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כ"ה אייר תשע"ח

Yom Yerushalaim Message

The beauty of Jerusalem in the eyes of our Sages

Dear Friends,

Our sages teach in the Talmud: ***“Ten measures of beauty descended upon the world, nine to Jerusalem, and one upon all the rest.”¹***

All who wander through the majesty of Jerusalem (especially after the reconstruction and preservation lavished with so much love upon her ancient precincts following her liberation on 28th Iyar 5727 in the 6-Day War of 1967 that we celebrate tonight) feel the great beauty of her streets and buildings, sense the boundless magnificence of her rich history, places and sights filled with *fundamental*, often *ultimate* meaning for the Jewish People and all the world's great monotheist Faiths. While some who journey to ancient and modern Jerusalem today might accuse the Talmudic Sages of indulgent over-appreciation, most are moved by the sheer *presence* and holiness of the City of King David, covered in a unique, brilliant and almost divine light. Despite all its problems, contradictions, anguish and challenge, Jerusalem of the present has restored much of the crown of her past glory; she is once again the seat of institutions of independent Jewish sovereignty: the Knesset; the Residence of the President of Israel, the Bureau of the Prime Minister and the Ministries of the Government; the almost interminable list of her renowned institutions - the Israel Museum, Yad Vashem, the Hebrew University and many more - proclaim the wonderful richness of her past and vibrant present.

But what was *really* the Jerusalem our Sages praised so exuberantly? What Jerusalem was *actually* seen by the eyes of the Sages who bequeathed to us the Talmud and its loving descriptions of the Eternal Capital of the Jewish People?

In fact, what our Sages saw when they penned their joy and praises of Jerusalem was more a reason for grief and despair: their eyes witnessed the *ruins* of *Beit Hamikdash* -- the Great Temple -- and the *destroyed* seats of Jewish sovereignty. The Jerusalem they described as embodying *nine* of the world's *ten* measures of beauty, was a desolation of destruction, heaps of blackened ruins, Jewish homes occupied by Roman invaders...

So *how* and *why*, *what* impelled our Sages to describe the City in such passionate and staggering superlatives?

¹ Kidushim 49b.



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In the days of the Talmudic Sages, the People of Israel were crushed under the weight of one of the most traumatic, terrible and anguished periods of our history, after the destruction of Jewish independence and, very nearly, the extinction of our life as a *Nation*. All was turmoil, amidst terrible suffering and a sense of abandonment: the loss of Jerusalem, built by King David as the focus of Jewish national unity and pilgrimage, suffocated our People in their desperate agony. Against the horrific *present* that they *actually* saw, filled with enormous responsibility for the spiritual and physical continuity of the Jewish People everywhere, our Sages offered praise and hope for a better future. When Jerusalem was little more than a ruin, and our People oppressed, expelled and scattered into exile, the Sages of the Talmud lovingly affirmed the beauty that of a gilded City, loved by the People of Israel, resolute in faith that her rightful splendor, glory and magnificence would return to the City of King David.

Our wise Rabbinical teachers promoted joy in desperation, sought hope in the anguish, and covered in shining beauty the images of a devastated Jerusalem. Today, as Jerusalem daily recovers its splendor, we know that they chose correctly, and that we are privileged to live in this era of her reconstruction, restoration and redemption.

Yom Yerushalayim Sameach!

Chazak ve'ematz!

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