places of Jerusalem old men and old women,

Every man with a staff in his hand for every age.

And the broad places of the city shall be full of boys and

girls playing therein" (Zech. 83,4).

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: behold, I will save My people

from the East country and from the West country;

And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of

Jerusalem;

And they shall be My people and I will be their God in truth

and in righteousness" (ib. 7).

How wonderfully real and contemporary these words of the ancient prophets sound today! No wonder that upon reading the words of prophecy we make the blessing, ve'davar ehad mi-devarekha ahor lo yashuv rekam, a rather strangely constructed phrase. This means, one great sage explained (R. Yehiel Miehel Epsztejn, Arukh ha-Shulhan), that not one single word of what was said by the prophets in the past, the ahor, shall be insignificant for us today, shall return to modern times rekam, empty. Instead, every word comes to us from the past full and pregnant with meaning for the present. Indeed, what happened last week has suddenly made new order and new sense out of all the past. The might of the Lord God of Israel has been revealed

to us. He has kept His word to us!

How tragically near-sighted and picayune it would be for us to fail to appreciate these larger religious dimensions of these current events. How enormously foolish to see in this Jewish victory nothing more than the brilliant strategy of a Dayan, the wise diplomacy of an Eban, the arrogance of a Nasser, or the cowardice of the Arab soldier. No doubt, these are important elements; but to see only these is to miss the heart of the issue. That is tantamount to explaining love in terms of physiology -- heartbeat, pulse rate, breathlessness. It is like a man who describes Einstein's theory of relativity as a matter of his penmanship and handwriting. It makes no more sense than describing the revelation at Mt. Sinai by explaining what caused the lightning and the thunder, reducing all of Sinai to a question of atmospheric conditions.

We must be wiser than that, although we are too close to the incident to see it in full perspective. We must appreciate that the God Who revealed Himself to our ancestors at Sinai has now revealed Himself to us in Jerusalem. Indeed, while the revelation at Sinai is always paramount in Jewish life and history, there is one way in which the giluy shekhinah of last week has a special significance for us: whereas at Sinai the lightning and thunder were provided by God, this revelation took place amidst the lightning and the thunder provided by the Jews who sped like lightning through the

skies and thundered with their tanks and guns through the desert. The difference between Sinai of then and Jerusalem of today is that then God came down on Mt. Sinai -- va-yered ha-Shem al har Sinai, "And the Lord descended on Mt. Sinai" -- whereas in Jerusalem God ascended, and indeed it was Israel that raised its God on high by the power of its faith and its arms, its heart and its blood. So did the Zohar teach us: mi-yoma d'itharev mikdasha, amar ha-Kadosh barukh hu de'lo yeial be'go yerushalayim di'le'ela ad de'yaalun Yisrael li'yerushalayim di'le'tata, "From the days that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One took an oath that He would not go up to the mystical Jerusalem in Heaven until Israel would go up to the Jerusalem on earth." By the Israeli capture of Jerusalem, we have permitted, as it were, God to rise on high! In this revelation, we were not passive recipients; we went forth towards God and found Him coming towards us.

Is our task done? No, certainly not. Not until the full significance of what has happened has not only been revealed but also understood and digested, not until our eyes and ears and hearts have been opened and our lives and habits radically changed -- in a word, not until the Messiah has come.

That he has not come is a patent fact -- one need only listen to the Bulgarian Ambassador to the U. N. to prove that to himself. But in our days those who are wise have sensed his approach, those who can hear with the inner ear have heard his footsteps, those who can see with the inner eye have perceived the first rays of his coming.

And the Jewish tradition has taught us that we can, by our conduct and our actions, bring on the Messiah before his appointed time.

About young King David it was said, madua lo ba ben Yishai gam temol gam ha-yom, "why has not the son of Jesse (David) come neither yesterday nor today?" (I Sam. 20:27). A famed Hasidic rabbi commented on this, that ben Yishai, the son of Jesse, refers not only to David but to his descendant the Messiah, who will likewise be known as the son of David and the son of Jesse. The verse is then understood as a question and an answer. Madua lo ba ben Yishai -- why has not the son of Jesse, the Messiah, come yet? The answer is: gam temol gam ha-yom, because our today is no different from our yesterday, because our yesterday was no improvement on the day before it, and because in all likelihood our tomorrow will be no better than our today! It is we who have held up the Messiah because of our pitiful lack of understanding, because of our lack of fortitude in doing something with our lives that will make the coming of the Messiah meaningful.

We are, assuredly, on the threshold of a new era. Our response to this revelation must be immediate and profound. None of us dare remain the same after all this. Whoever succumbs to life as usual, whoever permits his ha-yom to be nothing but a repetition of his temol, has failed the greatest test in the last twenty centuries.

Let me describe that in terms of Jerusalem, our precious symbol. In the Midrash (Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah, 7) the Rabbis asked what the Jerusalem of the future will be like. They offered two

answers. The first one says, atidah Yerushalayim she'tehei maga'at ad shaarei damesek -- Jerusalem will one day spread out until it reaches the very gates of Damascus. The second one avers that atidah Yerushalayim le'hitrahev ve'laalot ve'liheyot maga'at ad kisei ha-havod, Jerusalem will someday rise until it reaches the Throne of Glory, the place of God.

We have seen the first promise come true last week. Jerusalem today reaches the very gates of Damascus! The troops of Israel, of which Jerusalem is the eternal capital, are in striking distance of the capital of Syria. Now our destiny and our challenge is to make the second prediction come true. Now we must attempt to rise upward, to make Jerusalem climb higher and higher until it reaches the very site of the divine Throne of Glory. We have achieved success in expanding Jerusalem horizontally, and now we must expand it vertically. We have stretched forth right and left, now we must rise high upward and dig deep downwards into the soul that God has given us.

On this Shavuot, the festival of the revelation at Sinai, we thank Almighty God for His revelation of Jerusalem, for His deliverance of Zion in our day.

Let us dedicate ourselves anew to the completion of the tasks that lie ahead of us. Having stretched outward, let us now reach upward.

God has not forgotten us. He has remembered us and He has remembered Jerusalem.

Let us pray, in the words of our special festival petition:

our God and the God of our fathers, yaaleh ve'yavo, may there rise and appear before Thee, zikhronenu, the remembrance of us who have experienced the greatest cataclysm in the history of humanity and who now thankfully have experienced great joy; u-fikdonenu, may You remember those who are absent from our midst today because they have fallen in battle in defense of Jerusalem and Zion, young and precious souls, sons and husbands and fathers who will never return from the war in which they gave their lives; ve'zikhron avotenu, remember on this Yizkor day parents and grandparents whom we recall with tenderness, and for whom we rejoice vicariously, in the triumph of Israel; ve'zikhron mashiah ben David avdekha, remember also Thy Messiah, for whose coming we hope all the more fervently now that we have heard his approach; ve'zikhron Yerushalayim ir kadeshekha, remember Jerusalem Thy Holy City, and never allow it to depart from us again; ve'zikhron kol amekha bet Yisrael, and remember, O God, all Thy people the House of Israel; on this day of joy for Israel remember those three million Jews behind the Iron Curtain who are not permitted to express their solidarity with us, and the thousands of Jews in Arab countries who live in fear of life and limb as the vengeance of the enemy is wrecked upon them.

Remember all this, O Heavenly Father, be'yom hag ha-Shavuot ha-zeh, on this blessed and happy day of Shavuot.

Remember us for good, for life, for blessing, and for eternal salvation. Amen.