

Focus On Israel

By Kenny Gross

Jerusalem - The Ancient (Ha-Atika)

What does Jerusalem mean to us? The old city, quaint, with many interesting synagogues, churches, mosques, and shops! This certainly does not justify its political significance nor the reason for so much warfare and loss of life in a long history of strife — surely not about this small town?

I can only speak of what it means to me and my people. It is my roots. It is the city of David which gave birth to the nation of Israel as against the former tribal collection of Jews. It is the eternal city about which we have declared for thousands of years "If I forget Thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning" (Psalm 137).

It is well therefore to read and reread its history, from the day of its establishment as a city to modern times. For it represents a microcosm of Jewish history in the world.

It was originally the site of a Jebusite fortress built 4000 years ago. Its position was determined by its domination of the surrounding countryside, being on the summit of the Judean hills. It stands on the watershed which separates the desert from the green of the Mediterranean zone. Its climate is the pleasantest in the area because of its altitude of 25,000 feet. It enjoys a regular breeze from the "Western" sea (Mediterranean) passing over Mount Scopus and soon neutralized in the desert immediately beyond.

About 3,000 years ago King David made Jerusalem his royal city, the capital of the United Kingdom of Israel, as well as the religious center of the Jews. When Solomon built the Holy Temple, the focus of religious prayer, one of Jerusalem's hills, Mount Zion, became synonymous, not only with the city, but with the land and the people as well. Three times it has been the capital of a Jewish state; never of any other nation.

The Jews lived in Jerusalem continuously, except when they were expelled by force. After the destruction of the First Temple in 587 B.C.E. by Nebuchadnezzar and the exile to Babylon, it was rebuilt as the second Temple by the "Returnees" in 515 B.C.E., — they who "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and we wept when we remembered Zion."

And through its long history of capture, destruction and rebuilding, we follow the history of the Jews in the wide world. For when Jerusalem prospered so did the Jews wherever they lived. When Jerusalem groaned, the Jews suffered in their distant lands.

The city survived its sacking and destruction by the Romans in 70 C.E. Jews returned in 394. It fell again in 638 to the Muslim Caliph Omar. The dome of the rock was completed on the Temple Mount in 691. This site was deliberately chosen in order to demonstrate the domination of the children of Muhammad over the Christians and the Jews.

In 1099 Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders, who celebrated their triumph by a massacre of Jews and Moslems. Their roads through Europe to the Holy Land were stained with the blood of Jews.

In 1187 Saladin recaptured Jerusalem. The Arab Muslims lost it to the Moslem Ottoman Empire in 1517. These Turks held the city, which they reduced to a provincial town till 1917 when the British drove them out in World War I.

Despite the turmoil and the changing fortunes of Jerusalem, Jews from all over the Diaspora constantly prayed for and came to live in it. James Parkes, the Christian

scholar, writes, "The Zionists' real title deeds were written by the heroic endurance of those who maintained a Jewish presence in the land through the centuries and in spite of discouragement." There was never a period during those long dark centuries without Aliyah — a constant stimulation of idealism and devotion. The Jews were never a people without a homeland or a Zion.

The population figures of Jerusalem are illuminating.

Year	Jews	Moslems	Christians	Total
1844	7120	5000	3390	15510
1870	11000	6500	4500	22000
1-1896	28112	8560	8748	45420
2-1913	48400	10050	16750	75200
1931	51222	19894	19335	90451
3-1948	100000	40000	25000	165000
4-1967	197750	60100	10800	268650
1977	272300	91700	12000	376000

Key:

- 1 - First Aliyah
- 2 - Second Aliyah
- 3 - Third Aliyah
- 4 - Six Day War

Arab Muslims claim a right to the old city (as part of the "West Bank"). On what is it based? In their eyes Jerusalem never ranked with Mecca and Medina, Damascus or Baghdad in spiritual or political importance. Only once, during the reign of Abdul Malik — who built the Dome of the Rock — was Jerusalem briefly the seat of a caliph, when a rival caliph ruled Mecca.

Under the Ottoman (Turkish Muslim) regime which endured for four centuries, Jerusalem was neglected and impoverished. It became an outpost small town of the Syrian province administered from Damascus.

Why then is Jerusalem so important as a Holy City to Moslems? The answer seems to be that Jerusalem began to play an important role in Muslim piety, as an element of competition, not so much with Mecca (as originally thought because of competing caliphs) but with Christian churches in Jerusalem and especially the noble Dome of the Anastasis (Holy Sepulchre), the splendor of which the Muslims wanted to outdo with an even more glorious sanctuary. After the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, a movement spread in the Islamic world proclaiming the praises of Jerusalem, a superimposed legendary literature on an earlier traditional sanctity of the place, of Jewish origin. There followed the interpretation of Muhammad's flight to heaven from Mecca. "There are no direct flights from Mecca to heaven: You have to make a stop over in Jerusalem" (Professor R.J. Zwi Werblowsky) and the traditional stories multiplied, embellished by a luxuriant growth of the legend, which included the prophet's miraculous winged mount, the steed Al-Buraq, on his ascent to heaven.

In more down to earth reasoning, the *London Daily Telegraph* on June 25, 1967 (shortly after the Six-Day War) expressed it succinctly:

"To Christians and Moslems, Jerusalem is a place where supremely important things happened long ago. To them, therefore, it is a place of pilgrimage. To Jews, on the other hand, it is the living centre of their faith, or, if they have no faith, of their identity as a people. To them it is a place to be possessed, today and forever."

The importance of the knowledge of Jerusalem's history, both actual and fabricated, will emerge in the next article, "Jerusalem — The Modern, The Reunited" and its political implications.

Thoughts From The Lubavitcher Rebbe

By Rabbi Yossi Groner

The Month of Elul Reinforcing G-d's Covenant With Israel

During the month of Elul, we prepare ourselves for the new year, which begins with Rosh Hashono, that is when G-d reaffirms the covenant with the Jewish people to observe his precepts.

Torah and Israel would be forever inseparable, the former the life-force of the latter.

Rabbi Akiva was once asked why he persisted in teaching Torah publicly at a time when such action was punishable by death. The sage gave the parable of the fox who called out to the fish, "Why don't you come out onto land where you will be safe from the fisherman, and you and I can live together in harmony?" Replied the fish: "You foolish fox. If we are in danger in the water—how much more would we be in danger on dry land!"

Just as a Jew cannot change the fact of his Jewishness neither can he change the criterion of his existence.

What if one should stubbornly insist on removing the fish from the water and placing them on land? There are no two ways about it, the fish must soon die.

Yet this is most undemocratic; the fish itself wants to

live on land. Aquarium owners also protest loudly; it is better, more convenient, to keep the fish out of the tanks, they maintain. Unfortunately, all their protestations are of no avail. No sooner does the fish leave its environment—then it dies.

Whether the Jew likes it or not, he and Judaism are inextricably interconnected. Being democratically inclined, he may conduct polls and newspaper surveys. Public opinion may shout that he should, must and ought to live "on dry land"—devoid of the waters of Torah, dry of the moisture of mitzvos observance. We need no faith to refute this opinion, the very nature of the Jew refutes it.

Torah is "our life and the length of our days." True, a day is twenty-four hours, no more and no less, but the day can be lengthened or shortened according to its content. Eaten, slept and gone for a walk? Was that all?—that day is a mere "moment." Studied Torah with warmth and enthusiasm? That day is "long," each minute worth another's hour—through immersion, like the fish, in the life-giving waters of Israel's true environment.

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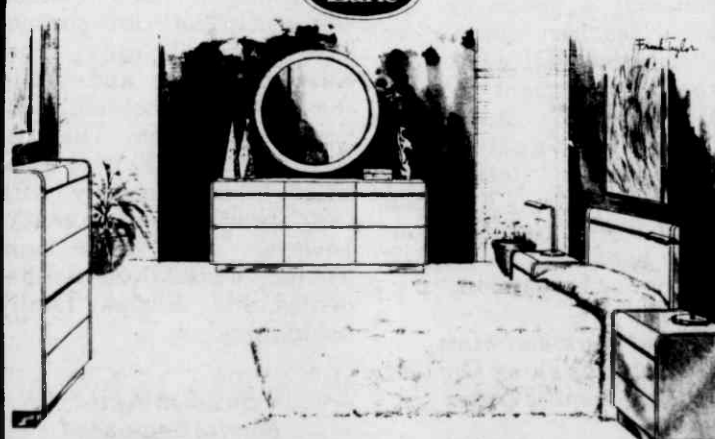
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