

The Three Names of Jerusalem

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The Jewish Center

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Who can remember the last time Jerusalem was not in the news?

- The location of the US embassy;
- Access to the Kotel;
- Final status talks;
- The province of the Temple Mount;
- The president's visit;

It's the city that appears to be not just eternally at the center of the Jewish world, but at the center of the world writ large.

Like the Torah tells us

יב ארץ, אשר-יהוה אלקיך דרש אתה: תמיד, עיני יהוה אלקיך בה--מרשית השנה, ועד אחרית שנה.

Hashem's eye is always on the land of Israel.

And the world's eye is always on the city of Jerusalem.

And so as we prepare to celebrate 50 years since the miraculous events of 1967, it behooves us to wonder: Just what is it that's so special about the city of Jerusalem?

After all, when King David made the decision to move from חברון to ירושלים every indication is that he did so for political purposes. He was consolidating power. Of course history matters, but what makes Jerusalem, Jerusalem?

In 1968, on the very first Yom Yerushalayim, Moreinu v'Rabbein Rabbi Lamm delivered a talk to a group of college students. Representing Yavneh, Bnei Akiva and Mizrahi Hatzair, students came to The Jewish Center to celebrate and to learn. And the words I share with you this morning derive their inspiration from Rabbi Lamm's.

Yerushalayim has three names – three identities in the Bible. And I'd like to suggest that each one can tell us something indispensable about the capital of our homeland – and in their aggregate, can help us understand what makes Yerushalayim so unlike any other city in the world.

Shalem: Generosity

The first name is Shalem.

יח ומלכי-צדק מלך שלם, הוציא להם וינין; והוא כהן, לאל עליון.

After Avraham successfully rescues Lot in the war of the kings, we meet a man called Malkitzedek, the king of a place called Shalem – a city לז"ל identify as Jerusalem. And the first thing we learn about him is that he greets Avraham with food and drink. Even before Avraham earns a reputation as an איש חסד, we're introduced to a man whose very nobility derives from his magnanimity.

The king of Shalem and his city are a foil for the king of Sodom and his. For Bera, the king of Sodom, there's one question that's top of mind: Now that this war is over, how will we go about dividing the spoils? What will be mine?

Against the backdrop of a man driven only by self-interest, we have Malkitzedek – this prince among men – whose principle interest is beneficence.

If Sodom was the biblical paradigm for the love of self, Shalem is the biblical paradigm for the love of the other.

This most iconic Jewish value of generosity finds its roots in this ancient city of Shalem. It's in this place that we learn: In the shadow of conflict – and we always live in the shadow of conflict – to be generous.

To be Shalem is to be whole: To identify what someone else is lacking and then act in such a way that will help someone else feel more complete.

עיר הצדק

Jerusalem is also called the עיר הצדק. The prophet Isaiah often describes Jerusalem as the city of justice.

In fact, the Radak writes that צדק was imbedded into the name of the place itself. Which is why the kings were always called Malki-Tzedek or Adoni-Tzedek. Jeremiah referred to the last king of Jerusalem – the King Messiah — as משיח צדקינו, our Messiah of Tzedek!

And after the Temple was built, as the home to the לשכת הגזית that housed the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem was inextricably bound up in the pursuit of justice.

We all know the first half of the pasuk in שופטים

כ צדק צדק, תרדף

But there's a second half, too.

למען תחיה וירשת את-הארץ, אשר-יהוה אלהיך נתן לך.

It's when you pursue justice that you merit occupancy of the land. There's something about Jerusalem that simply cannot abide injustice or oppression. The same city that inspires generosity, demands justice.

For it's the integration of these two ancient values that makes possible a decent society. The one without the other is a recipe for disaster.

And so Jerusalem is not just a symbol of our past, but the embodiment of everything to which we aspire. What better place to achieve the golden mean than in the City of Gold?

Tzion: Home

But there is one more name by which Jerusalem is known among the prophets: ציון.

It's a word whose etymology is something of a mystery.

Maybe the word means a fortress or a castle. Or maybe it comes from Tzayon – a reference to the dry or parched ground of the Judean desert.

But perhaps homiletically it's related to the word tziun, the Hebrew word for signpost.

We say in Shema every day:

ושמתם את דברי אלה על לבבכם ועל נפשכם.

You'll place the words of Hashem in your hearts and in you souls.

And Rashi says this pasuk is the antidote to its antecedent.

וְאִבְדַתֶּם מִהָרָה, מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטְּבָה, אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה, נָתַן לָכֶם.

If you want to be sure not be banished from the land, keep the Mitzvot close at hand.

And Rashi says something amazing:

אף לאחר שתגלו היו מצויינים במצות, הניחו תפילין, עשו מזוזות כדי שלא יהיו לכם חדשים כשתחזרו. וכן הוא אומר (ירמיה לא, כ) הציבי לך ציונים

Even after you've been exiled from the land, make yourselves – remarkable – marked by the מצוות themselves. Put on Tefilin; put up Mezuzot. There will be a time when you'll return to the land. And when that time arrives, don't be left ill-prepared. The vocabulary and the grammar of the Torah should be at the tips of your tongues and the knowledge of its Mitzvot at your fingertips – so that you'll be ready to spring in to action when that time comes.

As the prophet Jeremiah wrote: leave a trail of breadcrumbs – hold on to the Mitzvot – they'll lead you back home.

The Mitzvot are our ציונים that will lead us back to ציון.

Tzion reminds us that wherever we are – there is a place called Jerusalem that we can call home.

Hanan Porat – who was one of the founders of Gush Etzion and later a Chaver Knesset – was a paratrooper in 1967. Yossi Klein Halevi described Porat's euphoria upon his entrance into the Old City. "The Temple Mount may have been the locus of holiness, the center of the universe, but Hanan craved the Kotel, where Jews had prayed for this moment. As he ran down the steps, he said to a friend, 'We are writing the next chapter of the Bible.'"

When he reached the Kotel, a kibbutznik asked Hanan to teach him an appropriate prayer. Hanan said, "Just say the Shema." But the kibbutznik had never heard of the Shema. "Repeat after me," Hanan said, שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד.

Whatever our background, whatever our politics, imbedded deep in the soul of every Jew is the knowledge that Jerusalem is our home.

Today we're blessed to be celebrating Alex's Bar Mitzvah. And it's so fitting that Alex put on Tefillin for the first time at the Kotel in Yerushalayim. Not just because doing so bound him to his past, but because doing so set him on the course of charting an amazing Jewish future. And I

can assure you that it's not just because he lained so effortlessly that we have such great expectations about his future.

I asked Rabbi Lamm if it would be alright if I quote him in my drasha this morning. He said, "As long as you don't misquote me."

And so I conclude where I began – with the words of Rabbi Lamm:

"When the exiles of Judea, according to that famous psalm, hung up their harps and wept by the rivers of Babylon and proclaimed the immortal words, 'If I forget thee O Jerusalem, let my right hand fail...' they knew that we would return, even if it would take 2000 years. So today we call out to those exiles at the rivers of Babylon, our voice arching across the halls of centuries: You did not forget, and we have returned."

What a blessing to live at a time

- When Yerushalayim is once again Shalem;
- When we as a people have earned a reputation for our commitments to צדק and צדקה.
- And when ציון is a place we can call home.