



Rabbi Weiner's June 2007 Bulletin Article

On May 16th 2007, which corresponds to the 28th of Iyar in the Hebrew calendar, Jewish communities throughout the world celebrated and acknowledged Yom Yerushalayim-Jerusalem Day. This year's celebration is particularly noteworthy in that it was the 40th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem Day is simply the celebration of a reunified Jerusalem under Israeli authority. A generation of Jews has grown up with this wonderful reality. But as we know from our history Jerusalem, under Jewish sovereignty had been interrupted for 2000 years, and for most of that time, we lost the ability to assert our religious rights and freedoms in our holy city. Until 1967, whether under Roman, Christian, or Islamic rule, our ability to even pray at the ruins of the Second Temple were severely curtailed. During those difficult years our connection to Jerusalem was maintained mainly through the words of our liturgy, and the dreams of countless generations that preceded us.

As Jews began to return to the land of Israel in large numbers in the latter half of the 19th Century, one of the great areas of Jewish settlement was Jerusalem. And Jerusalem was always understood as the capital not only of the Jewish people but of the modern state of Israel that was envisioned. But following Israel's war of independence in 1948, Jerusalem became a divided city, with a Jewish west side, and an Arab east side. The city of peace was separated by barbed wire and a heavily armed no mans land. From a religious point of view what was particularly difficult about this outcome is that although Jewish life in West Jerusalem grew and expanded, East Jerusalem remained off limits to Jews, and once again the remains of the Second Temple (what we call the *Kotel* or Western Wall) remained a distant dream. Additionally, during this time the government of Jordan undertook a systematic destruction of the Jewish quarter of the old city of Jerusalem, including many synagogues that dated back to the middle ages, as well as homes, businesses and property.

All this changed in the midst of the 6-day war of 1967. Despite the government of Israel's well documented attempts to dissuade Jordan from joining Syria and Egypt in the war, Jordan attacked Israel at several places along the de facto border (what is commonly known as the green line). Israel successfully repelled these attacks and within a few short days expelled Jordanian forces from Jerusalem all the way to the Jordan river (the area that is commonly referred to as the West Bank). And despite the complicated political and legal ramifications

of Israel's control of these areas, it must be noted that after 2000 years the Jewish people are in control of Jerusalem and its holy sites, and that the Israeli government has done a magnificent job of maintaining free and unimpeded access for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

It is interesting that Israel came into possession of East Jerusalem in a war it neither sought nor initiated. And it is particularly important that we know this fact, and be prepared to explain it, as in our time one of the more nefarious attempts to delegitimize Israel and its control over Jerusalem is to assert falsely that Israel initiated the 1967 war as some sort of imperialist land grab, as opposed to a defensive war initiated by hostile and provocative acts from Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. It is also important for us to review these facts when one considers that it has become a favorite tactic among Palestinian leaders to deny the historic connection of the Jewish people to Jerusalem as well. In his memoirs, Ambassador Dennis Ross wrote how at the 2000 Camp David summit between then Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Barack, Yassir Arafat, and President Bill Clinton, Arafat told Clinton that the Temple originally stood in Hebron not Jerusalem. We may laugh and dismiss this as another example of Arafat's pathological lying. But it remains a rhetorical weapon used against Israel.

Let us be proud of Israel's control of Jerusalem, and the righting of a historic injustice that Israeli sovereignty represents. And while celebrating Jerusalem, let us ever be mindful of the words of Psalms, who long ago taught us to "...Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, may all who love her prosper."



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